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Ethics and the Encounter with the Other
in J.R.R. Tolkien's Middle-earth Narratives

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Abstract

My thesis is a study of the ethics formed by the encounter between the self and the Other in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings (LotR)*. Through the prism of Emmanuel Levinas' ethical philosophy, my thesis explores the construction of ethical relationships, perspectives, and responses by the characters of these texts when they are placed face-to-face with different embodiments of Otherness.

I contend that, historically, the analysis of ethics in Tolkien's Middle-earth narratives has failed to occupy a central position within Tolkien scholarship, being overlooked or subordinated to research concerns such as the biographical or religious content of the author's work, interpretations of his authorial intent, as well as the influence of Tolkien's academic and philological interests on his literary production. More recently, endeavours to understand the ethical dimension of Tolkien's narratives include studies by Jane Chance, Deidre Dawson, Robert Eaglestone, and Joseph Tadie, who detect an affinity with ethical considerations advanced by philosopher Emmanuel Levinas. My thesis is the next step in the Tolkien-Levinas approximation, for it is a meeting point between Levinas' philosophical reflections on ethics as arising from the encounter with the Other, and the characters who inhabit *The Hobbit* and *LotR*. Crucial to my argument are the different configurations of Otherness in Tolkien's texts – as racialised, feminine, queer, and evil – and how encountering the Other is interlaced with themes essential to Tolkien's literary production, such as heroism, the phenomenology of evil, death, and the intertwinement between fate and free will. I argue that the encounter with the Other in Tolkien's Middle-earth narratives is responsible for the surfacing of ethical questions that catalyse the narratives' actions and transformative processes within the characters.

My thesis is divided into two parts. Part One serves as an introduction to the positioning of this thesis within Tolkien scholarship and the method it follows. Chapter One reviews the history and current state of Tolkien studies in relation to the study of ethics in Tolkien's Middle-earth narratives. Chapter Two details the methodological approach of this thesis, which I name "companionship". This chapter expands on the notion of ethics underlining my thesis and describes the influence of philosophical ethics in literary studies prior to examining different portrayals of alterity in Tolkien's worldbuilding project, namely the feminine, the swarthy, and the orc. Chapter Two closes with an appraisal of the potential connections between Tolkien's fiction and Levinas' philosophical discourse as well as the establishment of the core tenets of Levinas' philosophy that accompany my study of primary sources.

The analysis of *The Hobbit* and *LotR* is the main focus of Part Two of my thesis. These chapters combine a close reading of primary sources, informed by relevant Tolkien scholarship, with a range of theoretical lenses and concepts, such as estrangement, the uncanny, and the abject. Underpinning my interpretation of Tolkien's narratives is Levinas' reflections on ethics, self, and Other. Chapter Three is dedicated to Bilbo Baggins' narrative journey and the ethical perspectives he encounters during his experiences outside of the Shire, which transform his sense of self, his sense of service to and his ethical relationship with the Other. Chapter Four inaugurates this thesis' study of *LotR*. This chapter focuses on hobbits as the queer Other, the constitution of Frodo Baggins, Samwise Gamgee, and Gollum, and the ethical relationships that ensue amongst them. Finishing this section is the study of Lobelia Sackville-Baggins' narrative arc as a development in the approach to the Other. Chapter Five elaborates on the phenomenology of evil in *LotR* as the negation of the self to engage in an ethical relationship with the Other, which then may lead to its impossibility. Evil as essence or choice, the effects of the Ring(s) of Power, and the Other as an embodiment of evil – wraiths, orcs, and Shelob – are addressed in this section. The final chapter of my thesis explores the linkages between ideas of heroism and serving the Other in *LotR*. I begin with a comparison of Frodo and Aragorn in order to illustrate how their narrative trajectories, in their similarities and differences, exemplify heroism as a form of service to the Other. Next, I analyse the constellation formed by Merry, Pippin, Éowyn, and Faramir to argue that their path of serving the Other is through a disobedience marked by the need to acknowledge their distinct selfhoods. Closing my thesis is a coda that explores the idea of surrendering to and renouncing desire as possession, and its implications for the relationship between the self and the Other as experienced Saruman, Sauron, Galadriel, and Frodo. These reflections gesture towards the interpretative affordances of Tolkien's Middle-earth narratives and the applicability of the encounter with the Other for Tolkien scholarship.

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Abbreviations

Most abbreviations of J.R.R. Tolkien's works used throughout this thesis correspond to those used by the journal *Tolkien Studies* as of Volume 19, 2022. For each text I indicate here the year of original delivery or publication. Information on the specific editions used for this thesis can be found in the bibliography.

Given the number of editions in existence of *The Lord of the Rings* (*LotR*), I cite them by book, chapter, and page number. For example, if page 28 of the first book of *The Fellowship of the Ring* were to be cited, it would be written as *FR* 1.II.28. Appendices are cited by Appendix, Section and subsection: for example, *RK* Appendix A.I.i.1352. The word 'volume' is used in this thesis to refer to the individual parts of *LotR* according to the format used during publication, whereas the term 'books' follows the internal division given by the author to each one the text's volumes.

<i>FR</i>	<i>The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring</i> (1954)
<i>H</i>	<i>The Hobbit</i> (1937)
<i>Letters</i>	<i>The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien</i> (1981)
<i>Lost Road</i>	<i>The Lost Road and Other Writings: Language and Legend Before "The Lord of the Rings"</i> (1987)
<i>LT II</i>	<i>The Book of Lost Tales, Part Two</i> (1984)
<i>MC</i>	<i>The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays</i> (1983), specifically referring to "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics" (1936)
<i>Morgoth</i>	<i>Morgoth's Ring</i> (1993)
<i>OFS</i>	"On Fairy-stories" (1947)
<i>RK</i>	<i>The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King</i> (1955)
<i>S</i>	<i>The Silmarillion</i> (1977)
<i>TT</i>	<i>The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers</i> (1954)
<i>UT</i>	<i>Unfinished Tales of Númenor and Middle-earth</i> (1980)

In the case of the journal *Parma Eldalamberon* or *PE*, I follow Dimitra Fimi's abbreviation (xvi). I have abbreviated Tolkien's "Valedictory Address to the University of Oxford" (1959) as VA.

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¡Oh glorioso Apóstol San Judas!
Patrón de los causas difíciles y desesperadas
Ruega por mí.

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This is for all the brown kids, the queer kids, weird kids, other kids. For the kids who are first generation academics, who are immigrants, whose existence is an act of resistance and joy. For all those who found in Middle-earth a place to dream and a place to hope: this one is for you.

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Author's Declaration

I certify that this thesis is my own work except where indicated by referencing. As I have pointed out later on, I construct a fuller analysis of the uncanny elements of *The Hobbit* which I address in Chapter Three in “A Dark Romantic Gaze: Otherness and Evil in Hoffmann and Tolkien” (2024). The analysis of Frodo, Sam, and Gollum as presented in Chapter Four as well as the study of evil in Chapter Five elaborates and expands research from my MA thesis (2017).

Introduction

A Thesis About the Other

When I began writing my thesis in 2018, I had no idea how much specific events in 2022 would fundamentally alter my approach to J.R.R. Tolkien's Middle-earth narratives, what they mean to me, who I am as a researcher and as a person. My thesis is the study of the ethics formed by the encounter between the self and the Other in Tolkien's *The Hobbit* (1937) and *The Lord of the Rings* (*LotR*, 1954-5). Through the prism of Emmanuel Levinas's philosophy, I explore the construction of ethical relationships and responses of the characters of Tolkien's texts when they are placed face-to-face with different embodiments of Otherness. My analysis focuses on characters who may represent or enact attitudes socially constructed or interpreted as *feminine* by contemporary readers like myself in the 21st century, whilst acknowledging the complexities and historical nuances of terms such as "feminine" and "masculine".¹ In addition to the study of ethics and Otherness in Tolkien's texts, my thesis also seeks to contribute to the analysis of female and feminine characters in Tolkien scholarship by contemplating their ethical choices and attitudes as key components of Tolkien's literary outputs. This thesis therefore highlights how these characters respond to ethical issues linked to essential themes in Tolkien's literary production, such as the nature of heroism, the phenomenology of evil, death, and the intertwinement between fate and free will. It is my contention that these characters' ethical responses have a crucial impact on the relationships and affects conjured by both texts, as well as their main plot. This description seems clear enough. Nevertheless, this thesis was only made possible through persistently asking: who is the Other? Can one define them? Can one ever claim to know them?² And why is it important that we ask ourselves these questions?

Near the end of the year 2021, as the world was still reeling from the aftermath of the COVID-19 epidemic, I was asked to comment on the upcoming Amazon Prime series *The Lord of the Rings: The Rings of Power*, to be premiered in September 2022, for an article in *Vanity Fair* (Breznican and Robinson 2022). During this interview I posed a rhetorical question regarding those who criticised the series' diverse casting: "Who are these people that feel so threatened or disgusted by the idea that an elf is Black or Latino or Asian?". This single question prompted a months-long barrage of online abuse from individuals and groups who felt entitled

¹ For the definition of "femininity" used in this thesis, see Chapter Two. For the definition of "masculinity", see Chapter Four.

² This thesis uses the pronouns "they/them" in association to the Other in order to evidence this research's inclusive approach as well as the full range of possibilities that the notion of the Other may encompass.

to contact me personally and say, in no particular order, that I should be ashamed of myself; that my nationality and my first language – even though I grew up bilingual – impede me from truly (and even ‘truly critically’) understanding Tolkien; that my skin colour is too dark to talk about Tolkien but not dark enough really to talk about racism; that I make a fool out of Tolkien scholarship; and, in response to a false rumour created by a right-wing media outlet claiming I had been hired as a consultant for the series, that I had ‘single-handedly’ ruined Tolkien ... (Lavezzo and Rios Maldonado 243)

This experience undoubtedly impacted the final outcome of my thesis. My research stands at the intersection of four years of research done by a queer, immigrant woman of Colour, her experience of trauma in learning the significance of Otherness and othering in the Primary and Secondary Worlds, and the hope or “critical joy” that marginalised communities feel when reading Tolkien’s Middle-earth narratives (Lavezzo and Rios Maldonado 244-5).

As well as being an intellectual exercise, this thesis is a heart-felt exploration of how works of fiction – and especially acts of imagination and Fantasy – enable readers to explore and question the boundaries of the self, and come face-to-face with the Other. The Other, in their fluid incarnations and their challenge to (my)self, is at the core of this thesis. My study of Tolkien’s texts is informed by how the Other stands in these narratives; how we, as readers and scholars encounter them, and the transformation that this encounter can bring about.

Part One of my thesis lays the groundwork for the analysis of *The Hobbit* and *LotR* that takes place in Part Two. Chapter One provides a brief overview of the history of Tolkien scholarship. Here I approach the paramount impact concepts like a “mythology for England” as well as religious and theological interpretations have had on the study of Otherness and ethics in Tolkien’s Middle-earth narratives. This research proposes an alternative methodological framework to analyse these texts, grounded in the insights provided by philosophy, modern critical and literary theory. This chapter concludes with the delineation of primary sources used for this thesis, as well as my use of Tolkien’s letters, essays, and biography.

Chapter Two establishes “companionship” as the methodological framework for this thesis. This section begins by examining the relationship between literary studies and philosophical ethics since the mid twentieth century. Using Fredric Jameson’s theorisations of Fantasy and fantastic literature in “Magical Narratives” (1981) as a springboard, I reflect on the correlation between ethics and Otherness in Tolkien’s worldbuilding project. Key to these reflections is the construction and depiction of women and the feminine, swarthy humans, and orc-kind in Tolkien’s fiction, which I approach from the perspectives of gender and race. I then consider how the formal aspects of these texts address alterity. The final

element of this chapter is an assessment of Emmanuel Levinas's ethical philosophy. Building on the work of scholars such as Jane Chance, Deidre Dawson, Robert Eaglestone, Yvette Kisor, Joseph Tadie, and Christopher Vaccaro, I assert the key Levinasian principles that guide my study of *The Hobbit* and *LotR* and consider some of the similarities and divergences that can be traced between Levinas's and Tolkien's work. Vital to my thesis are Levinas's observations on the ethical relationship that arises from the face-to-face encounter between the self and the Other, the different ways the Other can be conceived, and the significance of subjection and sensibility in the relationship with the Other.

Part Two of my thesis begins with a chapter dedicated to *The Hobbit*. In Chapter Three, I elaborate an appraisal of Bilbo Baggins' narrative journey as a queer hobbit who develops his sense of ethics as he sets out from the Shire and meets different iterations of Otherness. In the process, Bilbo transforms his selfhood and the terms through which he conceives his ethical relationship with the Other. I place special focus on the encounter between Bilbo and Gollum. Moreover, I analyse the ethics of and relationships amongst different beings populating Middle-earth, from humanoid beings – such as dwarves, elves, and humans – to anthropomorphic beings and talking animals – Beorn and the eagles – as well as evil beings portrayed such as trolls, goblins, the spiders of Mirkwood, wargs, and the dragon Smaug. This chapter turns to the notions of estrangement and recovery to explain how the text introduces the world created by it. It also applies Freud's theory of the uncanny to account for the effects the evil creatures in *The Hobbit* produce in the protagonist and the reader.

In Chapter Four, I begin my reading of *LotR*. This chapter focuses on the text's main hobbit characters. I examine the position of hobbits as queer Others in Middle-earth before following Frodo Baggins in his narrative journey as the Ring-bearer. I consider how his experiences *en route* to Mordor, such as meeting Gildor Inglorion and Tom Bombadil, prepare him for his face-to-face encounter and relationship with Gollum, which I address by contending that Gollum is an abject Other, using Julia Kristeva's terminology. I then interpret Samwise Gamgee's service and love towards Frodo, considering Sam's inability to engage in an ethical relationship with Gollum as a corollary of his bond with Frodo. The chapter concludes with an analysis of Lobelia Sackville-Baggins as the only female hobbit provided with a narrative arc in *LotR*. Her narrative journey showcases a transition from a preoccupation with the self to an ethical service to the Other.

Chapter Five comments on the depiction of evil in *LotR* by reflecting on what I call a "phenomenology of evil". My main argument is that evil is presented in this narrative as the negation or unwillingness to engage in an ethical relationship with the Other, which then may preclude any relationship with them. I explain how this is manifested in the different

phenomena and beings linked to evil as representations of antagonistic forms of Otherness. After considering evil as an essential quality or product of free will, I examine the effects and consequences of the Rings of Power intervening in relationships between the self and the Other, most notably displayed via the Ringwraiths. Attention is then directed to the orcs and Shelob.

The final chapter delves into the idea of heroism in *LotR* as service to the Other. The starting point of Chapter Six is a comparison between Frodo and Aragorn. I expand on their similarities and differences, their shared status as outsiders, their vulnerabilities, and their final destinies in the wider history of Middle-earth. I contend that the consideration of these aspects affords a better understanding of these characters' service to the Other. Subsequently, I analyse the constellation formed by the narrative journeys of Éowyn, Faramir, Meriadoc Brandybuck, and Peregrin Took, which depict disobedience as an ethics of service. These characters and their relationships evidence that the path towards engaging with the Other involves acknowledging the full dimension of the self and reaching out towards the Other beyond normative codes of conduct.

My thesis concludes with a coda that reflects on the idea of desire as possession and the desire for the Other as central to the narrative and its representations in four different characters. In their surrendering to or renouncing desire as possession, Saruman, Sauron, Galadriel, and Frodo show the multifarious forms and paths that desire can take and the crucial character of the metaphysical desire for the Other as expressed by Levinas. These reflections then gesture towards the multiple interpretations that Tolkien's texts can afford and the applicability of the encounter with the Other for Tolkien scholarship.

PART ONE
Chapter One
Tolkien Scholarship, Ethics, Other(ness)

Tolkien, the Scholars, and the Critics

Since the publication of *The Hobbit* (1937), *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-55), and the posthumous *Silmarillion* (1977), J.R.R. Tolkien's Middle-earth narratives have enjoyed a long life and enormous popularity amongst readers worldwide. In the year 2000, Tom Shippey opened his arguments for considering Tolkien as the "author of the century" by explaining that

late in 1996 Waterstone's, the British bookshop chain, and BBC Channel Four's programme *Book Choice* decided between them to commission a reader's poll to determine 'the five books you consider the greatest of the century'. Some 26,000 readers replied, of whom rather more than 5,000 cast their first place vote for J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. (Author xx).

This trend was also observed in polls conducted by the *Daily Telegraph* and the Folio Society during the same year, a poll amongst the audience of the television program *Bookworm* in 1997, and one commissioned by Nestlé two years later (Shippey, Author xxi).¹ In *Defending Middle-earth* – published four years after Shippey's *Author of the Century* – Patrick Curry would argue that

The Lord of the Rings (1954-55), at about 50 million copies, is probably the biggest-selling single work of fiction this century. *The Hobbit* (1937) is not far behind, at between 35 and 40 million copies. And one could add the considerable sales, now perhaps over a million, of his dark and difficult posthumously published epic *The Silmarillion* (1977). The grand total is thus well on its way to 100 million. (*Defending* 2)

The successful posthumous publication of the twelve-volume series *The History of Middle-earth* (1983-96), as well different texts based on stories or episodes from the *legendarium*, is proof of the enduring interest in Tolkien's literary production. But this may not only be measured in book sales and polls: the numerous media adaptations of Tolkien's Middle-earth narratives are solid proof of their legacy as a global phenomenon. These range from radio series by the BBC (1955-56 and 1981); board, roleplaying, and video games; the Rankin/Bass versions of *The Hobbit* (1977) and *The Return of the King* (1980), and Ralph Bakshi's *The Lord of the Rings* (1978); to Peter Jackson's film trilogy based on *LotR* (2001-

¹ See also Curry, "Critical Response" 373-4.

2003) and his three-part filmic adaptation of *The Hobbit* (2012-2014), and much more recently, the television series *The Lord of the Rings: The Rings of Power*, whose first season premiered in 2022.

Academia's stance towards Tolkien's fiction has, however, not always mirrored this success. Thus, the history of Tolkien scholarship can be traced to the debates surrounding his texts. At first the discussion revolved around the literary value of Tolkien's oeuvre. Critics and scholars were – and some still are – eager to argue about whether Tolkien's Middle-earth narratives are worthy of academic study and readerly enjoyment. Curry lists the reviews, articles, and studies penned by Alfred Duggan (1954), Edwin Muir (1954-5), Edmund Wilson (1956), Philip Toynbee (1961), and Catherine Stimpson (1969) as examples of the negative criticism *LotR* received in the first ten years or so after its publication (“Critical Response” 371). Decades later, in his scant, two-page introduction to the *Modern Critical Interpretations* volume dedicated to *LotR*, Harold Bloom would declare himself unable “to understand how a skilled and mature reader can absorb about fifteen hundred pages of this quaint stuff”, stating that “Tolkien met a need, particularly in the early days of the Counter-culture, in the later 1960's. Whether he is an author for the coming century seems to me open to some doubt” (2). To add to the reasons given by Bloom for disapproving of *LotR*, Shippey lists some further common objections:

The characters, it is often alleged, are flat; there is not enough awareness of sexuality; good and evil are presented as absolutes, without a proper sense of inner conflict within individuals; there is something incoherent in the ‘main pattern’ of the story, which prevents one from reading it as ‘a connected allegory with a real message for the modern world’. Most of all, *The Lord of the Rings* is felt not to be true to ‘the fundamental character of reality’, not to mirror ‘an adult experience of the world’, not to portray ‘an emotional truth about humanity’. (*Road* 154-5).

Whether these arguments are true or, as Curry argues, “the single greatest obstacle to appreciating Tolkien's work is sheer literary snobbery”, positive responses to Tolkien's literary creations in academia and literary criticism have defended their importance and quality by employing four principal discourses (*Defending* 9). The first discourse is the use of the mythical and medieval sources such as *Beowulf*, the Elder or Poetic Edda, Snorri Sturluson's Prose Edda, the *Saga of King Heidrek the Wise*, the *Völsunga Saga*, the *Kalevala*, the *Mabinogion*, poems such as *The Wanderer* and *The Battle of Maldon*, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, and the *Nibelungenlied*, amongst others known to Tolkien via his research and literary interests. The former discourse is closely connected to a defence based on the different literary genres and models that inspired Tolkien's literary production, from romance and heroic epic to incipient works of what is now known as the Fantasy genre.

The importance of Tolkien's creative "use of language" and the linguistic procedures he employed in constructing Middle-earth, connected to his personal creativity as well as his work as a philologist is a third important argument in favour of studying Tolkien's fiction (Fawcett 18). And finally, positive responses to Tolkien's Middle-earth narratives have put forth the portrayal of the author's personal experience in pivotal events of the twentieth century, such as the Great War and World War II, as well as his religious and moral beliefs. Pioneering critical monographs and collected volumes that have explored these discourses published up to the year 2000 include *Tolkien and the Critics: Essays on J.R.R. Tolkien's "The Lord of the Rings"*, edited by Neil D. Isaacs and Rose A. Zimbaro (1968);² Paul H. Kocher's *Master of Middle-earth: The Fiction of J.R.R. Tolkien* (1972);³ Jane Chance's *Tolkien's Art: A "Mythology for England"* (1979; 2001) and *The Lord of the Rings: A Mythology of Power* (1992; 2001); *J.R.R. Tolkien, Scholar and Storyteller: Essays in Memoriam*, edited by Mary Salu and Robert T. Farrell (1979); Verlyn Flieger's *Splintered Light: Logos and Language in Tolkien's World* (1983; 2002) and *A Question of Time: J.R.R. Tolkien's Road to Faërie* (1997); *J.R.R. Tolkien: This Far Land*, edited by Robert Giddings (1983); Brian Rosebury's *Tolkien: A Critical Assessment* (1992), later republished as *Tolkien: A Cultural Phenomenon* (2003); Shippey's *Road to Middle-earth* (1985; 2005) and his later work *J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century* (2000).

In *Author of the Century*, Shippey considers that Tolkien "needs also to be looked at and interpreted within his own time, as an 'author of the century', the twentieth century, responding to the issues and the anxieties of that century" (xxvii). And yet, Robert Eaglestone argued in 2006 that theoretical approaches developed during the 20th and 21st century, especially those that have impacted literary studies since the 1970s had "rarely been clearly engaged with Tolkien's work", for the tradition established by Tolkien studies seemed predominantly focused on the discourses mentioned previously (2). The disinterest, mistrust, or even aversion to the use of critical theory once shown within Tolkien studies seemed to be tied to the persistent impression that Tolkien and his works still needed to be defended from the negative "claims that its popularity made his work inappropriate for literary scholars to deal with" (Reid, "Race" 54). These claims were identified as consistent with or originating in critical theory, literary or otherwise, such as feminism, Marxism, and

² In 2004, the same editors launched the volume *Understanding the Lord of the Rings*, which included several contributions from the 1968 collection. Isaacs and Zimbaro also edited *Tolkien: New Critical Perspectives* (1981).

³ Subsequent editions of Kocher's work also bear the title *Master of Middle-earth: The Achievement of J.R.R. Tolkien* (1973, 1974, and 2002).

postmodern thought.⁴ For example, Curry has considered that his work as a Tolkien scholar is

to address the contemporary conditions – cultural, social, political – and readers; and, as far as seems relevant, Tolkien’s own character and intentions. But I try to do so while respecting the books’ internal integrity; that is, *without the single-minded reductionism that sees everything in such a story as representing’ something else, in line with a predetermined interpretative program around class, or gender, or the unconscious.* (6, emphasis added)

For Michael D. C. Drout, this scepticism also met “larger divides in contemporary criticism between medievalists and specialists in later (particularly twentieth-century) literature” (15).⁵ 23 years into the new millennium, Tolkien scholarship has mostly moved away from defending Tolkien, as such a defensive stance “has become rather tired” and unnecessary (Drout and Wynne 116). Nevertheless, in the case of using philosophy within Tolkien scholarship, I argue that the past tendency to suspect contemporary theoretical approaches has led to a marked partiality towards (or, in extreme cases, a hyper-fixation with) specific philosophical currents and systems – Platonism and neo-Platonism, and philosophy of language – or disciplines adjacent to philosophy, such as theology, religion studies, as well as an emphasis on philology over philosophy.⁶ Other philosophical movements have been dismissed as “conceptual frameworks” that, rather than exposing “the intrinsic value of Tolkien’s works, could instead put them at risk of losing, in the eyes of the readers, both their profound meaning and their inherent beauty” (Arduini and Testi 9). Amongst these frameworks are “19th century German idealism, 20th century German and French existentialism” and analytical philosophy, which have been described by Franco Manni in a conversation with Tom Shippey on Tolkien and philosophy as “obtruse” and even “empty” (22).

Contrary to Manni’s description, I contend that critical and philosophical approaches like existentialism, phenomenology, postcolonialism, and poststructuralism continue to provide insightful ways to analyse works of art, including Tolkien’s fiction. Furthermore, it

⁴ See also Lavezzo and Rios Maldonado (2023).

⁵ To Drout’s observation I would add the seemingly difficult task to define “Fantasy” as a literary and media genre, the politics of considering where and how Tolkien’s literature production figures in Fantasy’s history, and the negative reception Fantasy literature in scholarly circles as a “popular, ‘lower’ cultural field” (Moran 2). Although the affordances of Fantasy as a genre lie beyond the reaches of my thesis, the historic endurance of Fantasy and the fantastic around the world suggest that Fantasy is far from “low” anything. And even if it were, the “popular” and “low” are still worthy of study and appreciation.

⁶ The edited volume *Tolkien and Philosophy* includes a table of 62 pieces of Tolkien scholarship published prior to 2012 that use philosophy as their methodological approach. Of these, very few take on methodologies different from the ones described above, such as phenomenology or Marxism. With the exception of studies referenced in this thesis, the status quo has remained much the same.

is imperative for current scholarship to continue to contextualise Tolkien's literary creations and their adaptations within the events and developments of the 20th and 21st century, while critically reckoning with their achievements and flaws, reaches and limitations – particularly on class, colonialism, queerness, and race – without recurring to outdated defensive reactions. The multifarious paths in which Tolkien's Middle-earth narratives have actualised themselves, including those beyond the realm of the literary text, have justified Robin Anne Reid's definition of Tolkien studies "as an inter- and multidisciplinary field encompassing Tolkien's *legendarium* as well as adaptations, derivations, and transformative cultural productions arising from his work", whilst reaffirming the need to incorporate contemporary literary and critical theory into Tolkien studies' interpretative tool-kit ("Race" 33). At the same time, Tolkienists and scholars interested in Tolkien's Middle-earth narratives today come in all shapes and sizes, with different and diverse research backgrounds and interests that are not limited to literary or medieval studies: "hard-core Tolkienists have to get used to the fact that a critic may not know the difference between light-elves and dark-elves or between Westergesse and Eriador, but that s/he, nevertheless, is able to contribute relevant points to the understanding of the literary quality of Tolkien's work" (Weinreich and Honegger i). Uniting these different approaches is the common purpose to understand what is at play within and around Tolkien's literary production and its adaptations.

The diversification of current Tolkien scholarship has become increasingly visible in the amount and scope of studies published since the year 2000. In addition to the numerous scholarly articles published on Tolkien's Middle-earth narratives in the past couple of decades, as well as the presence of *Mythlore*, the Mythopoeic Society's journal (1969-), and the Tolkien Society's academic journal, *Mallorn* (1970-), peer-reviewed journals such as *Modern Fiction Studies* have dedicated specific editions to Tolkien's works (Volume 50, Number 4, 2004), not to mention to the emergence of specialised journals on Tolkien and his works, such as *Tolkien Studies: An Annual Scholarly Review*, the *Journal of Tolkien Research*, and the *Journal of Inklings Studies*. Ground-breaking monographs and edited volumes include (but are not limited to) *War and the Works of J.R.R. Tolkien* by Janet Brennan Croft (2004); *Tolkien's Modern Middle Ages*, edited by Jane Chance and Alfred E. Siewers (2005); John Garth's *Tolkien and the Great War: The Threshold of Middle-earth* (2005); and *Tolkien and Modernity I and II*, edited by Frank Weinreich and Thomas Honegger (2006). Pertinent to the more specific study of ethics and Otherness in Tolkien's Middle-earth narratives are critical works that broaden the interpretation of Tolkien's literary production by taking on modern and postmodern interpretative frameworks, specifically critical race theory, gender studies, philosophical approaches developed in the 20th and 21st century, postcolonialism, and queer studies. These include *Reading "The Lord of the Rings":*

New Writings on Tolkien's Classic, edited by Robert Eaglestone (2006); Dimitra Fimi's *Tolkien, Race and Cultural History: From Fairies to Hobbits* (2010); *The Body in Tolkien's Legendarium*, edited by Christopher Vaccaro (2013); *Perilous and Fair: Women in the Works of J.R.R. Tolkien*, edited by Janet Brennan Croft and Leslie A. Donovan; *Tolkien Among the Moderns*, edited by Ralph C. Wood (2015); Jane Chance's *Tolkien, Self and Other: This Queer Creature* (2016); Helen Young's *Race in Popular Fantasy Fiction: Habits of Whiteness* (2016); and *Tolkien and Alterity*, edited by Christopher Vaccaro and Yvette Kisor (2017). In a similar vein, research undertaken by scholars and Tolkienists such as Robert Eaglestone, Craig Franson, Gergely Nagy, Robin Anne Reid, Benjamin Saxton, and Joseph Tadie evidence a serious engagement with the theories and subjects identified previously. Moreover, Tolkien scholarship may still be largely anchored in the anglosphere but the publication of studies and journals on Tolkien, his texts, and the cultural products they have inspired, in other languages are markers of a global, academic interest in Middle-earth and its creator. In addition to, for example, French and Russian scholarship on Tolkien, in Italy, the Società Tolkieniana Italiana hosts two semestral publications – *Minas Tirith* and *Terra di Mezzo* – whereas the Associazione Italiana Studi Tolkieniani publishes the journal *Endóre* yearly. The Deutsche Tolkien Gesellschaft publishes annually the journal *Hither Shore*, which incorporates papers presented at each year's DTG Interdisciplinary Seminar in Germany. And notable studies about Tolkien's life and works in Spanish have been written by José María Miranda Boto, Andoni Cossio, and Eduardo Segura.

Despite the existence of these revolutionary studies, the analysis of ethics and Otherness in Tolkien's literary production can certainly be further expanded. My thesis aims to advance this area in Tolkien scholarship and add to the invaluable work of these scholars and critics by emphasizing how ethics, the Other, and Otherness are interconnected in Tolkien's *The Hobbit* and *LotR*. For this purpose I use Emmanuel Levinas's philosophical discourse on ethics as a major part of my framework. At the same time, my thesis addresses the portrayal of Otherness and the ethical dimension of these narratives whilst pushing past allegorical and theological readings – grounded, for instance, in Tolkien's Catholicism or scholars' own religious beliefs – by viewing Tolkien's Secondary World in itself.

Allegory, Mythology, Religion

Impacting the study of ethics and Otherness in Tolkien's literary production are mythical and allegorical interpretations of Tolkien's texts, especially Tolkien's supposed intention to create "a mythology for England", an idea popularised since the publication of Humphrey Carpenter's *J.R.R. Tolkien's: A Biography* (1977) and the reading of significant

aspects and plotlines of Tolkien's narratives as allegories for Christian beliefs.⁷ In 1977, Carpenter declared that behind Tolkien's literary endeavours was "his desire to create a mythology *for England*" (89). Anders Stenström explains that

Evidently satisfied with his phrase, Carpenter titled Part Three of his book "1917-1925: The making of a mythology" ... And thus it chanced that the phrase found its way into the biography's Index, where under Tolkien, John Ronald Reuel (1892-1973) you find WRITINGS – PRINCIPAL BOOKS, starting with *The Silmarillion*, which has a secondary entry "a mythology for England", within single quotation marks (in the original) like the names from Tolkien's works, and the one actual quotation ("out of the leaf-mould of the mind"), to be found in the Index. This is where the quotation marks come from. (310)

Stenström refers here to the quotation marks commonly used to refer to this concept. Carpenter's own labelling and interpretation of Tolkien's vision brought this phrasing into being. It was then disseminated via the publication of Tolkien's biography. Carpenter also indirectly quoted a letter Tolkien wrote to Milton Waldman, in which Tolkien affirms that he

had a mind to make a body of more or less connected legend, ranging from the large and cosmogonic, to the level of romantic fairy-story – the larger founded on the lesser in contact with the earth, the lesser drawing splendour from the vast backcloths – *which I could dedicate simply to: to England; to my country*. It should possess the tone and quality that I desired, somewhat cool and clear, be redolent of our 'air' (the clime and soil of the North West, meaning Britain and the hither parts of Europe ... and, while possessing (if I could achieve it) the fair elusive beauty that some call Celtic ... I would draw some of the great tales in fullness, and leave many only placed in the scheme, and sketched. The cycles should be linked to a majestic whole, *and yet leave scope for other minds and hands*, wielding paint and music and drama. Absurd. (*Letters* 144-5, emphasis added)

In this letter, Tolkien expands on what his work as an author could entail and how his creative outputs should be interconnected, reflecting English, British, or Northwestern European culture – thus coinciding with the geographical origin of the languages, myths, and texts that interested Tolkien personally and professionally. Such an "English mythology" would consist of "something like the body of lost legend which it must once have had" before its Christianization (Shippey, *Road* 232). On this point, Dimitra Fimi comments that

⁷ To the interpretation of *LotR* as an allegory of the Second World War, Tolkien responded in the "Foreword to the Second Edition" of *LotR* that "as for any meaning or 'message'" the text may have, "it has in the intention of the author none. It is neither allegorical nor topical" (*FR* xxv). Moreover, Tolkien stated that he "cordially disliked allegory in all its manifestations ... I much prefer history, true or feigned, with its varied applicability to the thought and experiences of the reader" (*FR* xxvi). See also *Letters* 121, 145, 212, 262, 307 and *OFS* 123.

This mythological project was in tune with the historical context of his era: in Edwardian times the Romantic interest in Northern European mythological texts was still strong. During this period the myths and language of a nation was considered an important part of its heart and soul. The early ‘Silmarillion’ saga was full of fairies, magic and nationalist pursuits. (5)

The creation of “a mythology for England” has thus been identified as a prime motive behind Tolkien’s authorship. The acceptance of this motivation is significant in the work of scholars such as Jane Chance, who wrote *Tolkien’s Art: A Mythology for England* based on this premise. And perhaps, as Jason Fisher suggests, “we can be relatively certain he [Tolkien] would have accepted it” (“Mythology” 446). But although over 20 years ago, Michael D.C. Drout and Hillary Wynne had argued that “the mythology for England approach has tended to be somewhat less successful than the other broad themes of criticism”,⁸ this approach continues to be summoned, if not in Tolkien scholarship, in the wider reception of Tolkien’s works (112).⁹ It is therefore vital for the Tolkien scholarship of today to question how and why this concept persists, and what are the consequences of this perpetuation.

As Stenström and Shippey indicate, strictly speaking, a “mythology for England” is “an intention and a phrase which have often been ascribed to” Tolkien, but which there is no record of him uttering (*Road* 345). I consider the construction of a mythology as *one* of the many impulses behind Tolkien’s creative enterprise, but even if Tolkien’s intentions could widely be identifiable as such, this intention would not rule out the “applicability” of his literary undertakings as a quality essential to the reading and interpretation of his texts.¹⁰ Nor does this intention dismiss the fact that in the same letter referred to by Carpenter and others as evidence for the “mythology for England” venture, Tolkien also speaks of “leaving scope for other minds and hands” to further his project.

Significant to this supposed intention is the meaning of the third element of the “mythology for England” formula: what England? For “which people, in what time period, for what level of generality, and so on” (Drout and Wynne 112)? What “England” did Tolkien have in mind – as a racialised white cis heterosexual male in the west,¹¹ an author and scholar educated in Edwardian England, writing in the shadow of the British empire, amidst the largest armed conflicts Europe had witnessed – when he thought about the England he wanted to dedicate his work to? How did his supposed mythology respond to his idea of England? And what connects the idea that Tolkien as an individual had developed of

⁸ See also Drout’s article “Towards a Better Tolkien Criticism” (2006)

⁹ See also Luke Shelton (2022) as well as Fimi and Rios Maldonado (2022).

¹⁰ Shippey has therefore proposed considering Tolkien’s work as “mythology of England” (rather than “for England”) (*Road* 345).

¹¹ For further discussion on the terms “west/western” and its use in this thesis, see Chapter Two.

England throughout his lifetime with the England and Britain of the twenty-first century? Although the specific answers to the questions lie outside the reach of this thesis, it is paramount to gesture towards them because of the implications the “mythology for England” concept has when taken to its logical extremes by contemporary readers and popular culture. These implications include the interpretation of how right and wrong, good and evil, as well as the Other – who is the enemy, the foreigner, the stranger – are constructed and portrayed in Tolkien’s texts, especially in racial terms, as well as which interpretative angles and interpreters are sanctioned as valid or not. Furthermore, an over-emphasis of the idea of “a mythology for England” may potentially lead to constraining interpretations of Tolkien’s Middle-earth narratives as specifically “retrieving the art of mythological or *mythopoeic* thinking” in relation to the texts’ ethical dimension (Caldecott 3). By privileging the reading of a text like *LotR* as a “mythopoeic journey, or archetypal process”, there is a risk of not reading “the text itself”, but seeing it only “as the triumph of Good or Evil”, “as a symptom of some other mythical, religious or psychological process” (Eaglestone 2-3), or as containing no more than “trudging plots of ‘departure and return’, ‘initiation, donor and trial’” (Shippey, *Road* 381). I am not suggesting that mythical, archetypal, or psychological interpretations have not or cannot contribute to the reflection on ethics in Tolkien’s literary production. Rather, I am highlighting the importance of studying the nuanced portrayal of ethical conflict as a meaningful aspect of *the narrative itself* – that is, within the text.

As early as 1975, Colin Manlove, a founding figure in the study of Fantasy fiction and of Tolkien’s texts in particular, considered Tolkien’s Middle-earth as functioning according to a “medieval and/or Christian world order” (163). The perception that “Christian elements are undeniably present” in Tolkien’s *Silmarillion* mythology and his Middle-earth narratives (Flieger, *Splintered Light* 58) and that “Tolkien’s work is animated and undergirded by a profound moral and religious vision” has led to the conclusion that the “profound ethical” concerns that permeate Tolkien’s literary production are also “theological concerns” (Wood 1). Thus, the religious, theological, and spiritual exegeses of Tolkien’s literary production are one of Tolkien scholarship’s cornerstones. This is attested to by the myriad essays, articles, contributions, and monographs written throughout the decades, either specifically dedicated to the subject or touching upon it as one of their arguments. Richard L. Purtill’s *J.R.R. Tolkien: Myth, Morality and Religion* (1984); Stratford Caldecott’s *Secret Fire: The Spiritual Vision of J.R.R. Tolkien* (2003); Matthew T. Dickerson’s *Following Gandalf: Epic Battles and Moral Victory in “The Lord of the Rings”* (2003); Ralph C. Wood’s *The Gospel of Tolkien: Visions of the Kingdom of Middle-earth* (2003); Fleming Rutledge’s *The Battle for Middle-earth: Tolkien’s Divine Design in “The Lord of the Rings”* (2004); Christopher Garbowski’s *Recovery and Transcendence for the*

Contemporary Myth-maker: The Spiritual Dimension in the Works of J.R.R. Tolkien (2000; 2004); Peter J. Kreeft's *The Philosophy of Tolkien: The Worldview Behind "The Lord of the Rings"* (2005); Alison Milbank's *Chesterton and Tolkien as Theologians: The Fantasy of the Real* (2009); and, more recently, Lisa Coutras's *Tolkien's Theology of Beauty: Majesty, Transcendence, and Splendor in Middle-earth* (2016), Jonathan McIntosh's *The Flame Imperishable: Tolkien, St. Thomas, and the Metaphysics of Faërie* (2017); and Jeffrey L. Morrow's *Seeking the Lord of Middle-earth: Theological Essays on J.R.R. Tolkien* (2017) are relevant examples of works dedicated to the subject from the past 30 years or so. Theology has also been an important influence on the studies elaborated by outstanding Tolkienists such as Jane Chance, Verlyn Flieger, and Tom Shippey, thus contributing to the importance of religion in Tolkien studies through these scholars' influential contributions.

Tolkien may not have felt "called to enter the lists as a writer on Christian themes ... a theologian or philosopher of religion", but theological or religious readings of Tolkien's literary production range from studying Tolkien's work in relation to theological sources and debates, to analysing specific themes present in his texts – the quest motif, the battle between good and evil and the factions involved in this struggle, the coexistence of a providence-like force and free will in the author's fictional world, and so on (Caldecott 175). Simultaneously, Tolkien's texts have been read as dealing with "demonic forces, archangels, bondage and liberation, justice and mercy, failure and restoration, friendship and sacrifice, sanctification and glorification, divine election and human freedom", making *LotR* "like the Bible in its narrative structure" (Rutledge 4). Tolkien connected the activity of storytelling as sub-creation with the divine act of creation by a Christian god (*OFS* 143-4) and one of the most important concepts in his essay "On Fairy-stories" is the *eucatastrophe*. Roughly translated as "the good catastrophe", Tolkien defined *eucatastrophe* as "the Consolation of the Happy Ending" given by fairy tales that "denies (in the face of much evidence, if you will) universal final defeat and in so far is *evangelium*, giving a glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief" (*OFS* 153, emphasis in original). In the epilogue to his essay, he added that "The Birth of Christ is the *eucatastrophe* of Man's history. The Resurrection is the *eucatastrophe* of the story of Incarnation. This story begins and ends in joy" (*OFS* 156). In *LotR*, Frodo's and Sam's rescue from Mordor by the eagles and their awakening in Cormallen are moments in which Tolkien's concept of *eucatastrophe* shines through, as "the Christian myth comes close to the surface and is explicitly alluded to" (Shippey, *Author* 206). In a letter to Robert Murray, Tolkien would declare that

The Lord of the Rings is of course a fundamentally religious and Catholic work; unconsciously so at first, but consciously in the revision. That is why I have not put

in, or have cut out, practically all references to anything like ‘religion’, to cults or practices, in the imaginary world. For the religious element is absorbed into the story. (*Letters* 172)¹²

LotR presents few instances of religious veneration to a superior force – like the Valar – such as the Elvish hymns praising Elbereth Gilthoniel or the custom practiced by Faramir and his men of facing the west before eating their evening meal, looking “towards Númenor that was, and beyond to Elvenhome that is, and to that which is beyond Elvenhome and will ever be” (*TT* 4.V.884). The text presents its main characters, hobbits, with “all their nineteenth-century Englishness” as “devoid of any religious sanction for any of their activities” (Caldecott 51). But although hobbits are not depicted as religious beings, from a religious perspective their role as the story’s main characters would demonstrate that despite being small and vulnerable, “every person is equally important in the eyes of God, *anyone and everyone* can be a hero” (Caldecott 35). Frodo’s heroism would resemble Christian qualities:

For Christians, *the true hero is not the one who succeeds in imposing his own will on others* by virtue of outward, physical strength, or even by the inner strength that comes from intelligence and moderation of appetite. He allows himself to be humiliated and crucified. He refuses earthly respect and glory for the sake of something much greater: *not merely his own integrity, but the will of the Father in heaven; not for the self, in other words, but for the transcendent Other, for God and for neighbour.* (Caldecott 34, emphasis added)

Theology or a religion-based interpretation is one of the many paths through which ethical choices of Tolkien’s characters can be approached. But as Fleming Rutledge indicates, “the Ring saga contains a powerful undercurrent of *transcendent meaning*. This undercurrent can be interpreted in varying ways, and not all of these will be theological” (8). The ethical is not exclusively Christian nor is a theologically motivated framework indispensable to appreciate the importance of ethical choices in Tolkien’s texts. I highlight the use Caldecott and Rutledge make of the word “transcendent” because, like them, it is also my contention that a key aspect to the ethical dimension of Tolkien’s Middle-earth narratives is the relationship between the self and the Other, and even the primacy of the Other over the self. What I wish to highlight is an interpretation of the transcendent Other that is not grounded in the concept of a god and their will, but rather in the ethical relationship created between the self and the Other.

¹² Different explanations have been offered as to why Tolkien would distance himself from an overtly religious or Christian interpretation of his texts. According to Shippey, if *LotR* “should approach too close to ‘Gospel-truth’, to the Christian myth in which Tolkien himself believed, it might forfeit its status as a story and become at worst a blasphemy, an ‘Apocryphal gospel’, at best a dull allegory rehearsing in admittedly novel form what everyone ought to know already” (*Road* 223). Colin Manlove points out that “for the Christian, only one fantasy has come true in our world without ceasing to be a fantasy – the story recounted in the Gospels” (158).

Regarding Tolkien's attempt to come to terms with the state of the world as reflected in his literary production, Eaglestone maintains that *LotR* should also be understood as "a meditation on what the very nature of community and evil might be in the twentieth century, traumatized by two World Wars, mass death and totalitarian disaster" (2-3). Shippey considers this text as "a war-book, also a post-war book framed by and responding to the crisis of Western civilization, 1914-1945 (and beyond)" through the use of Fantasy (*Road* 374). Adding to both reflections, and from his own religious perception, Caldecott affirms that

What the book celebrates – and mourns – is a world and a tradition that appears to be passing away in a great war, or a series of wars. These wars are fought in a good cause, against an enemy that cannot be allowed to win. Yet the real danger is not that the free world might be defeated; it is that we might be corrupted, brutalised and degraded by the conflict itself, and in particular by the means employed to secure victory. (2)

The experience of war was, simultaneously, one of the most important factors to prompt Emmanuel Levinas's reflections on the ethical responsibility of the self to the Other. The parallels between the creation of Levinas's philosophical discourse and the impact of Tolkien's wartime experiences on his creative work will be briefly addressed in the methodology chapter of this thesis. In the next section, I present the reasoning behind the selection of my primary sources for this thesis.

Primary Sources

The selection of material from Tolkien's writings is crucial to any critical analysis of Tolkien's Middle-earth narratives, from the body of lore and legend on Middle-earth to the author's essays and letters. Because Tolkien's worldbuilding effort spans multiple publications, drafts, and versions, this selection is closely related to the possibility of differentiating, on the one hand, Tolkien the author from Tolkien the scholar and the commentator of his own work. On the other, it constitutes the possibility of distinguishing the texts published during the author's life and under his supervision, from those published posthumously. The latter would constitute not only the author's own words, but possibly also a version and interpretation of them.

Tolkien scholarship has accounted for the long and complex creative process from which these texts originated, while keeping in mind three important aspects: first, that "however neat the final product" – be it the *LotR* or *The Silmarillion* – Tolkien "had no clear plan at all" for a *Hobbit* sequel after 1937 (Shippey, *Author* 53). In a letter from 1964 quoted by Christopher Tolkien in the Preface to *The Hobbit*, Tolkien explained that *The Hobbit*,

which was originally written to entertain his children, did not bear any connection with “the matter of the Elder Days” (*H* viii).¹³ Second, both *The Hobbit* and *LotR* underwent amendments during the author’s lifetime, as *The Hobbit*’s original storyline did not anticipate the plot of the One Ring. Because of this, “Tolkien had to do a good deal of work here in modifying what he had said about the ring, Bilbo’s ring, the ring not yet imagined as the One Ruling Ring, in the first edition of *The Hobbit*” (Shippey, *Author* 112). Tolkien kept “the first version as an excuse Bilbo had told with uncharacteristic dishonesty to put his claim to the ‘precious’ beyond doubt”, whereas the later editions would tell the true account of the events in Gollum’s cave (Shippey, *Road* 88). And third, Tolkien began working on his “vast personal mythology”, which he referred to as the ‘Silmarillion’ or *legendarium* as early as 1914, for the then unpublished “Story of Kullervo” was to be the origin of Túrin Turambar’s tale (Fimi 2). By the time *The Hobbit* and *LotR* were published, these texts had changed Tolkien’s outlook on his own writing.

Dimitra Fimi draws attention to the fact that, before 1937, “Tolkien was mainly writing in a ‘mythological mode’. He imitated ancient as well as medieval myths and legends by writing creation myths. In this process he shaped a pantheon of divine and semi-divine creatures and fashioned epic tales of heroes” (6). *The Hobbit* and *LotR* changed that: not only were the protagonists different – from the Valar, the heroic elves and the men of old to hobbits – but the narrative mode also turned to “a ‘novelistic mode’, or more accurately, a ‘historical mode’” situated in a Secondary World: “in the aftermath of the paradigm shift caused by *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien was unable to complete his mythology for publication. *The Lord of the Rings* had altered so many fundamental ideas and conceptions of his mythology that the rifts were irreconcilable” (Fimi 6). But Tolkien did not abandon his worldbuilding efforts completely. Even after the publication of *LotR*, Tolkien “was still thinking and writing about these texts and their problems in the last year of his life, 1973” (Shippey, *Road* 253). According to Fimi,

The last version of the ‘Silmarillion’ that Tolkien left was missing its final chapters. Versions of the complete narrative had been written more than forty years earlier, but many elements of the mythology had changed in the intervening period. Consequently there were many different versions of the same story all from different times of Tolkien’s life, with variations of names, plot elements and characters. (2)

Thus, *The Silmarillion* (1977), the *Unfinished Tales of Númenor and Middle-earth* (1980), the twelve volumes of *The History of Middle-earth* (1983-1996), as well as the publication of different versions of stories from the *legendarium* have emerged as chronicling Tolkien’s

¹³ See *Letters* 346-7.

creative process in the construction of his *legendarium* and *LotR*. They provide textual versions of the more or less “connected narratives” from this “immense chronicle/mythology/legendarium” thanks to the editing and posthumous publication made possible by the author’s son and literary executor, Christopher Tolkien (Shippey, *Author* 226). The account of the writing process behind *The Hobbit* can be found in *The Annotated Hobbit*, edited by Douglas A. Anderson (1988; revised and expanded edition 2002) and *The History of the Hobbit*, edited by John D. Rateliff in 2006, with a revised edition in 2011.

In the specific case of the texts analysed in this thesis, *The Hobbit* and *LotR* achieved a “fixed” form under Tolkien’s supervision, and yet they are connected not only to other works situated in or adjacent to Middle-earth published during Tolkien’s lifetime, but also to posthumous publications that were edited by individuals thoroughly familiar with the author’s work and/or Tolkien as a person. This signals an important conversation about the extent to which critics and scholars may consider the entire body of texts that comprise Tolkien’s Middle-earth as expressing an inner consistency and coherency. Middle-earth can be spoken- of as an integral structure built throughout several texts; but each text could also be understood as a self-contained glimpse into this fictional world and analysed independently without necessarily recurring to the entirety of the author’s *legendarium*. In terms of studying ethics in *The Hobbit* and *LotR*, it is possible to consider each narrative as possessing its own recognisable set of moral and ethical values, manifested in the narrative journey of each character, as well as the possibility of an overarching moral system that traverses all Middle-earth texts and affects all characters. Similarly, it is worth pondering if there is a unified portrayal of Otherness and the relationship with the Other in Middle-earth, or if there are narrative-specific depictions in *The Hobbit* and *LotR* that may exist autonomously and should consequently be approached as such.¹⁴ As a final addition to these considerations, it is worth reflecting on the role of Tolkien’s commentaries on his literary creations, as contained in his letters and essays, as well as any evidence provided by his published biography and available interviews, as these have definitely influenced the interpretation of his oeuvre.

The scope and approach of this thesis exemplify a proposal towards navigating these issues when studying *The Hobbit* and *LotR*. Departing from the premise that Middle-earth as a fictional construct is the common ground of these texts, I have chosen for this thesis to interpret these two narratives due to their more immediate intradiegetic connections, how the former was purposefully modified to achieve a (more or less) seamless connection with

¹⁴ A third possibility would be the consideration of a period-specific approach, related to a specific stage in Tolkien’s life and/or work as an author.

the latter, and the fact that Tolkien oversaw the publication of both narratives.¹⁵ While a full reading of the *legendarium* lies outside the reaches of my thesis, I refer to *The Silmarillion* and, in specific cases, to different versions of themes and events as presented in *The History of Middle-earth* in order to contextualise my interpretation of vital elements in *The Hobbit* and *LotR* that are significant to the ethical dimension of these texts.¹⁶ These elements include the hierarchy of beings and human groups, as well as the surfacing of evil in Middle-earth. I contend that these elements impact fundamental themes present in *The Hobbit* and *LotR* – such as heroism, the nature and phenomenology of evil, the intertwining of fate and free will, as well as the manifestations of death and its liminality – which, in turn, constitute vital reference points for the characters’ – and the readers’ – exploration of the ethical relationship with the Other in Tolkien’s Middle-earth.

To conclude this section, I will detail my stance on the use of Tolkien’s letters, essays, biography, or interviews to support the arguments contained in my thesis. One of the most important objectives of my thesis is to discover how Tolkien’s Middle-earth narratives explore the ethical relationship with the Other as experienced by its main characters *within* these texts. For this reason, my choice of primary sources focuses first and foremost on Tolkien’s literary production. In comparison to other Tolkien scholars, I have reduced the reference to Tolkien’s letters, essays, or biography as part of my analysis or as a corroboration of my findings. This is because it is not my main objective to conclusively establish how Tolkien’s personal worldview influenced the ethical dimension of his creative writing, or to deduce what Tolkien may have thought about the ethical responsibility towards to the Other or the concept of Otherness. Pertinent to this point are the thoughts Drout elaborates on the implications of Roland Barthes’s essay “The Death of the Author” (1967) and Michel Foucault’s concept of the “author function” in “What is an Author?” (1969) for Tolkien scholarship. Drout opines that Tolkien’s letters may offer problematic leads in the interpretation of the author’s works because they “do not present their meaning transparently” (21). In Drout’s view, an “over-reliance ... upon the *Letters* guides Tolkien scholarship down the narrow channel of finding a single, ‘theological’ meaning for Tolkien’s works”, that would assume that the only “correct” way of interpreting Tolkien is through the

¹⁵ For this thesis I am using the fifth edition of *The Hobbit*.

¹⁶ Although *The Silmarillion* is considered by scholars like Flieger and Shippey as a “substantial text”, canonical as a Middle-earth narrative, I am aware that crucial reflections on these subjects can be found throughout the *legendarium* (Shippey, *Road* 256). I am also aware that despite its seemingly canonical status, Christopher Tolkien undertook a monumental editorial task when preparing *The Silmarillion* for publication. This is evidenced, for example, in the Beren and Lúthien storyline: “the illusion of a coherent and self-contained narrative in the published *Silmarillion* (1977) was achieved by cutting and pasting from a great wealth of material, along with an imposed ‘regularisation’ of names and storylines” (Fimi 3).

author's "evaluation of his own work" (Drout 21).¹⁷ This does not mean, however, that Tolkien's reflections upon his own work cannot or do not significantly contribute to the study of his texts, including the one elaborated by this thesis. Indeed, "his correspondence reveals the birth of *The Lord of the Rings*", the experiences and thoughts that accompanied the creation of this narrative, his answers to readers' questions, and so on (Alliot 79). Similarly, Tolkien's theory of Fantasy literature as presented in "On Fairy-stories" offers extremely valuable insights into his perception of Fantasy, its importance within and beyond the literary landscape, how Fantasy functions, and what his own creative practice as a Fantasy writer consists of. For my study, I have prioritised letters and passages in Tolkien's essays that may provide greater insight into the encounter and relationship with the Other as depicted in *The Hobbit* and *LotR*. This is of particular importance when considering racial representation in Tolkien's Middle-earth narratives and the author's own anti-fascism and rejection of apartheid; Fantasy as fulfilling the desire to commune with the Other; how characters like Tom Bombadil and Aragorn enact the encounter with the Other; and Frodo's "failure".

The goal of my thesis is not to produce a definitive "correct" way of reading Tolkien in terms of the ethical and the Other validated by Tolkien. Nor is this thesis focused on certifying if Tolkien's characters or narratives can be deemed as morally good or bad. Instead, it offers a pathway for discussing how *The Hobbit* and *LotR* engage with different representations of the Otherness, and how these texts delve into the ethical relationship between the self and the Other through the enactment of the encounter with the Other.

¹⁷ Not to mention that the letters have been made available through a selection editorially processed by Humphrey Carpenter and Christopher Tolkien, which is arguably an interpretation of Tolkien's words.

Chapter Two

Method and Companionship

Ethics, Morals, and the Ethical

According to Hanna Meretoja and Colin Davis, literature plays an important role in visualizing “how we experience the world and what we think” (1-2). This is due to literature’s capacity to offer *Möglichkeitsräume*, realms of possibility, that allow the reader to explore and interpret different stances, perspectives, or worldviews depicted in and integral to literary texts (Öhlschläger 11). These perspectives are rendered, for example, through a narrative’s characters— their qualities and actions – the plot, or the themes portrayed, which then create a narrative’s ethical dimension. Thus, all texts, in the broadest sense of the term, “can function as an experimental space where good and evil, right and wrong, are in play and at stake”: a space to explore ethics (Meretoja and Davis 9). This study reads Tolkien’s *The Hobbit* and *LotR* as such “experimental spaces”, where the encounter with the Other, the ethical relationship between the self and the Other, and ideas of Otherness can be explored. This relationship impacts individual narrative journeys in the texts as well as the main plot, and is connected with themes essential in Tolkien’s literary production. The framework articulated by my thesis is based on Emmanuel Levinas’s philosophical approach to ethics and the Other, current discussions surrounding the portrayal of Otherness in Tolkien’s literary production, as well as key concepts taken from literary theory that deal with the idea of Otherness, such as the uncanny and the abject. These are utilised to undertake a close reading approach to the primary sources. I will therefore begin by reflecting on the concept of ethics and its study in literature during the past century, in order to then consider the tradition in which this research inserts itself.

According to Werner Stegmaier, Levinas makes no real terminological distinction between the ethical and the moral – ethics and morals – in his philosophical discourse (90). However, as my study prioritises the use of the term *ethics*, it is necessary to outline how ethics is understood in my thesis and the difficulty in differentiating ethics from morals, before proceeding to Levinas’s philosophical approach. In western philosophical traditions, ethics and morals have been considered core concepts dating back to the Greco-Roman world. Their relationship with the arts is already a matter of reflection in Plato’s *Republic*, Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, the writings of Cicero and Seneca. Ethics and morals have, however, different etymological roots: morality or morals comes from the Latin *mos/mores*, “customs”, whereas as ethics comes from the Greek *ethos/êthos*. Liesbeth Korthals Altes indicates that “in ancient Greek, *ethos* referred to a person’s or community’s character or

characterizing spirit, tone, or attitude” (vii). As for its Latin counterpart(s), *mos* generally refers to habit and the plural *mores* denotes character – “all of the habits that define one’s behaviour” (Cassin, Crépon, and Prost 693). *The Encyclopedia of Ethics* proposes, as a tentative distinction, to understand “morality as a set of principles ... of right conduct, while ethics is defined as the study of moral judgments”; that is, ethics studies the reason behind moral principles and judgments as well as their application (187). On the other hand, Kyoung-Jin Lee considers that ethics is *usually* understood as a teaching of morality and moral endeavours directed towards the greater good; as a technical term, it denotes a branch of philosophy that deals with these issues (43).¹ These definitions exhibit the difficulty in separating morality and ethics, for they are placed in correlation to one another, and may often overlap in meaning. In turn, Colin Davis defines ethics “a set of problems concerning right and wrong, good and bad, rather than the prospect of the solution ... Ethics is a place where the contest over values takes place, not where it is resolved” (33). I read Davis’s description of ethics as running parallel to Claudia Öhlschläger’s formulation of the literary text as providing realms of possibility. For the purposes of this thesis I follow Davis’s definition first and foremost and consider ethics as the set of problems concerning behaviour and choices that are expressed in the construction of an internal stance or attitude. This consideration is then informed by Levinas’s philosophy, which will be discussed in the following sections. Tolkien’s *The Hobbit* and *LotR* as spaces where it is possible to explore how characters encounter concepts, events, or beings presented within the text. These strategies form the characters’ narrative trajectories, and with them, their ethics. In this sense, this thesis conjoins interpretative and descriptive aspects: it delves into and interprets the ethical dimension of Tolkien’s narratives, of Middle-earth, as well as the ideas and actions of the narratives’ characters. These are influenced by their own qualities, experiences, the characteristics of the society or culture they belong to, and so on. However, this research into the ethical dimension of these texts does not evaluate them according to a distinct moral scale: it does not ask if these texts are morally uplifting, nor elaborates an ethical code or manifesto based on these texts to then impart authoritative moral or ethical advice to the readers. Instead, I focus on how ethics is built as a relationship through the encounter with the Other.

¹ The French language, in which Levinas wrote his philosophical reflections, also distinguishes between *les mœurs* and *la morale*. According to the *Dictionary of Untranslatables*, *les mœurs* are “the rules of behaviour of a people or an individual”, whereas *la morale* “only includes rules of good behaviour” (Cassin, Crépon, and Prost 694). For a further discussion on the area(s) of study of morals and ethics see Cassin, Crépon, and Prost 691-697.

Ethics and the Study of Literature

In recent history, the most diverse currents of literary theory, from poststructuralism to the proponents of the so-called “ethical turn” in the 1980s and 1990s, have emphasised the relationship between ethics and the arts as well as the correlation between ethics and aesthetics. Korthals Altes perceptively argues that the interest from narratology and literary studies in the ethics of fictional characters lies in the fact that “the representation of actual or fictive human (or anthropomorphic) experience is quite generally considered to constitute a key interest of narratives. Characters would be primordial vehicles for readers’ empathic involvement in fictional narrative” (106). The different ways in which critics and theorists have engaged with the ethical in literature has led scholars such as Korthals Altes, Jakob Lothe and Jeremy Hawthorn to roughly identify three main tendencies within this “ethical turn”: “pragmatist and rhetorical ethics, ethics of alterity and political approaches to ethics” (Hawthorn and Lothe 4).² At the forefront of the pragmatist/rhetorical approach stands neo-Aristotelian philosopher Martha C. Nussbaum, who asserts that literature is capable of exercising the reader’s agency in the resolution of ethical dilemmas and consequently encourage them to reflect on how to lead “the good life”. The second strand within the “ethical turn” is akin to the analysis of this research and stresses the multiple encounters that narratives are capable of conveying – between the self and Other – as well as the “final undecidability of meaning and values” (Hawthorn and Lothe 3-4). Jacques Derrida, Maurice Blanchot, Jean-François Lyotard, and Paul de Man figure amongst the exponents of this interpretative angle. Unlike Nussbaum, who deems literature as a potential tool to inform the reader’s moral perspective, the proponents of the ethics of alterity perceive the reading of texts as an encounter with a radical Other, ultimately unknowable in their entirety. As for a political approach to ethics, this current incorporates a critical perspective on, for example, the potential sexist or colonial legacies present in literary texts – by underlining questions of “race, gender, class and multiculturalism” – as well as the ethics that reinforce oppressive legacies (Hawthorn and Lothe 3-4). This line of inquiry considers the text as a device through which one can witness and practice ethical reflections, while focusing on how literature is affected by and expresses power relations. In addition to what can be found *within* the text, writers in this current voice “their social or ethical commitment through their literary works, often alongside forms of social activism” (Korthals Altes 9).

A final tendency that could be added to the former list is the study of how a narrative’s aesthetic design accentuates its ethical implications (Öhlschläger 9). For Öhlschläger,

² See also Meretoja and Davis 1-9.

[i]nteressant wird es dort, wo kritische Einwände oder paradoxe Sachverhalte aus der narrativen oder ästhetischen Struktur eines literarischen Textes zu ermitteln sind. Ethik wäre dann nicht als eine dem Text äußerliche Kategorie zu denken, sondern der poetischen und poetologischen Struktur eines literarischen Textes inhärent. (11)

[it becomes interesting when critical objections or paradoxical circumstances are mediated by the narrative or aesthetic structure of a literary text. Ethics would then not be thought of as a category external to the text, but rather inherent to the poetical and poetological structure of a literary text. (Translation mine.)]

Öhlschläger's observation, which emphasizes the "poetical and poetological structure of a literary text" is a thought-provoking one because it would mean that rather than ethics being an "external category" that can be applied to the text by the reader or the critic, the ethical could be considered a constitutive element that imbues all layers of a narrative and consequently emanates from the text itself. It is not within the purposes of my thesis to analyse in detail the narrative structure of *The Hobbit* and *LotR*. However, Öhlschläger's proposal is of interest to this thesis insofar as it conceives conceptualising the ethical dimension of literary texts as a realm of possibility that can operate with a certain degree of independence from the (ethical) view of the author and the reader.

Of the currents mentioned so far within the "ethical turn", I identify "the ethics of alterity" as part of the approach pursued by my thesis. According to Meretoja and Davis, this current surfaced as a response to structuralist narratology, which in its focus on narrative structures disregarded the exploration of the ethical in literature through the subject's experience of narratives, their function, or their significance (3). This exclusive focus on structure developed a tendency towards constructing putative fixed, universal categories and truths – such as, for example, the theories and interpretations derived from Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* (1928), which distinguish 31 functions or actions and seven characters or actants within Russian folktales as the basic elements of their structure. It was thus that:

in the French context, the structuralist approach met fierce criticism from divergent thinkers who were later grouped together under the term "poststructuralism". In this heterogeneous strand of thought, ethical issues were addressed particularly under the influence of the post-phenomenological thinking of Emmanuel Levinas. Reading came to be perceived as an encounter with radical alterity ... because it often mystifies the literary text as an absolute Other, fundamentally, ineffable and beyond comprehension. The form in which ethics emerged in the poststructuralist context was through critique of conventional narrative form, which was perceived as oppressive and ethically problematic ... Deconstructionist ethics is suspicious of any claim to understand the other through narrative and valorizes the power of

imaginative art to transgress boundaries and norms which conventional narrative forms were considered to perpetuate. (Meretoja and Davis 4)

Poststructuralism strove to transcend structuralist approaches by attending to the objects of its study *as well as* the systems and structures that produced them, thus espousing the argument that knowledge – and *knowing* an object – could neither be universally evident nor permanent. Consequently, the experience of a text for a particular reader is impacted by their own circumstances and they cannot presume to know the text entirely. It is here that poststructuralist thinkers such as Jacques Derrida found common ground with Emmanuel Levinas's philosophical programme. In the brief relation above, Meretoja and Davis describe Levinas's discourse as both poststructuralist and post-phenomenological.³ Although the particularities of Levinas's philosophical discourse will be approached at length later in this chapter, for now I will note that unlike phenomenological philosophers before him, Levinas departs from the conception of phenomenology as a rigorous discipline that follows a subject-object model. Instead, Levinas highlights the ultimate unknowability of the Other when it is encountered and the relationship this unknowability has with the ethical dimension of human existence and thought.

Meretoja and Davis also point out how poststructuralist thinkers take issue with the “conventional narrative form” because they consider it “oppressive and ethically problematic” (4). As distinct cultural/historical products, narrative forms potentially express the problematic values of the time and space in which they were created. Adjacent to this criticism of the “conventional narrative form” is the poststructuralist criticism of the “foundational concepts of ethics”, which imply “the assumptions of shared values, of an autonomous self, of the evidence of communication, and of the author as the authoritative source of meaning” (Korthals Altes 24). The objective was to problematise the existence of and belief in a common understanding of ethics, the concept and identity of the self, and the author's role in determining a text's ethical position. Poststructuralism therefore highlighted that, in fact, the ethical position of narratives could not be taken for granted, for different texts reflect different notions of ethics, which are created and enforced within different cultural frameworks with their own biases and prejudices. Consequently, not only could (and should) the ethics portrayed in or by a text be questioned, but it is also necessary to question the ethical point of view from which they are analysed, for the perspective from which a text is studied also reveals specific cultural standpoints of critics and scholars.

³ Stephan Moebius also argues that Levinas' ethics moves *between* philosophical fields such as existential philosophy, phenomenology, and poststructuralism (28).

The Feminine, the Swarthy, and the Orc: Tolkien and Alterity

Considering the context provided by Meretoja, Davis, and Kothals Altes discussed above, the following section considers if and how Tolkien's Middle-earth narratives may be visualised as "oppressive and ethically problematic" in their portrayal of Otherness. This consideration stems from these texts as (potentially) reflective of real-world power structures and structural inequality. Thereon, I articulate how *The Hobbit* and *LotR* may simultaneously offer nuanced reflections on the ethical relationship between the self and Other that challenge these problematic perspectives as a preliminary view of Otherness and ethics will be addressed in the further chapters of this thesis. My starting point is Marxist and poststructuralist philosopher Fredric Jameson's essay, "Magical Narratives" (1981). In this text, Jameson scrutinises the relationship between ethics and Otherness in romance, which he understands as one of the literary modes Northrop Frye formulates in the latter's *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957). Jameson first identifies ethics as "the informing ideology of the binary opposition ... it is ethics itself which is the ideological vehicle and the legitimation of concrete structures of power and domination" (189). For Jameson, this binary opposition is that of positional and problematic notions of good and evil, further arguing that

Evil ... continues to characterize whatever is radically different from me, whatever by virtue of precisely that difference seems to constitute a real and urgent threat to my own existence. So from the earliest times, the stranger from another tribe, the "barbarian" who speaks an incomprehensible language and follows "outlandish" customs, but also the woman, whose biological difference stimulates fantasies of castration and devoration, or in our own time, the avenger of accumulated resentments from some oppressed class or race, or else that alien being, Jew or Communist, behind whose apparently human features a malignant and preternatural intelligence is thought to lurk: these are some of the archetypal figures of the Other, about whom the essential point to be made is not so much that he is feared because he is evil; rather he is evil because he is Other, alien, different, strange, unclean, and unfamiliar. (190)

Thus, in Jameson's sense, ethics would constitute a system bent on "a once-and-for-all judgement of what is or is not good", which could be instrumentalised to serve specific power structures that identify the Other as evil (Tally 44). Such instrumentalization could further the oppression of marginalised groups along the lines of class, gender, race, or sexual orientation. Thereon, Jameson argues that "magical narratives", like the ones found in fantastic and Fantasy literature, evince the "persistence of romance" into the present day, replacing what he identifies as the "older magical categories of Otherness" of "medieval

romance” with those available in contemporary socioeconomic environments (203).⁴ Of interest to my study is to consider if and how Tolkien’s worldbuilding effort, in its blend of mimetic elements from the Primary World as well as non-mimetic, displays the “categories of Otherness” tied to racial and gender prejudices like the ones noted by Jameson. Such a consideration would simultaneously imply reflecting on the positioning of the idea of self in or the primary subject of Middle-earth as a cosmogonic construct.

Middle-earth is inhabited by dwarves, elves, humans, hobbits, and wizards. These beings “are all human-like and the characteristics they share with mankind are more than those that separate them”, which may include physicality, history, and/or cultural marks (Fimi 132). Simultaneously, there are humanoid beings like orcs and trolls who run contrary to the protagonists of Tolkien’s texts in their motivations, alliances, and to a certain extent their appearance.⁵ There are also creatures such as dragons, ents, giant spiders, and eagles, which are closer in kinship to Middle-earth’s flora and fauna whilst also possessing reasoning and the ability to speak. At the same time, although humans occupy an important space throughout Tolkien’s *legendarium*, they are not the central characters of either *The Hobbit* or *LotR*. This opens up the possibilities of who the text depicts and who the reader perceives as self and Other from the beings that inhabit this fictional world. In *The Silmarillion*, Arda’s highest deity, Eru Ilúvatar (“Father of All” in Quenya) is conceived “firmly within a familiar patriarchal religious tradition” (Crowe 65-66). None of the main characters in *The Hobbit* are women. In *LotR*, where a clearer picture is gained of Middle-earth’s cultures at the time of the War of the Ring, these “exhibit almost invariably patriarchal and patrilineal political and social organization” (Crowe 67). On the women in *LotR*, Melanie A. Rawls writes

only Éowyn of Rohan is depicted in any detail of character, desire, motivation, and activity. Arwen, Elrond’s daughter, is a half-glimpsed dream. Galadriel is a mighty Elven ruler, and we learn something of her thought and powers; but she is peripheral

⁴ Although Jameson does not elaborate on his understanding of “medieval”, his assertions bring to mind Maria Sachiko Cecire’s description of the Middle Ages as “the only non-‘modern’ period in recorded Western history, a shadow space of superstition and ignorance” (5) and medievalist Fantasy literature like Tolkien’s as replicating or normalising “‘medieval’ hierarchies of class, race, and gender” (12-13). Although lying outside the scope of my thesis, it is worth questioning what exactly Jameson and Cecire understand as “medieval” whilst, more broadly, pointing towards the contemporary understanding of the global Middle Ages, as well as current problematisations of the Middle Ages as “the Dark Ages” and the use of medieval elements in popular culture. See, for example, the work of Rabia Umar Ali (2012), Olivette Otele (2020), Mary Rambaran-Olm (2021), and Geraldine Heng (2003, 2018, 2021) on these subjects.

⁵ As Fimi indicates, Tolkien uses “varying terminology” in order “to refer to the different kinds of beings” that inhabit Middle-earth: races, Free Peoples, and kindreds (132). In my own analysis of *The Hobbit* and *LotR*, I choose not to refer to the groups that populate Tolkien’s fictional world as “races” because of the concept’s ideological and political content, and, more importantly, because race does not exist in the Primary World. Racism does.

to the action and we learn little of her history and relationships. There are no female counterparts for Gandalf or Sauron, Aragorn or Saruman, Frodo or Gollum. (49)

No women form part of the Fellowship of the Ring, and very few female characters actively intervene in *LotR*'s plot or are in positions of authority and leadership on par with men. Furthermore, only in rare occasions does the text provide insight into women's subjectivity, with experiences such as motherhood sporadically brought forth via Lobelia or Aragorn's relationship to his mother, Gilraen (*RK* Appendix A.I.v.1385-92) Although it is not my intention to theorise in detail about Tolkien's authorial decisions when creating female characters, I refer here to Laura Michel's summary of perspectives on the subject:

Criticism on this topic has ranged from mild attempts to excuse Tolkien's points of view to truly violent accusations of misogyny and chauvinism ... Those who try to exculpate Tolkien often justify his 'exclusion' of women as due to stylistic and generic constraints (the epic has never allotted important roles to women), or argue that it has to do with his education and his living in a male-dominated scholarly society. (56)

As Michel indicates, critics have offered different explanations regarding Tolkien's portrayal of women in his Middle-earth narratives, such as his personal life and the cultural moment he belonged to: his orphanhood and conservative upbringing, his Roman Catholic faith, and his supposedly limited personal acquaintance with women and their preoccupations – as extrapolated from his letters or by his biographers. Furthermore, whilst Tolkien was critical of nineteenth century scholarly assumptions on literature – as discussed by the author himself in his essay on *Beowulf*, "The Monsters and the Critics" – and scholars like John D. Rateliff have argued that Tolkien was "unusual for dons of his era in his support for women taking degrees and pursuing academic careers" ("Women" 24), other scholars, like Candice Fredrick, Sam McBride, and Jennifer Neville, contend that Tolkien's academic circle and literary works evidenced patriarchal attitudes to both female scholars and characters in medieval and Old English literature.⁶ Thus, it would seem that most critics agree that "trying to prove that Tolkien was in any way a 'hidden feminist' would be a rather pointless exercise" (Benvenuto 33). More recently, however, Tolkien scholarship has tried to demonstrate how Tolkien's female characters represent "a modern vision of women"

⁶ See Fredrick and McBride (2001). For Jennifer Neville, "Tolkien underestimated the women depicted in texts like *Beowulf*, and so women in Rohan are, I believe, more marginal than those in *Beowulf*. Yet Tolkien should not be singled out for blame for the limits he placed on women. The best nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scholarship left no room for active women in Old English poetry, and late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century feminist criticism of Old English literature continues to create an image of the powerless, voiceless, and hopeless woman who can do no more than weep" (101).

(Benvenuto 41), with scholars such as Janet Brennan Croft and Leslie A. Donovan asserting that “women fulfil essential, rather than merely supportive, roles in Middle-earth and in his [Tolkien’s] life” (6).⁷ Moreover, Charlotte Spivack argues that a character like Frodo

undermines two major mythic role models of Western patriarchal society, Faust and Prometheus. Frodo is anti-Faust, committed to destroying power, not in its manifestations but at its source, and an anti-Prometheus, distrustful of the potentially destructive uses of that stolen fire of technology. In this sense, although Tolkien’s trilogy is notoriously lacking in female characters, the work exhibits decidedly “*feminine themes*”. (7, emphasis mine)

For my thesis, I reflect on how, in a “patriarchal economy” as exhibited by almost all societies of Middle-earth, the female and *feminine* characters in *The Hobbit* and *LotR* occupy a position of “simultaneous marginalization and transgressive potential” (Driggers 81). In this sense, it is vital to note that the idea of femininity (and masculinity) “has involved the arrangement of items within a system that gives them their meaning” and has varied according to different cultural and historical parameters (Bordo 24). As Judith Butler indicates “gender is not always constituted coherently or consistently in different historical contexts ... gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual, and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities” (4).⁸ Furthermore, for feminists like Simone de Beauvoir, “humanity is thus male and defines woman not in herself but as relative to him”(15).⁹ This not only means that woman is “not regarded as an autonomous being” (de Beauvoir 15), but also that “‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity,’ at least since the nineteenth century, and arguably before, have been constructed through a process of mutual exclusion” (Bordo 174). With these considerations in mind, my understanding of femininity throughout this thesis follows Julia Serano’s definition as “the behaviors, mannerisms, interests, and ways of presenting oneself that are *typically associated* with those who are female” (320, emphasis added). Serano further clarifies this definition by stating that “‘femininity’ or ‘feminine’ traits ... are a *heterogeneous, non-female-specific* collection of traits that each have a unique biological and/or social origin” (325, emphasis added). I therefore consider for my analysis how

⁷ See also Reid, “History” (2015).

⁸ Thus, for example, Susan Brownmiller’s (1986) analysis of the different elements that inform femininity is different from bell hooks’s (1982) account of femininity as experienced, performed, and perceived by Black women.

⁹ Although the feminist critique of Levinas’s philosophical discourse lies beyond the reaches of this thesis, it is important to gesture to how feminists like de Beauvoir have questioned Levinas’s understanding of the Other as feminine. She contends that when Levinas “writes that woman is mystery, he implies that she is a mystery for man. Thus his description, which intended to be objective, is in fact an assertion of masculine privilege” (16).

contemporary readers like myself may interpret different characters, irrespective of their gender, as portraying or enacting qualities and attitudes perceived as feminine.¹⁰

Rawls suggests that within Tolkien's Arda, "the prime feminine characteristic is *understanding*. The prime masculine characteristic is *power*" (49). Furthermore, she lists further attributes that can be considered feminine – love, counsel, intuition, mercy and compassion; song, dance, healing, and weaving – and masculine – law, action, reason, justice, fine arts, crafts, technology (Rawls 49-50). These attributes, Rawls contends, "are not necessarily confined to the sex of the same gender, i.e. feminine attributes are not confined to females nor masculine attributes to males" (49). I would problematise Rawls's arguments by positing that the attributes she lists have been *culturally and historically understood and associated* with femininity and masculinity, but they are neither essentially masculine nor feminine. Given this note, I would nevertheless agree with Rawls that femininity is capable of including both *female* and *male* bodies and identities. My analysis therefore focuses on female and male characters who present feminine attributes and who are intradiegetically situated in the experience of othering, of embodying and encountering the Other in *The Hobbit* and *LotR*. I therefore pay special attention to the main hobbit characters of both texts; to female characters such as Éowyn, Galadriel, and Lobelia Sackville-Baggins; and to male characters such as Aragorn and Faramir, who I argue display characteristics associated with femininity.

In contrast to the study of female characters in Tolkien's Middle-earth narratives, Robin Anne Reid wrote in 2017 that "academic discussion on race in Tolkien studies originated fairly recently caused, in part, by the growing influence of cultural studies and the release of the live-action film by Peter Jackson in 2001–2003" ("Race" 33). She observes "two significant patterns of critical approaches and varying, at times oppositional, claims about Tolkien's work and/or Tolkien himself" that still hold true for the majority of Tolkien scholarship today ("Race" 33). In Reid's words:

These patterns tend toward the binary, especially the conflict between those who see Tolkien or his work as racist and those who see Tolkien or his work as celebrating diversity and multi-cultural cooperation. The other conflict is between scholarly periods of specialization, specifically the question of whether approaches developed by medievalists or postmodernists are best suited for analyzing Tolkien's work. ("Race" 33-34)

The approaches specified by Reid can be appreciated in the study of Middle-earth's inhabitants. Brian McFadden contends that "Tolkien's depiction of dark-skinned Swertings

¹⁰ For the approach this thesis takes on the idea of *masculinity*, see Chapter Four.

or Southrons was shaped by his reading of Latin and Old English descriptions of the Sigelwara or Ethiopians” (155), but the “discord and enmity result from manipulation of the perception of difference and are not inherent in difference” in Middle-earth (156). For Margaret Sinex, “Tolkien mirrors the Western Europeans’ methods of constructing their imaginary Saracen” in the creation of the Haradrim (176). Whereas McFadden and Sinex contend that the racial construction of the Other in Middle-earth has medieval antecedents, Fimi’s monograph *Tolkien, Race and Cultural History: From Fairies to Hobbits* (2010) points towards more modern roots of the racialisation of characters in Tolkien’s Middle-earth narratives by elaborating on racial notions ubiquitous since at least the eighteenth century and prevalent as Tolkien constructed his *legendarium*.¹¹ What each of these perspectives indicate is that, in one way or another, Tolkien’s texts are reflective of real-world ideas on race which can be localised in western tradition, ideas which then feed into the representation of Otherness in Tolkien’s Middle-earth narratives.

My use of the term “western” above and in subsequent instances requires certain clarification: as Stuart Hall indicates, concepts like “west” and “western” are “short-hand generalizations” that “represent very complex ideas and have no simple or single meaning” (*West* 276).¹² My point with using this term is not to force a common denominator that merges heterogenous groups of peoples with different histories and worldviews, but rather, first, to point towards one way in which multiple strands of this thesis are brought together – from the literary tradition Tolkien is part of, the philosophical tradition Levinas is inscribed in, to my own positioning.¹³ Second, and more importantly, to emphasise how, although the west as a concept has no “ontological stability”, it is however “made up of human effort, partly affirmation, partly identification of the Other” (Said 12). Race has held an essential position in the political and social structuring of the west, for within this idea and its concrete ramifications, race has been used to categorise those who may be deemed as the Other in various ways: as barbarian, as the New World, as the Orient; or as Hall terms it, as “the Rest” (*Europe* 382).¹⁴ As such, the connection between race and the construction of Otherness in Tolkien’s Middle-earth narratives mirror notions that are indeed western.

¹¹ In addition to Fimi and Helen Young’s research, of singular importance to Fantasy scholarship is Ebony Elizabeth Thomas’s *The Dark Fantastic: Race and the Imagination from Harry Potter to the Hunger Games* (2021), which studies racial difference in speculative fiction from the perspective of the Dark Other. More recently, Robert Stuart published *Tolkien, Race, and Racism in Middle-earth* (2022). However, in line with the arguments presented in my thesis, I find his approach problematic, for he positions authorial intentionality as one of the pillars of his study and tries to determine if Tolkien was a racist (14).

¹² For the mythologisation of the west and its culmination in America, see Loren Baritz (1961). For an attempt to define the characteristics of western civilisation, see Philippe Nemo (2005).

¹³ As a Mexican and therefore Latin American researcher from the Global South and a Person of Colour who has produced this thesis as the result of research conducted at a British university.

¹⁴ See also Edward Said (2014) and Charles W. Mills (2022).

Helen Young argues that the “race-based ideologies behind the social systems which privileged” white authors like Tolkien “very strongly influenced the shape of the worlds they imagined, worlds which were decidedly eurocentric and reproduced White race-thinking” (16). Young further contends that “some of Tolkien’s peoples are inherently and essentially superior to others; both his hierarchy and the underlying construction of human difference invoke race-thinking which created racial categories based on supposed biological differences, and assigned character traits to those races” (23). This “hierarchy and construction of human difference” is found in the Three Houses of Men of the First Age. Those who belonged to these Houses were considered friends of the elves and described in *The Silmarillion* as follows: “the house of Hador Goldenhead ... Yellow-haired and blue-eyed”; the house of Bëor, “the Men of that house were dark or brown of hair, with grey eyes”; and “like to them were the woodland folk of Haleth” (*S* 148). The “Prologue” of *LotR* presents a division of different hobbit groups: “The Harfoots were browner of skin, smaller, and shorter ... The Stoors were broader, and heavier in build ... The Fallohides were fairer of skin and also of hair, and they were taller and slimmer than the others” (*FR* 4). It is notable, however, that the text does not define the skin-colour of the Stoors. This “tripartite ‘racial’ division of the Men of the First Age according to their phenotype, stature and character”, also present in hobbit-kind, bears relation to how the people of Europe were categorised at the end of the nineteenth-century in Nordic, Alpine, and Mediterranean “races” (Fimi 144-5). Back in Middle-earth, it is said that some the Swarthy Men or Easterlings are “already secretly under the dominion of Morgoth, and came at his call; but not all ... These Men were short and broad, long and strong in the arm; their skins were swart or sallow, and their hair was dark as were their eyes” (*S* 157). *The Silmarillion* continues to explain how certain groups of Easterlings held an alliance with Maedhros and Maglor, sons of Fëanor, whereas others allied themselves to Morgoth. The Haradrim are described as “a great and cruel people that dwelt in the wide lands south of Mordor beyond the mouths of Anduin”, most of whom were allied to Sauron during the Second Age (*S* 293). Fimi points out that in the relationship between Primary and Secondary Worlds,

The description of the ‘Swarthy Men’ or ‘Easterlings’ brings to mind racial stereotypes of black and ethnic people and their visual representation in contemporary Britain. In fact, Tolkien’s tripartite division of the fair-skinned ‘races’ of Men in Middle-earth who are invariably on the good side and his grouping of the black peoples in one category which is hostile nearly *ab initio* represents popular attitudes to race in Britain during the period before World War II. (Fimi 146)

The textual examples from *The Silmarillion* and Fimi's research on racial representations in Tolkien's literary production provide grounds towards considering how the peoples depicted as white and elf-friends are aligned with the idea of self or same constructed by this narrative from an elvish perspective. The Sindarin word *Edain* (singular *Adan*) "became especially associated with them, so that it was seldom applied to other men" (S 318). In turn, those who are "swarthy" or "southern" are portrayed and perceived as Other: they are not a house in their own right nor part of the Edain, their appearance is different, and whilst there are individuals amongst the Edain or the Elves who depicted as evil, the "swarthy" are marked as adversarial. Thus, the idea of self or the primary subject of Middle-earth, in their goodness and whiteness, is pitted against an Other of darker skin, whose history and perspective is hardly even traced. Arda therefore replicates racial categorisations found in the Primary World.

The Númenóreans of the Second Age, who later founded the realms of Arnor and Gondor, are described as "wise and glorious and in all things more like to the Firstborn than any other of the kindreds of Men" (S 261). The Númenóreans are thus ranked above the rest of humankind due to their "enhanced bodily and intellectual characteristics. They have won this pre-eminence by being the allies of the Elves, virtually by sticking to the good side. Although their empowerment was initially related to theological or moral factors, they evolved into a superior race that stood apart from all the others" (Fimi 148). But by the Third Age, "the blood of the Númenóreans became much mingled with that of other men, and their power and wisdom diminished, and their life-span was shortened" (S 298). Fimi notes that "out of the twenty-two times that the term 'race' is used in *The Lord of the Rings*, nine refer to the 'race' of Númenor", as a marker of their position above all other human groups (147). Númenor's superior legacy as embodied and perceived by the people of Gondor is later manifested in Faramir's hierarchical relation of the human peoples of Middle-earth: "For so we reckon Men in our lore, calling them the High, or Men of the West, which were Númenóreans; and the Middle Peoples, Men of the Twilight, such as are the Rohirrim and their kin that dwell still far in the North; and the Wild, the Men of Darkness" (TT 4.V.887). As for "the wild Easterlings or the cruel Haradrim" – thus echoing the latter's description in *The Silmarillion* – they are not related to Gondor, and instead are understood as lesser people, associated with darkness, cruelty, and ultimately evil given their alliance with Sauron (TT 4.V.886). Thus, as noted by Fimi, "during the Third Age of Middle-earth the Men allied to the good side were still fair-skinned and descendants of the same primordial races, while the evil Men were dark-skinned and come from a completely different background" (150). The default locus of goodness for humankind remains associated to whiteness, with darker skin

continuing its position as the Other – in the case of the Easterlings and the Haradrim, the evil Other up until Sauron’s downfall – whilst cultural decline is a consequence of mixing higher blood with lower – a racial notion “quite popular in Victorian times” (Fimi 148). Although the mixing of bloodlines may be challenged by half-elven characters like Elrond, whenever it is accepted, it is between outstanding individuals of different peoples – Beren and Lúthien; Tuor and Idril; Aragorn and Arwen – never, it would seem, between elves and any of the Swarthy Men.

In addition to darker-skinned people depicted as allies of Morgoth and Sauron, orcs (and goblins) are presented as the stock villains of Tolkien’s Middle-earth narratives. *The Silmarillion* states that

all those of the Quendi who came into the hands of Melkor, ere Utumno was broken, were put there in prison, and by slow arts of cruelty were corrupted and enslaved; and thus did Melkor breed the hideous race of the Orcs in envy and mockery of the Elves, of whom they were afterwards the bitterest foes. (*S* 50)

The notion that evil forms of Otherness are a counterfeit of Eru Ilúvatar’ creational powers is not only limited to orcs: “Trolls are only counterfeits, made by the Enemy in the Great Darkness, in mockery, as Orcs were of Elves” (*TT* 4.IV.633). Frodo expresses the same idea: “The Shadow that bred them can only mock, it cannot make: not real new things of its own. I don’t think it gave life to the orcs, it only ruined them and twisted them” (*RK* 6.I.1195). Tolkien was aware of the problematic implications – “theological and philosophical” – of this origin story: even though this storyline would stay true to the idea that evil is not capable of original creations, there is still the possibility that if orcs “are corrupted forms of life then they are not irredeemable” (Shippey, “Images” 249). So despite their position as part of the main antagonists of *The Hobbit* and *LotR*, this origin would imply that orcs cannot be absolutely evil even if they are depicted and treated as Other. Furthermore, “the thought that the hideous and malicious Orcs were once Elves, – the ‘highest’ beings of Middle-earth – became increasingly unbearable for Tolkien” (Fimi 155). Throughout his lifetime, Tolkien devised alternative origins for the orcs – such as being made out of stone, corrupted men or maiar, or a type of automata.¹⁵

Important to the orcs’ position as Other is their description in racial terms.¹⁶ *The Fellowship of the Ring* depicts orcs and related creatures, such as those hostile to Frodo in Bree, as a “swarthy Bree-lander” and a “squint-eyed Southerner” (*FR* 1.IX.210). Later on,

¹⁵ For these different versions see *LT II* 59; *Lost Road* 212; and *Morgoth* 73-4, 78, 80, 406-24.

¹⁶ However, scholars like Marjorie Burns have also posited that the philological origin of orcs in the trolls from Germanic tradition (188-9),

the Fellowship encounters in Moria orcs whose faces are described as being broad, flat and swart (*FR* 2.V.423). In *The Return of the King*, Sauron's allies in the battle of the Pelennor Fields are described as "Easterlings with axes, and Variags of Khand, Southrons in scarlet, and out of Far Harad black men like half-trolls with white eyes and red tongues" (*RK* 5.VI.1107).¹⁷ Young notes that these beings are "collected together within the single Othering category of non-European, non-White" (23). Tolkien's own description of orcs in his letters narrows down the connection between them and "conventional nineteenth-century European projections of the racially suspect East" (Flieger, "Orcs" 206). The author wrote "the Orcs are definitely stated to be corruptions of the 'human' form seen in Elves and Men. They are (or were) squat, broad, sallow-skinned, with wide mouths and slant eyes: in fact degraded and repulsive versions of the (to Europeans) least lovely Mongol-types", a statement that simultaneously indicates Tolkien's awareness of (his) racial perceptions and their relativity (*Letters* 274). The author's own assessments of these characters "reflect popular ideas of the traditional hierarchy of the three extreme human racial types: the Caucasoid, the Mongoloid and the Negroid" (Fimi 156). Tolkien, as a white English male – Caucasian – thus associates evil with "the physical characteristics in extreme of the so-called Mongoloid race, traditionally seen as inferior from a western European perspective" (Fimi 156). Furthermore, the association of the term "mongoloid" with disability calls to mind the ableist view of "disabled people as sinister and evil" (Fimi 156). Parallel to *The Silmarillion* and *LotR* in their placement of the Easterlings and the Haradrim, *LotR* "establishes orcs as a monstrous Other through racial discourses. They are somatically different to the White Self of Good" (Young 25).

Whether Tolkien consciously believed in and professed the racialised and racist views that form part of his fictional world is a question whose answer lies beyond the reaches of my thesis. Fimi has already argued that by the time "Tolkien started composing his mythology, it was still entirely legitimate and scientifically acceptable to divide humankind into races with fixed physical characteristics and mental abilities" (132). However, from my perspective as a scholar of Colour analysing Tolkien's work in the twenty-first century, it is just as important to openly consider how Tolkien's *The Hobbit* and *LotR*, as works of art, are capable of simultaneously embodying and challenging the ideologies that form part of their creation. As Helen Young succinctly says, "Tolkien was not a fascist", as can be clearly observed from statements made by the author throughout his lifetime (21). For example, in

¹⁷ Una McCormack and Maria Sachiko Cecire draw attention to the novelization of a reader's response to Tolkien's *LotR* in Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. The experience of the main character, Oscar de León, a Dominican immigrant in the United States and an avid Tolkien reader, speaks of the tension between the enjoyment of Tolkien's text as a Person of Colour and reading the lines quoted above (Díaz 307).

a letter from 1938, Tolkien criticised Rütten and Leoning Verlag's query into his potential arian origin, adding that "if I am to understand that you are enquiring whether I am of *Jewish* origin, I can only replat that I regret that I appear to have *no* ancestors of that gifted people" (*Letters* 37). Five years later, Tolkien admitted in a letter to his son Christopher that he held "a burning private grudge ... against that ruddy little ignoramus Adolf Hitler" for "ruining, perverting, misapplying, and making for ever accursed, that noble northern spirit" that Tolkien had dedicated his life to studying (*Letters* 55-6). Then, in his "Valedictory Address" (1959), Tolkien declared to "have the hatred of apartheid in my bones; and most of all I detest the segregation or separation of Language and Literature.. I do not care which of them you think White" (VA 238). And yet, despite these personal declarations, it is nevertheless true that racial ideologies come forth in his literary production, ideologies that still have noxious consequences in the Primary World such as the replication of racial prejudices. It is therefore important to consider and question if, as Maria Sachiko Cecire argues, Tolkien's literary pursuits contain "a powerful Anglophilia that celebrates Britain's medieval origins in ways that build on colonialist sentiments and tend toward (typically unthinking) white supremacy", and if they are capable of countering problematic categories of Otherness and notions of ethics (26). Where I see *The Hobbit* and *LotR* enacting this defiance is precisely in their depiction of the encounter between the self and the Other and the ethical relationship that ensues thereon. Consequently, the analysis undertaken in the following chapters of my thesis focuses on the intradiegetic moments in which the self becomes or is viewed as Other; the moments in which the self meets figures understood as Other; and how these meetings constitute opportunities in which the self accepts their ethical responsibility towards the Other – such as the encounter between Sam and one of the Haradrim in *The Two Towers*. Furthermore, my thesis reflects on how evil is constructed as a form of Otherness within *The Hobbit* and *LotR*, and if these narratives have the potential to provide coordinates of empathy with beings depicted as evil or antagonistic – such as orcs – if not within the text, then at the level of the reader.

Middle-earth Narratives as Other

Whereas the preceding section reflected on Tolkien's Middle-earth narratives as potentially affording problematic depictions of Otherness, this section considers how, simultaneously, Tolkienists have argued that Tolkien's text both epitomize alterity in themselves and offer positive notions and points of reference to reflect on the Other. For Yvette Kisor, the alterity of Tolkien's literary production lies, first, in the fact that it "defies easy categorization. To consider just *The Lord of the Rings*, it has been called an epic, a

romance, and a novel, among other genres. It partakes of older genres at the same time it births a new one, high fantasy, while Tolkien himself called it a fairy-story” (“Queer” 27). Shippey defines *LotR* as an anomalous, hybrid narrative form where romance and the traditional bourgeois novel meet, and which presents itself as the chronicle of an imaginary bygone era (*Author* 221-3). Similarly, *The Hobbit* also presents a unique amalgam of novelistic elements, narrative forms, and modes, such as the fairy tale and myth. Furthermore, Christopher Vaccaro and Yvette Kisor see in the incorporation of medieval traditions and the content of Tolkien’s Middle-earth narratives grounds for considering Tolkien’s texts as embodying alterity, as being Other:

The sense of the radical difference of the medieval is recreated in his Middle-earth through the “retelling” conceit he employs, the different cultures and created languages he introduces, and through the displaced and “queer” hobbits he provides as our entrée into this strange world. We meet many characters with attitudes toward difference that are disturbingly familiar to us; some embrace the Other, others reject it. The “Othering” for cultural dominance is played out in Middle-earth just as in our own world, and Tolkien’s story allows us to understand where we should value such dynamics, whether of race, class, gender, sex, or geography. Most often, a rejection of difference defines those characters aligned with wickedness, domination, treachery, and depravity. Wise and benevolent characters see through the veils of culturally-constructed binaries and are the better for their expansive, even cosmopolitan awareness of their world’s diversity. (Vaccaro and Kisor 4)

The “strange world” Vaccaro and Kisor speak of, Middle-earth, with its fusion of Primary and Secondary World elements, makes it possible both to approach Tolkien’s literary production under the premise of the text-as-an-Other, and to interpret the world contained in Tolkien’s Middle-earth narratives as an *Other-world*. Tolkien uses this term when speaking of his desire for dragons: “The dragon had the trade-mark of Faërie written plain upon him. In whatever world he had his being it was an Other-world. Fantasy, the making or glimpsing of Other-worlds, was the heart of the desire of Faërie” (*OFS* 135). That is, reading Middle-earth and its texts is in itself to participate in an encounter with an Other. However, as will be seen in the section pertaining to Levinas’ philosophy, for Levinas the Other and their Otherness can never be fully grasped. The Other cannot be fully exhausted nor explained unequivocally by “empirical study and rational thought” but they can be perceived, approached, ethically met (Cecire 12). Similarly, Tolkien states that the Other-world known as “Faërie cannot be caught in a net of words; for it is one of its qualities to be indescribable, though not imperceptible. It has many ingredients, but analysis will not necessarily discover the secrets of the whole” (*OFS* 114). Following Tolkien’s line of thought, Taylor Driggers proposes that the potency of Fantasy, insofar it is the creation of Other-worlds through the

act of storytelling, “comes from its overt gestures towards an ineffable alterity that Tolkien terms ‘Faërie’” (37). Tolkien’s Other-world of Faërie, in its ineffable Otherness and capacity to propitiate an ethical relationship between ideas of self and Other, is part of this study’s core.

Building on Jameson’s emphasis on “the ideological and historical contingency of the fantastic despite its frequent claims for universality” (334), China Miéville indicates that “the usual charge that fantasy is escapist, incoherent or nostalgic (if not downright reactionary), though perhaps true for great swathes of the literature, is contingent on *content*” (337). Fantasy literature like Tolkien’s *The Hobbit* and *LotR*, it would seem, is perceived as escapist because it apparently withdraws “from the ‘real world,’ rather than projecting meaningful alternatives to our present ‘real world’ problems” – as utopia, dystopia, or science fiction would seem to do (Tally 42).¹⁸ Miéville thus contends that Fantasy and fantastic literature do not provide “a clear view of political possibilities or acts as a guide to political action”, and yet “because ‘reality’ is a grotesque ‘fantastic form’”, Fantasy “is *good to think with*” (339). My approach to Tolkien’s literary production bears similarities with Miéville’s position: instead of understanding Tolkien’s Middle-earth narratives as providing political or ethical codes to be applied in the Primary World, I interpret Tolkien’s *The Hobbit* and *LotR* as *good to think ethics with*. This is possible because each text contains “things besides elves and fays, and besides dwarfs, witches, trolls, giants, or dragons: it holds the seas, the sun, the moon, the sky; and the earth, and all things that are in it: tree and bird, water and stone, wine and bread, and ourselves, mortal men, when we are enchanted” (*OFS* 113). These texts provide realms of possibility through which we can actively explore “what might be called ‘real world’ problems through this imaginative activity of fantasy” (Tally 46). These problems or issues include the ethical relationship between the self and the Other, and how this relationship may challenge structures of power and domination whose origin lies in the Primary World – in a way that, for example, Jameson did not acknowledge when writing his essay in 1981 on magical narratives.

Because this thesis is grounded in the study and interpretation of the ethical journeys within texts rather than the elaboration of ethical prescriptions, it calls for a method capable of acknowledging how ethics potentially reinforces power structures within narrative forms whilst simultaneously and competently unveiling further unexplored depths within literary

¹⁸ Tally also points out with reference to Jameson that Fantasy and the fantastic’s use of magic would seemingly invoke “an irrational, metaphysical, or non-cognitive substitute for science that ‘magically’ avoids the material or logistical problems that would normally take place within the fantasy world” (43). In terms of what this means for Tolkien’s work, Tally observes that “Tolkien’s writings include very little actual magic”, for although magic – magical artifacts, beings, forces – exists in Middle-earth and it is an important factor in *The Hobbit* and *LotR*, it is neither their central focus nor their driving force (47). How *LotR* problematises the sceptical perception of magic as Other, untrustworthy, or evil is explored in the Chapter Four of this thesis.

texts. Ethics enables the exploration of that “radical alterity”, the Otherness mentioned by Meretoja and Davis, embedded in the text and that accompanies the encounter with it. Germane to this vision of ethics is Emmanuel Levinas’s philosophical discourse, which, as mentioned briefly before, has been used in literary studies since the advent of poststructuralism. Through the lens of Levinas’s understanding of ethics and the Other, this research seeks to look at *The Hobbit* and *LotR* anew by highlighting the encounter with the Other to which their characters and the act of reading them are linked, while also considering how Otherness in Tolkien’s Middle-earth narratives is conceived as a radical difference that may be empathetic or hostile.

Tolkien and Levinas: An Appraisal

That Levinas’s philosophy and formulation of ethics is a fruitful methodological approach to apply to Tolkien has already been suggested by scholars such as Jane Chance, Deidre Dawson, Robert Eaglestone, Yvette Kisor, Joseph Tadie, and Christopher Vaccaro. Chance’s monograph *Tolkien, Self, and Other: This Queer Creature* (2016) is premised on the argument that Tolkien was “much more forward-thinking than has previously been considered. Key are his humanism and his feminism – his sympathy for and toleration of those who are different, unimportant, or marginalized – the alien, the rustic, the commoner, the poor, the female, and the other” (xi). Levinas’s philosophical discourse forms part of Chance’s intricate methodological framework, through which she interprets Tolkien’s literary and academic production, as well as his medieval influences, whilst considering how Tolkien viewed “himself as different from others, *queer*” (Chance, *Self* xii, emphasis added).¹⁹ As Kisor notes, Levinas’s work constitutes a possible approach “for scholars interested in the queer in Tolkien” as “a broader concept of the queer than just the sexual” (Kisor, “Queer Tolkien” 26). Furthermore, in the introduction to the edited volume *Tolkien and Alterity*, Vaccaro and Kisor make a point of drawing attention to the supreme importance alterity holds in Levinas’s philosophy. Dawson’s contribution to Vaccaro and Kisor’s collection constitutes a Levinasian analysis of significant moments in *LotR* where language becomes paramount in the relationship with Otherness. As for Eaglestone and Tadie, both have written essays in which Levinas is fundamental to their exploration of significant aspects of *LotR* and *The Hobbit*: the tripartite relationship between invisibility, evil, and modernity; and the service to the Other as the release from bondage, respectively.

¹⁹ Vaccaro and Kisor also emphasize why Tolkien may have perceived himself as Other: his orphanhood at a young age, his Catholic faith, how “his own passionate engagement with issues surrounding Christianity would mark him as Other in a largely secular world”, and how “his study and teaching of the Germanic languages set him further apart from those whose primary focus was literature” at Oxford (5).

Building on the work of these scholars, my intervention in the field is an interpretation of Tolkien's *The Hobbit* and *LotR* that holds Levinas's ideas on ethics and the Other as a *companion* rather than a series of concepts that are to be applied to Tolkien's texts. As will become clearer in the following sections, Levinas did not understand ethics as a guide to life, nor did he intend his reflections to become the foundation of an ethical code of conduct. It is therefore not the purpose of my thesis to establish a series of Levinasian tenets which can simply be applied 1:1 to Tolkien's texts. Instead, Levinas's philosophy has informed and accompanied my reading of Tolkien's narratives, thus becoming a dialogic partner through which the exploration of Middle-earth as a space that invokes the ethical, that is inhabited by the Other, is accomplished.

In order to understand the particularities of Levinas's philosophical discourse in relation to ethics and the Other, as well as the novel perspectives Levinas's work can open up in the study Tolkien's Middle-earth narratives, I will briefly elaborate on the historical and personal context in which Levinas developed his ideas. Thereafter I will extract a key set of understandings from Levinas's rich and complex philosophical thought that will potentiate the study of ethics and the Other pursued by my thesis. I will also begin to point out the similarities and differences between Levinas's philosophy and Tolkien's texts in order to indicate the forms of analysis undertaken in the following chapters of my thesis.

Philosophy as a Response to the 20th Century

Emmanuel Levinas was born in Kovno (now Kaunas), Lithuania in 1906 and died in Paris, France in 1995. His philosophical work is considered akin to the French and German phenomenological traditions that fostered the work of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, both of whom were his teachers during the semesters he spent studying philosophy at Freiburg University in 1928. However, alongside his academic formation, the influence of his Jewish upbringing is a discernible factor within the development of his own discourse. In his work, Levinas identifies what he called the "Greek" tradition of European philosophy – which led to the philosophy of being and reason – and contrasts it with principles and teachings of the Jewish tradition. For Levinas, western philosophy assumes that good deeds presuppose the knowledge of what is good and trusts that if the knowledge of goodness was sufficiently clear, it would be followed by the doing of good. In the interpretation of the Torah, Levinas sees an alternative to the mainline of European thought, for Jewish tradition does not consider the knowledge of what is good to be adequately clarified and generally determinable, nor does it hope from it an improvement in people's

actions (Stegmaier 12). Instead, Levinas perceives that which can be considered good and meaningful to arise from the ethical relationship with the Other human being.²⁰

Within rabbinical Judaism, Levinas subscribed in particular to the ideas of the Musar movement, a rational Misnagdim countercurrent opposed to Hasidism, which in its stance against idolization and mysticism, sought to transpose thoughts of redemption proclaimed by mysticism to everyday life through the rigorous observance of the Torah. For this line of Jewish thought, it is not in the pursuit of an immortal soul that the prophets' teachings are fulfilled, but rather in the current pursuit of justice. Consequently, individual and collective actions should be directed towards the present and not the utopian thought of a distant future under the rule of God. In other words, “[g]egen jegliche Rede einer Erlösung in einer jenseitigen Welt, gilt es die Bedingungen, die Leiden und Toten verursachen und die sich im gegenwärtigen Gesichtsfeld *präsentieren*, zum Zentrum politischen und sozialen Handelns zu machen” [Against any talk of redemption in a world beyond, the conditions that cause suffering and death and that present themselves in the current field of vision must be made the centre of political and social action] (Moebius 25-6, translation mine).

The events leading up to World War II, Heidegger's fostering of Third Reich ideology within German academia and his position as one of the most influential figures in modern philosophy, as well as Levinas's personal experiences during the Holocaust, had a profound impact on the construction of Levinas's philosophical programme. Between 1940 and 1945, Levinas was made a prisoner of war and his family was murdered in Lithuania by the National Socialists. After the war, Levinas sought throughout his work to explain the philosophical origins of the rise of totalitarianism in the west and respond to the conflicts and humanitarian catastrophes of the 20th century— much in the same way Tolkien's literary production has been considered a response to his experiences during two World Wars and the changes that ensued. According to Levinas, in its striving towards self-sufficiency and self-containment, the history of European thought had culminated in the placement of the idea of generality or totality – what Levinas calls the same – as its highest value, thus failing its own humanistic and idealistic traditions while inevitably establishing itself against alterity, the strange, the Other. Levinas consequently criticises “ontology as first philosophy” for it “is a philosophy of power. It issues in the State and in the non-violence of the totality, without securing itself against the violence from which this non-violence lives, and which

²⁰ As Adriaan T. Peperzak notes, “One particular difficulty which any translator of Levinas has to solve is the rendering of *Autre*, *autre*, *Autrui*, and *autrui*, Levinas's use of which is not always consistent. Among Levinas scholars it has become a convention to reserve ‘the Other’ with a capital for all places where Levinas means the human other, whether he uses *Autrui*, *autrui*, *autre*, or *Autre*” (xiv-xv). See also Alphonso Lingis in *Infinity* 24-5. I maintain the capitalisation of “Other” throughout my thesis, as I consider that everyone who is not oneself/one's self is, in fact, the Other.

appears in the tyranny of the State” (*Totality* 46). Consequently, institutions and structures ordained by specific ideas of being – such as judicial powers, state policy, economic systems, and the church – gradually ordered the population’s life and relieved individuals of their responsibility towards others. As supposed representatives of a generality or totality, individuals could believe that they were acting to the best of their knowledge and conscience by complying with the norms propagated by these institutions. It was good and just to comply with them, even if this compliance resulted in wrongful behaviour. For Levinas, trust in the institutions during the Shoah became the ruin of men, physically for the victims, morally for the perpetrators. Not only had the institutions made reason their guiding principle, but they were also convinced that reason was neutral. The conjunction of Heidegger’s phenomenological method and his commitment to National Socialism thus evidenced the incapability of phenomenology in particular, and European thought in general, to guarantee blameless (political) action, despite being proud of its supposed neutrality.²¹ For Levinas, pride could lead to ethical blindness (Stegmaier 62). But beyond the political and structural factors that enabled the Holocaust, perhaps the single most important lesson to be learned from the systematic murder of an ethnic group due to their putative Otherness was the ethical responsibility caused by an Other’s suffering. Stegmaier reflects on this subject and its relationship to Levinas’s philosophy as follows:

Leid, das Schmerz und Not sein kann, die mich nicht ruhen lassen, die von mir verlangen, etwas zu tun. Leid, das aber auch aus der bloßen Andersheit des Anderen kommen kann, die mich befremdet und feindselig macht und gegen die man nicht leicht etwas tun kann. (8-9)

[Suffering, which can be pain and need, that will not let me rest, that demands I do something. Suffering that can also come from the Other’s mere Otherness, which alienates me and makes me hostile, and against which it is not easy to do something. (Translation mine.)]

Suffering is thus a question for philosophy and the self, while its avoidance and the preservation of the peace remains an ethical issue.

The immediate aftermath of the Holocaust and Levinas’s experience during World War II led the philosopher to hold a critical perspective on art and literature. In “Reality and Its Shadow” (1948), Levinas suggests that “the immediate post war period is not a moment to indulge in immoral artistic pleasures” (Davis 26). Levinas’s view reflects a common sentiment amongst certain philosophers and theorists of the time, who questioned the

²¹ For further insight on Levinas’s positioning regarding ontology and what he dubs “Western thought” as well as his response to Heidegger’s philosophy, see also “Is Ontology Fundamental?” (1951).

possibility of creating art – as well as questioning concepts like “western” philosophy and God – after not only the censoring and instrumentalization of culture and occidental thought by the Nazi regime, but the abhorrent evils perpetrated. A poignant example of this issue are Theodor W. Adorno’s famous words “nach Auschwitz ein Gedicht zu schreiben ist barbarisch [to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric]” (34). However, despite Levinas’s aversion to art and aesthetics during the early stages of his philosophical discourse, his later work contains multiple literary references as well as a nuanced engagement with different literary works. This evidenced a change in his perception of literature as a source of images and figures through which he could articulate and convey his ethical philosophy.²² For instance, Levinas juxtaposes the image of Odysseus and the figure of Abraham to explain the differences between occidental philosophy and his ideas. As Moebius summarizes it, at the end of his fantastic adventures, Odysseus returns safely back to his home in Ithaca: in this case, home is “my world”, which “I” know, rule, and control (40). Abraham, however, follows God’s command to leave home and venture towards unknown territory whilst knowing that he will never return; in this respect, Abraham is the prototype of the Other (Moebius 40).²³ In a similar fashion, Tolkien’s literary production, especially *LotR*, has been interpreted by scholars as a reflection on the changes and destruction brought on by armed conflicts of the 20th through the language of Fantasy, while also building upon the movements of leaving and returning to explore how the self transforms into the Other – Bilbo’s there and back again, Frodo’s departure and return to the Shire and the final venture into the unknown through his sailing into the West. These movements will be further studied in the following chapters of this thesis.

Face to Face with the Other

Levinas’s most well-known concept quite possibly remains “ethics as first philosophy”, an idea around which his text *Totality and Infinity* revolves.²⁴ Robert Eaglestone explains that “by this he [Levinas] means that our thought and daily lives are first in a relationship to the others that populate the world. Everything else is built on this fundamental relationship to the other, which ‘happens’ to us before we choose it” (“Invisibility” 75). Philosophy is thus bound to our encounters with others, as this experience is the basis of our experience of the world. Levinas names ethics as that which “happens” when we encounter and relate to others as opposed to a series of generalised rules or a theory

²² See also Morgan 16-36 (2011).

²³ In literary theory, the comparison of Greek and Hebraic models – Odysseus and Abraham, the Bible and the Odyssey – and their synthesis are used by Erich Auerbach to discuss the genesis of representation in occidental literature in *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (1946).

²⁴ See also the essay “Ethics as First Philosophy” (1984).

based on prior criteria. Ethics reinvents itself in every encounter, for each encounter generates different responses and actions.

In order to trace how Levinas's philosophy reaches this conclusion, a first step is to consider the subject-object relationship so essential to Western thought. A central feature of Levinas's philosophical discourse is its questioning of the subject-object paradigm by reconsidering the self, the "I", which "is not a being that always remains the same, but is the being whose existing consists in identifying itself, in recovering its identity throughout all that happens to it. It is the primal identity, the primordial work of identification" (Levinas, *Totality* 36). The I – the ego, the self, or the same – is first and foremost an ethical subject that acquires their ethical quality or condition precisely thanks to their relationship to and with the Other.²⁵ Rather than a relationship in which the subject looks down at the object, it is the self who looks up at the height of the Other. The re-examination of this paradigm leads to what Vittoria Borsò describes as a change in perspective, an optics, in two different directions: optics not as augmented vision, but as seeing without objectification; and an optics through which the subject opens itself up to dismay, losing its autonomy and sovereignty (129-30). Indeed, Levinas writes that "ethics is an optics. But it is a 'vision' without image, bereft of the synoptic and totalizing objectifying virtues of vision, a relation or an intentionality of a wholly different type" (*Totality* 23). This ethical optics, Levinas argues, would impede the Other being comprehended as an object that can be subsumed into abstract categories of thought and subordinated to the subject's field of vision. It would recognize the Other's power to keep the subject in its grasp by calling upon its aid in a relationship that remains ethical and not theoretical. In this sense, Simon Critchley considers Levinas's discourse as a transition "from Husserlian intentional consciousness to a level of preconscious sensing or sentience" (*Essays* 63). Critchley defines "intentional consciousness" as the state "where the subject maintains an objectifying relation to the world mediated through representation" (*Essays* 63).

As indicated previously, Levinas understands the Other as a human being with whom one engages with in an ethical relationship.²⁶ Levinas furthermore explains that "the Other as Other is not only an alter ego: the Other is what I myself am not. The Other is this, not because of the Other's character, or physiognomy, or psychology, but because of the Other's very alterity" (*Time* 83). However, this does not mean that the Other and their Otherness is encountered as a negation of the self but rather as "the metaphysical other": "other with an alterity that is not formal, is not the simple reverse of identity, and is not formed out of

²⁵ Which Levinas calls "le Même" or "to auton".

²⁶ See also Critchley, *Cambridge* 16.

resistance to the same, but is prior to every initiative, to all imperialism of the same” (Levinas, *Totality* 38-39). The Other can thus be described as “that which is not us, something incomprehensibly different, something which lies outside everything we know and understand, and which therefore radically challenges our security and sovereignty in the world” (Davis 25). This challenge is described by Levinas as follows:

a calling into question of the same – which cannot occur within the egoist spontaneity of the same – is brought about by the other. We name this calling into question of my spontaneity by the presence of the Other ethics. The strangeness of the Other, his irreducibility to the I, to my thoughts and my possessions, is precisely accomplished as a calling into question of my spontaneity, as ethics. (*Totality* 43)

Ethics is thus more than moral prescription: it is living moments, a response to the Other who stands before the self. For Levinas, the Other who questions the self “is, for example, the weak, the poor, ‘the widow and the orphan,’” the enemy, the guest, “whereas I am the rich and the powerful” (*Time* 83).

Tolkien’s Middle-earth narratives portray constructions of selfhood and Otherness which both coincide with and transcend Levinas’s philosophical schemas. The “other-worldliness” of *The Hobbit* and *LotR* afford the depiction of multiple peoples and, multiple constructions of selfhood, which in turn determine who each people and each character may consider as Other. Moreover, the texts’ central characters coincide or share similarities with the Other(s) outlined by Levinas: the orphan (Frodo and Aragorn); the traveller, exile, and guest (Bilbo and Frodo; Sam, Merry, and Pippin; Aragorn). These texts then expand Levinas’s outline by presenting characters blur the boundaries between ideas of self and Other through disguises (Éowyn) or transformations – such as those caused by the power of the Ring: Sméagol/Gollum, Frodo, and Bilbo. Moreover, Middle-earth is inhabited by beings who may be constructed and perceived as Other but who are not or are no longer human beings. In order to illustrate how the Other may be visualised in Tolkien’s work, Chance refers to Slavoj Žižek’s taxonomy of the Other:

First, there is the imaginary other—other people ‘like me,’ my fellow human beings with whom I am engaged in the mirrorlike relationships of competition, mutual recognition, and so forth. Then, there is the symbolic ‘big Other’—the ‘substance’ of our social existence, the impersonal set of rules that coordinate our coexistence. Finally, there is the Other qua Real, the impossible Thing, the ‘inhuman partner,’ the Other with whom no symmetrical dialogue, mediated by the symbolic Order, is possible ... *The neighbor (Nebenmensch) as the Thing means that, beneath the neighbor as my semblant, my mirror image, there always lurks the unfathomable abyss of radical Otherness, of a monstrous Thing that cannot be gentrified.* (*Self* 4, emphasis added)

To this, Chance adds that the above “must imply that in the neighbor is the monstrous Other, in whom I see myself” (*Self* 4). Chance gestures here to two concrete differences between Levinas’s philosophical programme and Tolkien’s depiction of Otherness and the encounter with the Other. First, Tolkien’s *The Hobbit* and *LotR* portray instances in which it may be possible to bridge the gap between the self and Other, even if the Other is “monstruous”. Second, these texts showcase an Other-world that is also inhabited by beings whose radical alterity lies in their antagonism to main subjects of these narratives, in an evilness with whom an ethical relationship may not be possible according to a Levinasian view. I have thus referred to the work of Sigmund Freud on the uncanny and Julia Kristeva on the abject to analyse these instances of radical Otherness when they encounter the self.

A third consideration regarding the relationship between the self and the Other is its framing in Levinasian discourse as a *face-to-face encounter*. For Levinas, the “relation between the same and the other ... is language ... The relation between the same and the other, metaphysics, is primordially enacted as conversation” (Levinas, *Totality* 39). But to converse with the Other, to communicate with them, does not mean that the distance which separates the self from the Other is cancelled:

So ist für Lévinas Kommunikation weder Aufhebung der Trennung und Andersheit der an der Kommunikation Beteiligten noch reine diskursive Verständigung. Sprache überbrückt nicht den Abgrund der Trennung des Selben und des Anderen, sie kann ihn sogar vertiefen. (Moebius 50)

[For Lévinas, communication is neither the abolition of the separation and the otherness of those involved in the communication, nor is it pure discursive understanding. Language does not bridge the abyss of separation between the self and the Other: it can even deepen it. (Translation mine.)]

During this conversation, a series of urgent questions arise regarding our disposition towards the Other and their radical alterity or difference. Levinas asks “but how can the same, produced as egoism, enter into relationship with an other without immediately divesting it of its alterity? What is the nature of this relationship?” (*Totality* 38). Davis reframes Levinas’s questions as asking ourselves “do we try to eliminate it [the Other] from our world, because it doesn’t fit? Or do we try to welcome it, to learn from it, to let it persist in its otherness?” (25). For Levinas, to behold the Other is not to observe their physiognomy: beyond the physical reality of the Other, the Other’s face delivers these urgent questions in the form of a “silent request” which through its mere presence expresses their total exposure before me and prompts me to answer (Moebius 47). Rather than the face understood or

signified by transcendental consciousness, Levinas defines the face as an appeal from the Other that *speaks* during the encounter even before verbalization occurs through complex rituals such as alternating glances, looking away, being vulnerable to moments of hesitation, the need to take a step back (Stegmaier 15). The face expresses the Other's contingency and infinity – their irreducibility and unpredictability – their weakness and mortality. This serves to disrupt theoretical knowledge of the Other even in moments of complete mundanity. Furthermore, the Other's plea, in all of its vulnerability and awkwardness, is “you will not kill me” (Moebius 47-8). These brief and yet powerful moments in which the ethical arises are pervasive throughout Tolkien's Middle-earth narratives, with the face-to-face encounter with Gollum being perhaps the most significant amongst them: what stays the hand of those that who meet Gollum, encourages their pity and mercy despite *knowing* about him, is *witnessing* him face-to-face.

Levinas also uses the meeting between *guest* and *host* to describe the face-to-face encounter. Instead of a unidirectional movement from the subject towards the object, Levinas explains that the ethical relationship to and with the Other is like the host receiving a stranger as a guest. The ethical is experienced in this separation between the host and the guest, between the self and others. Levinas presents “subjectivity as welcoming the Other, as hospitality; in it the idea of infinity is consummated” (*Totality* 27). To welcome a guest means to accept that they cannot be circumscribed: it is to grant them rights without previously knowing how these rights will be used, if the experience will be good or bad, and what the end result of such an “gift” of hospitality will entail (Stegmaier 86). Without the mediation of fixed conditions or previous knowledge of one another, the encounter between guest and host, the self and the Other, is always experienced as something different, for the circumstances and those involved are always different. At the same time, “the ethical relation is not yet another work of pure reason, constrained by method” (Tadie 224). Due to its unpredictability, the face-to-face encounter is the original ethical relationship, one that is moving, engaging, unsettling, and entirely the responsibility of those involved (Stegmaier 89). The former reflections on the guest-host relationship bear a stark resemblance to emblematic situations of hospitality in Tolkien's work, perhaps an echo of the many Germanic sources that inspired the author. Scenes such as Bilbo's reception of Thorin Oakenshield's company, Beorn's hospitality, Frodo's brief stay in *The Prancing Pony*, or Gandalf's unwelcome arrival at Edoras are marked both by the uncertainty that accompanies the unknowability of the Other and the responsibility that ties the host to the guest.

In his philosophical discourse, Levinas acknowledges the importance and presence of entities that act as mediators between the self and the Other, which he calls *the third*.

These can take the form of those others surrounding the face-to-face encounter or of the societal conditions that seemingly regulate our interactions with others. Pre-established moral values and norms can undoubtedly affect the original ethical relationship because they entail previous cultural or social agreements based on the premise of generality external to the encounter between the self and the Other. The problem with the idea of generality is that it can also potentially limit or erase (the importance of) the Other's Otherness and therefore cancel the originally ethical relationship – as mentioned previously in Levinas's criticism of western institutions (Stegmaier 89). Nevertheless, Levinas also points out that even in situations where these norms are supposed to set the tone or be understood as an inevitable routine, such as in groups or team interactions, Others' otherness can always surprisingly reappear, thus interrupting conventions and calling the norms that created them into question (Stegmaier 92). I perceive this to be the case in Tolkien's texts, in instances such as the development of Frodo's perception of Gollum, Sam's witnessing a Southron warrior's death, and disobedience as an ethics in Éowyn, Faramir, Merry, and Pippin. As Stegmaier points out, “[d]as Ethische schafft Verunsicherung, bevor es Sicherheit schafft” [the ethical creates uncertainty before it creates security] (10, translation mine).²⁷ Individuals then stand once again face to face, in that original ethical relationship.

The Ethical Subject

Levinas's reformulation of the subject-object relationship thus reimagines the role of each actant as the ethical subject and the Other respectively. In relation to the ethical subject, we must remember Critchley's understanding of Levinas's discourse as a departure from the notion of intentional consciousness, according to which the subject relates to the world by objectifying it. Instead, Critchley insists that Levinas's goal is to move away from the world mediated through representation, mediated by a theoretical knowledge and categorization of that which surrounds us. Levinas proposes the world being mediated by enjoyment and the ethical subject's preconscious sensing. In the following quotation, Critchley summarizes the intricacies of the movement related above, as well as Levinas's understanding of the ethical subject and the role of joy:

the movement from intentionality to sensing, or, ... from representation to enjoyment, shows how intentional consciousness, is, to put it simply, conditioned by *life*, by the material conditions of my existence. Life is sentience, enjoyment and nourishment, it is *jouissance* and *joie de vivre*. It is a life that lives from (*vivre de*)

²⁷ Stegmaier here alludes to the German linkages between the nouns Verunsicherung/Versicherung (uncertainty/certainty or assurance) and Unsicherheit/Sicherheit (insecurity/security). The encounter with the Other is without certainty, safety or assurance; it is, in its own way, perilous.

the elements ... Life, for Levinas, is love of life and love of what life lives from: the sensible, material world ... Now, for Levinas, it is precisely this I of enjoyment that is capable of being claimed or called into question ethically by the other person. Ethics, for Levinas, is simply and entirely this calling into question of myself – of my spontaneity, of my *jouissance*, of my freedom – by the other ... The ethical relation takes place at the level of sensibility, not at the level of consciousness; the ethical subject is a sensible subject, not a conscious subject. (*Essays* 63)

This calling into question highlights how the I, represented as a universal and abstract concept, involved in hypothetical scenarios, is in fact myself. The subject, the I who must be understood as *me* before anybody else and who understands first-hand what freedom, joy, and pleasure feel like is, is wakened by the Other. The Other's need, presence, suffering awakens me from my preoccupation with my self and brings me to witness their face, to answer their appeal. Being called into question thus makes me understand that "ethics is entirely my affair" and therefore it is also my *responsibility* (Critchley, *Essays* 66).²⁸ That is, the face-to-face encounter with the Other is not only the moment in which the Other expresses and presents themselves to me qua the face, but it is also the moment in which my responsibility to them arises. This responsibility is not the result of a natural moral consciousness, but rather originates from my relationship and my response to the Other (Moebius 52). To be the subject of an ethical relationship is to be exposed to the Other – even if that is against one's will – in a first moment of passive reception; after this moment I can either behave actively or passively regarding this Other (Moebius 41).

Two ramifications spring from the reflection on responsibility outlined above: the Other's election of me or me being chosen is to bear a responsibility that comes before my freedom – and here I am reminded of Frodo being "chosen" as the Ring-bearer and bearing a responsibility towards the Shire and Middle-earth. This responsibility thus makes me a "hostage to the other"; it makes me as a subject and therefore my subjectivity "a subjection to the other" (Critchley, *Essays* 66). In a simultaneous motion, this subjection also makes me a subject of sentience or sensibility. As Critchley explains, "sensibility is what Levinas often refers to as 'the way' of my subjection, vulnerability and passivity towards the other" (*Essays* 188). The path towards the Other is not paved by a process of knowledge or identification, in which my attempt to theoretically identify (with) the Other and intellectually understand them can lead me to assume that we are the same or that I can definitely know them.²⁹ As Levinas declares, "the relation between the same and the other

²⁸ Parallel to Levinas' concept of responsibility would be Mikhail Bakhtin's "answerability", which Saxton defines as being "accountable ... for any response given to others in the course of (co-)authoring our lives" (174-5).

²⁹ Or as Moebius frames it, "Denn bevor der Andere verstanden werden kann, ist schon die Beziehung zum Anderen da" [For before the Other can be understood, the relationship to the Other is already there] (43, translation mine).

is not always reducible to knowledge of the other by the same, nor even to the *revelation* of the other to the same” (*Totality* 28). Rather, it is an act of passivity that means to be affected by and powerless before the Other, to *sense* them – like Frodo senses Gollum upon meeting him on his way to Mordor. As Critchley puts it, “it is in my pre-reflective sentient disposition towards to the other’s suffering that a basis for ethics and responsibility can be found” (*Essays* 98). If ethics means to sense the Other and to have a sensible responsibility towards them, then ethics transcends the theoretical and becomes “*lived* in the sensibility of a corporeal obligation to the other” (Critchley, *Essays* 64). The self’s sensibility lies in its fragile and vulnerable constitution, which can experience both pain and pleasure.

In his reading of the Levinasian idea of sensibility, Critchley highlights the importance of an ordinary feeling like hunger, because hunger reminds us that “[t]he ethical subject is an embodied being of flesh and blood”, not only an abstract image or concept (*Essays* 63). Just like the Other, the ethical subject is a living, breathing being, “capable of hunger, who eats and enjoys eating”, for “only such a being can know what it means to give its bread to the other from its own mouth” (Critchley, *Essays* 63-4).³⁰ The action of recognizing the Other’s corporality and understanding the urgency of their needs – may it be hunger, shelter, or otherwise – is central to Levinas’s philosophical discourse, and is shared in Tolkien’s Middle-earth narratives by beings across the spectrum of good and evil, and of anthropomorphism – from Beorn to orcs and goblins. Similarly, corporality is an element worth underlining in hobbit culture, for although Tolkien’s Middle-earth narratives feature magic, the hobbits’ sensible, earthly nature remains a constant throughout *The Hobbit* and *LotR*. The “sensible material world” experienced corporally functions as a connector between characters. From the symbolic meanings food enjoys in hobbit culture to the hunger and thirst experienced in companionship by Sam and Frodo during their journey through Mordor, these and other instances place corporality as an important element in Tolkien’s narratives as they frame encounters amongst their characters and the responsibility they hold to one another. Simultaneously, these depictions would also speak to the empathic involvement of the reader with the text, for the reader is also grounded in the sensible, material world, and can feel hunger and pain.

Another important event linked to responsibility and sensibility is death. Levinas considers the death of the Other – of a being other than ourselves – as the first death insofar as our first experience of what death is and what dying means is through the death of the Other. The Other’s death constitutes an essential borderline situation for the self: only

³⁰ Critchley adds “in what must be the shortest refutation of Heidegger, Levinas complains that Dasein is never hungry ... and the same might be said of all the various heirs to the *res cogitans*” (*Essays* 64).

through the death of the Other does one become aware of one's own death – that I have to live out my own death, which will remain in truth unshareable and unknowable – as well as the limits of one's being (Moebius 45-6). When the Other comes into my care, I must consider that if the occasion were to arise, it is me who should be willing to take their place even in the face of death, even if I cannot “demand that the other respond responsibly to my response” (Critchley, *Essays* 66). Even if I cannot expect anything from the Other, my ethical responsibility goes beyond any expectations. Death in Middle-earth involves the exploration of mortality and immortality as the two sides of the coin of existence, which is presented in the intertwined fates of humans and elves, such as Aragorn and Arwen. At the same time, deathlessness as a liminal space is embodied by those in the grasp of the Rings of Power, such as the Ringwraiths. Death is a subject that I approach on the basis of Levinasian ethics: that is, not only as the literal terminus of organic life, but as an instance that calls upon our care and responsibility towards one another, as well as an ineffable dimension of being linked to supreme Otherness.

Final Considerations

Despite Levinas's portrayal of the ethical relationship as revolving around the Other's calling, this relation and the ethics that arises from it “is a movement of *desire* that tends towards the other and that cannot be reduced to a *need* that returns to the self. Ethical intersubjectivity must be founded on the datum of an irreducible difference between the self and the other” (Critchley, *Essays* 65). This means that although physical and emotional needs such as warmth, food, or love form part of this relation and can be ultimately fulfilled, this “movement of desire” towards the Other remains for Levinas metaphysical, paradoxical: it cannot be fulfilled and deepens with every effort to fulfil it.

Besides the hunger one satisfies, the thirst one quenches, and the senses one allays, metaphysics desires the other beyond satisfactions, where no gesture by the body to diminish the aspiration is possible, where it is not possible to sketch out any known caress nor invent any new caress. A desire without satisfaction which, precisely, *understands [entend]* the remoteness, the alterity, and the exteriority of the other. For Desire this alterity, non-adequate to the idea, has a meaning. (Levinas, *Totality* 34)

For Levinas, the movement towards the Other transcends the act of being and with it any impulse of seeking myself or my reflection in the Other, for then I would inevitably discount and/or minimize the Other's Otherness. The ethical relationship moves away from the self. Levinas thus accomplishes a philosophical shift on different levels: his discourse veers away from the realm of dialogic philosophy that purely strives towards the ideals of communality

and unity. Instead, as Stegmaier rightfully points out, Levinas's philosophical thought "besteht auf der Andersheit" [insists on Otherness] (9-10, translation mine). Whereas Levinas presents the desire for the Other as a paradox, Tolkien consistently presents moments in which the self feels desire for the Other and reaches (out to) them. These points of contact and divergence between Levinas and Tolkien will be explored in the following chapters of this thesis. By presenting moments that bridge the gap between the self and the Other, *The Hobbit* and *LotR* showcase the complexity of seeking identification with the Other and its impossibility.

Ultimately, Levinas does not seem interested in questioning ethics on a terminological level: he is invested in questioning the ethical in ethics – in (re)considering what the ethical is and means – and finds an alternative approach to it (Lee 44). By thinking the ethical from the relation of the subject to and *with* the Other, rather than working entirely from the perspective of the subject, Levinas first problematizes the conception of western philosophy as discourses of "totalizing objectification" incapable of tolerating otherness and what Tadie calls the "desire to secure justification for their own particular (and wholly conventional) interpretation of the world" (220). Second, he flags a turning point in occidental ethics that has been revisited time and time again by an array of theoretical approaches, from deconstruction to postcolonial studies (Lee 93). In short, "Levinas versucht der Andersheit des Anderen auf neue Weise gerecht zu werden" [Levinas tries to do justice to the Other's Otherness in a new way] (Stegmaier 53, translation mine). My thesis is an attempt along similar lines: it tries to do justice to the Other and Otherness in Tolkien's Middle-earth narratives by taking a path yet to be fully explored, thus broadening the horizons of Tolkien studies in the twenty-first century.

Part Two
Chapter Three
Ethics and the Other: A Hobbit's Tale

This chapter is dedicated to *The Hobbit*. As mentioned in Chapter One, before the publication of *LotR*, Tolkien reedited *The Hobbit* so it would fit with the plot of the One Ring. In *LotR*, the third section of Appendix A, “Durin’s Folk”, relates many of the events portrayed in *The Hobbit* within the wider context of the history of Middle-earth as well as their relation with Sauron and the One Ring, tying both texts more tightly together.¹ This creates a sense of continuation between both texts, simultaneously influencing the depiction of specific themes and the relationship between the self and the Other in Middle-earth. Here I explore *The Hobbit*’s textual particularities, its connections with *LotR*, as well as the different narrative strategies at work in the text that strive to generate sympathy with or aversion to specific sets of characters. Special focus is placed on examining Bilbo Baggins’ narrative journey from Bag End to the Lonely Mountain. Because Bilbo functions as a positioning of the self within the narrative, I analyse his distinct qualities on an individual narrative level, his encounters with different forms of Otherness in the tale, how these encounters transform his sense of self and his ethics, as well as his othering within the context of the hobbit community in the Shire. As part of my analysis, I will examine the themes of heroism and evil, the role of fate and free will, and the experience of death as depicted in the text, considering how these form part of Bilbo’s narrative trajectory and help develop his ethical stance. My goal is to uncover, through a Levinasian prism, how Otherness is presented in *The Hobbit* and where encountering the Other leads the protagonist and reader.

Because it is a work of fiction for children, it has been suggested that at its heart, *The Hobbit* is a simple tale portraying uncomplicated ethical positions – as if books directed towards children were incapable of containing complex and nuanced ethical scenarios. For example, Christopher Wrigley reads *The Hobbit* as

a near-perfect story for children between, say, seven and twelve. It urges them to engage in imaginative and adventurous play, provided that they are home in time for

¹ See *RK* Appendix A.III.1406-19. Other examples of this linkage to *LotR* and the wider *legendarium* are the mention of Elrond as chief of a “people who had both elves and heroes of the North for their ancestors”, the swords Orcrist and Glamdring as made in Gondolin, and the differentiation between High Elves of the West – Light-elves, Deep-elves, and Sea-elves – as those who went to Faerie in the West, and the Wood-elves who did not (*H* 59). References made to Sauron, his alter ego as the Necromancer, and his former keep Dol Guldur in Mirkwood are made only in passing (*H* 30, 156, 333). “The Quest of Erebor” in the *Unfinished Tales* elaborates on Gandalf’s decision to help Thorin in his quest and to include Bilbo in the adventure (415-35).

tea. There are frissons of danger, and some characters do get killed, but no reader could have any doubt that Bilbo would survive. (37)

Readings like Wrigley's oversimplify who the readers of *The Hobbit* are, how they will understand the narrative, as well as the actions or feelings that it may inspire. This chapter will demonstrate the ethical complexity of *The Hobbit* by following the multifaceted journey upon which Bilbo embarks himself and analysing the spectrum of ethical perspectives and Otherness present within the text.

From the start, *The Hobbit* offers different paths to acknowledge and approach the Otherness contained in the Other-world presented by this text, paths which at times may seem paradoxical. As a fairy-story in which "many magical creatures and mythical beings appear in it naturally, in 'Nature,' including trolls, goblins, giant spiders, Beorn the shape-changer, and most especially, the Elves (or fairies)" the text uses several conventions from the fair-tale form (Chance *Self* 51). These include describing *The Hobbit* as "a story of long ago", a twist on the traditional opening lines found in fairy tales – such as "once upon a time" or "long ago, in a land far, far away" (*H* 1).² Further on, the narrator states that:

In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit. Not a nasty, dirty, wet hole, filled with the ends of worms and an oozy smell, nor yet a dry, bare, sandy hole with nothing in it to sit down on or to eat: it was a hobbit-hole, and that means comfort. (*H* 3)

The narrator – who John D. Rateliff suggests is also an "intrusive" narrator in the tradition of works like *Tom Jones*, *Tristram Shandy*, and the tales of Lord Dunsany – addresses the reader directly, engaging them with the narrative (55). Whilst the fairy-story format may already be known to readers of *The Hobbit* – thus setting the stage for the type of story presented and its potential contents – it is the narrator who explains unknown elements of this Other-world, anticipating much of the potential strangeness that could result from encountering this new fictional world and then proceeding to *normalize* or *familiarize* it, as if the information provided by the text were popular knowledge that must simply be brought once again to the surface.³ This facilitates the reader's immersion into Tolkien's secondary world. Thus, the two sentences quoted above introduce a foreign element to the reader's mind, a hobbit, a fictional character invented by Tolkien, not to be found in any other known

² Further references to fairy tale tropes include Bilbo's description of Gandalf as "the fellow who used to tell such wonderful tales at parties, about dragons, and goblins and giants and the rescue of princesses and the unexpected luck of widows' sons" (*H* 8).

³ Another example of this are the narrators comments regarding sunlight and trolls in the chapter "Roast Mutton": "for trolls, *as you probably know*, must be underground before dawn, or they go back to the stuff of the mountains they are made of, and never move again" (*H* 48, emphasis added).

mythologies or imaginary worlds prior to *The Hobbit*. Hobbits are not strictly human: their differences may be enough to categorize them as an Other, and yet their humanoid characteristics endow them with an ambiguous status. *The Hobbit* not only suggests that hobbits are real, but also that at some point, in a distant past, hobbits and humans had met and, given their similar physique, they were differentiated from one another by being called little and Big people respectively (H 4). The narrator describes hobbits as having no beards,

inclined to be fat in the stomach; they dress in bright colours (chiefly green and yellow); wear no shoes, because their feet grow natural leathery soles and thick warm brown hair like the stuff on their heads (which is curly); have long clever brown fingers, good-natured faces, and laugh deep fruity laughs (especially after dinner which they have twice a day when they can get). Now you have enough to go on with. (H 4)

The conjunction of similar traits and cultural values acts like a bridge between human readers and hobbit subjectivity, allowing the novel to bring hobbits closer to the readers.

However, with the familiarization of elements such as hobbits, the text also employs strategies to emphasize the Otherness of this Other-world via a sense of *wonder*, “which may best be understood as an alternative formulation of the idea of estrangement” (Attebery 16). As Attebery points out, “this term has come into English-language critical discourse from two sources: Viktor Shklovsky’s *ostranenie*, translated as ‘defamiliarization’ and Bertolt Brecht’s *Verfremdung*, which may mean ‘alienation’” (16). In “Art, as Device”, Shklovsky writes

The goal of art is to create the sensation of seeing, and not merely recognizing, things; the device of art is the “enstrangement” of things and the complication of the form, which increases the duration and complexity of perception, as the process of perception is, in art, an end in itself and must be prolonged. (162)⁴

Shklovsky argues that “things that have been experienced several times begin to be experienced in terms of recognition: a thing is in front of us, we know this, but we do not see it. This is why we cannot say anything about it. Art has a different way of deautomatizing things” (163). In turn, Brecht describes *Verfremdung* as a perspective or technique that “estranges an incident or character simply by taking from the incident or character what is self-evident, familiar, obvious in order to produce wonder and curiosity” (144). I contend that along with a process of familiarizing the reader with the seemingly unknown and strange – the Other – the principles described by Shklovsky and Brecht work in *The Hobbit* through

⁴ For the reasoning behind the translation of *ostranenie* as *enstrangement*, see Shklovsky 151.

the text's simultaneous focus on decontextualizing elements familiar to the reader, such as a hole in the ground where an animal would be expected to live, and reintroducing them according to the laws of the fictional world in which they stand. Tolkien expressed similar ideas to Shklovsky and Brecht in his essay "On Fairy-stories", under the concept of *recovery*. In this concept lies not only Tolkien's perspective on estrangement and wonder, but also Fantasy's ability to disrupt the sense of familiarity with the world:

Recovery ... is a re-gaining – regaining of a clear view. I do not say 'seeing things as they are' and involve myself with the philosophers, though I might venture to say 'seeing things as we are (or were) meant to see them' – as things apart from ourselves. We need, in any case, to clean our windows; so that the things seen clearly may be freed from the drab blur of triteness or familiarity – from possessiveness. Of all faces those of our *familiars* are the ones both most difficult to play fantastic tricks with, and most difficult really to see with fresh attention, perceiving their likeness and unlikeness: that they are faces, and yet unique faces. This triteness is really the penalty of 'appropriation': the things that are trite, or (in a bad sense) familiar, are the things that we have appropriated, legally or mentally. We say we know them. They have come like the things which once attracted us by their glitter, or their colour, or their shape, and we laid hands on them, and then locked them in our hoard, acquired them, and acquiring ceased to look at them. (*OFS* 146)

Coming back to the hobbit hole example, recovery is thus the act through which a hole in the ground is seen anew, as more than what seems familiar – an animal's burrow. In this passage, Tolkien speaks of the "faces" of what or who we consider to be familiar and how this familiarity is the end result of a possessiveness – an equating or reducing to the same – that ultimately forgets or denies their uniqueness and Otherness. The parallel between Tolkien's argument and Levinas' philosophical propositions, as well as their shared use of the term "face" to describe how the subject encounters the Other, is striking. Such a parallel indicates the value Tolkien places on reaching out and meeting the Other whilst, *at the same time*, acknowledging how, in a gesture similar to Levinas's, the perception of the Other by the self may become an acquisition, a greedy act, like a dragon hoarding treasure, that blinds the self to difference – or the Other's right to exist in themselves. Taking the Other for granted is, in a sense, to possess them, because it curtails the ability of the self to see the Other on their own terms.

A Queer Other

The protagonist of *The Hobbit*, Bilbo Baggins, is a character who resembles an "English; middle-class; and roughly Victorian to Edwardian" individual from the Primary

World (Shippey, *Road* 11).⁵ Despite belonging to families of renown within the Other-world of Middle-earth – the Tooks and the Bagginses – Bilbo deviates from what is considered acceptable within the hobbit community, a community that shares many of the values of conservative English society. From the earliest pages of the text, an emphasis is placed on Bilbo’s home being a comfortable abode for a “well-to-do” and “respectable” hobbit, as if he belonged to the western bourgeoisie (*H* 3). However, what makes the concept of respectability in *The Hobbit* so particular is its association with *predictability*; that is, “people considered them [the Baggins family] very respectable, not only because most of them were rich, but also because they never had any adventures or did anything unexpected” (4). Bilbo is thus, “at the start of *The Hobbit* full of nonsense, like modern English society as perceived by Tolkien: he takes pride in being ‘prosy’, pooh-poohs anything out of the ordinary, and is almost aggressively *middle* middle-class in being more respectable than the Tooks, though rather ‘well-to-do’ than ‘rich’” (Shippey, *Road* 82).

The beginning of *The Hobbit* foreshadows how Bilbo will be considered an Other by his fellow hobbits by the end of the text. The narrative hints at the possibility that Bilbo’s particular ancestry – he is rumoured to have fairy blood and friendly relations with magical wizards – was at least partly responsible for his *queerness* arising in the precise moment for him to embark on an adventure: “[Bilbo] got something a bit *queer* in his make-up from the Took side, something that only waited for a chance to come out” (*H* 5, emphasis added). Throughout the Middle-earth narratives that involve hobbits, *queer* is the specific word used in association with hobbits to describe anything strange and out of the ordinary. For example, the text also describes Bilbo as “feeling very queer indeed” as a result of his adventures – and the lack of food (*H* 122). According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) – to which Tolkien was a contributor after World War I – the word *queer* first appeared in the English language during the 16th century, probably as a borrowing from the German *quer*, and can mean “strange, odd, peculiar, eccentric” and “of questionable character, suspicious, dubious”.⁶ In *The Hobbit*, individuals considered at best eccentric and at worst insane according to the expectations of hobbit society are described as “queer”. The term thus signals what Taylor Driggers calls “a potentially disruptive alterity that ... must be covered

⁵ Chance describes Bilbo’s illustrious lineage thus: “what ‘nobility’ he has – the nobility of the Fallohide Hobbits – he has inherited from his Took mother. Bilbo’s mother and Frodo’s grandmother were Took sisters, descended from the Took line that Took of Great Smials had founded, with Isengrim II representing the tenth Thain of the line: Bilbo’s mother, Belladonna Took, was the fourth daughter of Gerontius (the “Old”) Took (son of the nobly named Fortinbras I and grandson to Ferumbras II, himself the lone brother of the heroic “Bullroarer,” or Bandobras, Took)” (*Self* 62).

⁶ The usage of the word *queer* to refer in a derogatory and offensive manner to the homosexual community began during the early 20th century. However, amid the AIDS crisis during the 1980s, the term was reclaimed by gay and lesbian activists as a sign of solidarity. Today, *queer* is understood as “a gender or sexual identity that does not correspond to established ideas of sexuality and gender, especially heterosexual norms” (*OED*).

over and suppressed to maintain the stable identities of normative subjects and stability *per se*” (140) Driggers here defines the term queer in relation to a contemporary, scholarly usage that was not prevalent at the time Tolkien was writing his Middle-earth narratives. By using the word queer, Tolkien was not alluding to the normativity based on heterosexual and cisgender identities that Driggers speaks of; nevertheless, by designating the main hobbit characters Bilbo and later Frodo as “queer” – and although not explicitly stated, Sam, Merry, Pippin and Éowyn in *LotR* – Tolkien’s texts highlight the capacity these characters have to unsettle the world around them and even change those who come into contact with them.

Although Bilbo is the eponymous character of *The Hobbit*, he is portrayed as hesitant to engage in the adventures proposed by Gandalf because, according to his cultural framework, they are “nasty disturbing uncomfortable things” (*H* 7).⁷ But Bilbo is betrayed by his queer Took side: “Bless me, life used to be quite *inter* – I mean, you [Gandalf] used to upset things badly in these parts once upon a time” (*H* 8, emphasis added).⁸ According to Shippey, the dichotomy in Bilbo’s character can be understood as an anachronism; he represents the juxtaposition of modern reactions and inabilities – such as the inability to mimic birdcalls or hunt for survival like the dwarves – within an archaic, heroic, Fantasy world setting of Thorins and Bards (*Road* 81; *Author* 6-7). It is also through this anachronism, this preference for “good food and staying at home to adventure and rescue of lost treasure, [that] Bilbo occupies the prototypical Tolkenian [sic] queer role of the hero as other – unlikely, unsuitable in all ways, untrained, and absurd” (Chance, *Self* 49). What Shippey describes as Bilbo’s “anachronism”, I interpret as the conjunction between Bilbo queerness in the hobbit world and a *femininity* that sets him apart from male characters and heroes of the text. This conjunction acts a baseline for the construction of the chief idea of self in the narrative, which then acts as a mediator between the world of the text and the world of the reader.

As part of his hobbitness, Bilbo displays qualities that may be understood as performing femininity, such as the appreciation of the domestic circle and a patent physical vulnerability due to the absence of corporal strength or martial skills. With his neatly brushed woolly toes, baking of “beautiful round seed-cakes”, and fearing for the integrity of his

⁷ Although *The Hobbit* does not identify him as one of the Istari, Gandalf’s presence signifies the invisible forces at work in Arda and consequently in the development of the events portrayed in the text. For the origin of the wizards or Istari and their role during the Third Age, see *S* 299-304. In *LotR*, Gandalf’s full identity and purpose is reported indirectly through Faramir (*TT* 4.V.876). Gandalf confirms the existence of these powers in the aftermath of his battle with the Balrog of Moria (*TT* 3.V.655).

⁸ Gandalf chooses Bilbo as one of Thorin’s companions not only because of his illustrious Took ancestry and the fact that the company’s best bet to approach the Lonely Mountain lies in stealth: the wizard also senses that the hobbit has a natural, although yet undiscovered, inclination towards adventure. Furthermore, Gandalf suggests that the experience will be “very good for” Bilbo, thus hinting at the personal transformation the hobbit is about to undergo (*H* 8).

crookery, Bilbo is different from the more prototypically masculine types such as the bearded dwarves with their tools and weapons, or a warrior-like leader such as Bard (*H* 11). His femininity is even more striking when considering the absence of women in such a detailed imaginary world. In fact, at no moment in the text does Bilbo converse with a specific female character. In *The Hobbit*, there is a brief mention of Bilbo's mother, Belladonna Took, but no description of her relationship with her son and no depiction of a shared moment. From that point forward, it is only logical to assume the existence of more female hobbits in addition to the existence of female humans, elves, and dwarves.⁹ Despite this absence of female figures, the feminine surfaces precisely through Bilbo and it is the joint action of his queerness and femininity which allow him, on the one hand, assert that he "has a place in the ancient world too" (Shippey, *Road* 81). On the other, his alterity within this Other-world brings the reader closer to the world of the text.

Thorin & Co.

The Hobbit creates a pattern according to which Bilbo – and the reader – encounter a new set of beings with each chapter of the story: a wizard, dwarves, elves, goblins, Beorn, and so on (Rateliff 137). In each of these encounters, Bilbo displays reactions that heighten, on the one hand, the importance and implications of the domestic dimension of hobbit culture, and on the other, the deeply transformative powers that such encounters enact on those who participate in them. Bilbo meets three humanoid groups: dwarves, elves, and men. Other beings, like Beorn and the eagles, are characterised by the anthropomorphic qualities. All of them are aligned to the idea of goodness constructed by the text, despite their potential flaws and mutual disagreements, and form an allegiance against the evil goblins and wargs in the Battle of the Five Armies in the final portion of the narrative.

The first group of beings Bilbo encounters are the dwarves of Thorin's Company. In comparison to humans or elves, dwarves feature most prominently in the story. From the perspective of this thesis, the dwarves in *The Hobbit* share elements of the text's positioning of the self as Bilbo's companions; but they are also an Other who is not idealised, who through their choices can become an evil Other. Bilbo encounters and reencounters the dwarves as multifaceted beings throughout the narrative, in instances of agreement and dissension. According to Gerard Hynes, the presence of dwarves in Tolkien's Middle-earth

⁹ For example, Thorin introduces Fili and Kili to the guards of Lake-town as "the sons of my father's daughter" (*H* 219). However, in *The Hobbit* there is only a brief mention of "Bilbo's *cousins* the Sackville-Bagginses", in plural, which includes Lobelia (*H* 337, emphasis added). The spiders of Mirkwood – offspring of the female Shelob (*TT* 4.IX.946-7) – are either collectivised or referred to as "it" when spoken of individually: "The spider evidently was not used to things that carried such stings at their sides, or *it* would have hurried away quicker" (*H* 175, emphasis added).

narratives derives from Germanic mythology, although Tolkien was also “exposed to depictions of dwarves in several nineteenth-century works: William Morris, Andrew Lang, and the Brothers Grimm” (20). *The Hobbit* does not delve into the dwarves’ origins – explicated, for example, in *The Silmarillion*, where they are described as being created by the Vala Aulë and therefore different from elves and humans as the Children of Ilúvatar (*S* 43-4). For the purposes of this chapter, I focus on how dwarves – their selfhood and their culture – are presented within *The Hobbit* rather than the wider legendarium. Hynes indicates that “*The Hobbit* brings dwarves into the home of our protagonist ... The narrative may not be written from a dwarvish point of view, but it allows the reader a glimpse of dwarven society from the inside” (25). Such a positioning within the text begs the question to what extent the dwarves of Thorin & Co. and their goals are depicted and perceived as Other. I argue that the narrative affords a wide spectrum of possibilities: moments in which the dwarves are portrayed and understood as Other, as well as moments in which they come close to the idea of the self constructed by the text.

For the dwarves, especially Thorin, the dragon-hoard constitutes their stolen heritage and power, and they are out to both reclaim their property and avenge their kin. Simultaneously, there is no doubt that the desire for gold and riches in themselves is also one of their most important motivations. The text notes that the dwarves

intended to pay Bilbo really handsomely for his services; they had brought him to do a nasty job for them, and they did not mind the poor little fellow doing it if he would; but they would all have done their best to get him out of trouble, if he got into it ... dwarves are not heroes, but calculating folk with a great idea of the value of money ... some ... are decent enough people ... if you don't expect too much. (*H* 238)

By portraying Thorin and Company as acting “out of revenge as well as greed”, being rather hesitant to share Bilbo’s peril, and underlining the monetary value attached to the danger the hobbit faces, *The Hobbit* stresses that dwarves are capable of actions that render them paradoxical, ambiguous, or even wicked (Shippey, *Road* 72).¹⁰ Dwarves are not depicted as having an internal predisposition towards evil, but they can do evil. According to the narrator of *The Hobbit*, “in some parts wicked dwarves had even made alliances” with goblins (*H* 72), and some dwarves are “tricky and treacherous and pretty bad lots” (*H* 238). Furthermore, in this story dwarves are shown as suffering from the so-called “dragon-sickness”, which is “simultaneously magical and moral”, described by Shippey as “an

¹⁰ Shippey adds: “the long and painful vengeance of Thráin for Thrór is the centre of what we are told of the dwarves in Appendix A of *The Lord of the Rings*, Dáin Ironfoot himself incarnates in Tolkien’s Middle-earth the whole tough, fair, bitter, somehow unlucky character of the dwarvish race” (*Road* 72).

external force meeting an internal weakness, especially strong in the artefact-worshipping dwarves” (*Road* 101). This sickness not only preys on the dwarves’ love of gold, but also seems to intensify Thorin’s memories of bygone splendour and the sorrow of everything lost, emotions that lead him to act like a dragon obsessed with the hoarding of treasure.

Because of the negative facets of Tolkien’s depiction of dwarves in Middle-earth, scholarship has discussed the possibility that this portrayal reflects stereotypically antisemitic attitudes. As Rateliff explains, Tolkien would claim both groups shared a “secret ancestral language (Khuzdul, Hebrew) reserved for use among themselves while they adopt the language of their neighbors (Common, Yiddish) for everyday use”; endured diaspora, had an analogous “warlike nature”, and talent for craftsmanship (80). Jewish influences and stereotyping in Tolkien’s work have been discussed by scholars like Zac Cramer (2006), Rebecca Brackmann (2010), and Renée Vink (2013).¹¹ Although a detailed consideration of this issue lies beyond the scope of this thesis, the arguments presented by Brackmann in this respect are compelling. As Brackmann explains,

“Dwarvishness” in *The Hobbit* involved several traits, recognizably drawn from antisemitic stereotypes, that, according to the narrator, exclude the Dwarves from the heroic ethos that is the hallmark of the book’s value system. Tolkien’s later recognition of this, perhaps, caused him to sharply alter his presentation of Dwarves in *The Lord of the Rings*, published in 1954-55, and to continue this revision in his later unpublished works. (85)

When the dwarves arrive – or better said intrude – upon Bilbo’s world, they become what Levinas describes as “the Stranger who disturbs the being at home with oneself ... But Stranger also means the free one. Over him I have no power” (*Totality* 39). Bilbo’s initial reaction to their sudden appearance demonstrates, on the one hand, the hobbit’s instinctual concern regarding potential threats to his lifestyle, his worldview, and furthermore, his idea of (him)self. On the other, the dwarves’ arrival as guests compels Bilbo to fulfil duties as *host*, which he does not question despite his misgivings and complaints. Hospitality “as welcoming the Other”, as “subjectivity”, stands at the forefront of this encounter (Levinas, *Totality* 27). When Dwalin, as the first dwarf who arrives at Bag End, introduces himself by saying that he is at Bilbo’s *service*, it is in fact Bilbo – the subject – who is called upon to serve the Other (*H* 10). A relation is thus created between the hobbit, Gandalf, and the dwarves, between the “humbled (and often bewildered and even bewuthered) reasoners who

¹¹ I thank Mercury Natis for pointing me to these sources.

attend and serve one another” (Tadie 223).¹² This encounter then leads to a defining moment as the dwarves sing “Far Over the Misty Mountains Cold”:

the hobbit *felt* the love of beautiful things made by hands and by cunning and by magic *moving through him*, a fierce and a jealous love, the *desire* of the hearts of dwarves. Then something Tookish woke up *in* him, and he wished to go and see the great mountains, and hear the pine-trees and the waterfalls, and explore the caves, and wear a sword instead of a walking stick ... and very quickly he was plain Mr. Baggins of Bag-End, Under-Hill, again. (*H* 19, emphasis added)

This moment marks the beginning of Bilbo’s internal journey, as Bilbo and the readers are “permitted a glimpse of the heart of dwarves” (Hynes 25). Not only is Bilbo capable of understanding the dwarves’ plight on an intellectual level, but the text also indicates that, for an instant, Bilbo is capable of *feeling* an Other’s emotions of love and desire, regardless of how different the source of that love may be from his cultural perspective. Furthermore, the encounter with the Other and the experience of their emotions awakens in Bilbo a new type of *desire*, one that is not only the desire of the Other but perhaps to *be* Other. This will eventually lead Bilbo to an internal conflict about his true identity: does he truly wish to remain the normal and respectable Baggins that the Shire community wishes him to be? Or, on the contrary, is this different side of him sufficiently strong to propel him into embracing the queerness of his new circumstances and the emotions that have been awoken in him? That is, does Bilbo Baggins wish to be the same or the Other; or someone who can negotiate both positions and hold them in balance? Bilbo feels this tension deeply, for after hearing the song “he got up trembling. He had less than half a mind to fetch the lamp, and more than half a mind to pretend to, and go and hide ... and not come out until all the dwarves had gone away” (*H* 19). To complicate matters even further, as Bilbo is made part of Thorin’s plan, he is described as “conspirator”, “audacious”, and “fierce as a dragon in a pinch”, which anticipates the struggles Bilbo will endure regarding his selfhood throughout the narrative (*H* 20-21).

The change or awakening in Bilbo’s character is reflected not only in how Bilbo perceives himself, but also the service he is willing to provide the Other. As a result of the bonds of hospitality, contractual obligations, and shared dangers, as well as Bilbo’s awakening to his own Otherness, the hobbit is willing to go to great lengths to help the strangers who are now his companions, regardless of his own personal safety and his changing role as a burglar. Starting with the moment of empathy Bilbo experiences whilst

¹² Tadie also argues that Bilbo’s name “conjures association with bondage, connoting fetters or leg chains”, but he does not provide any references or sources to support this reading (225).

listening to the dwarves sing, the Other becomes Bilbo's responsibility. After being sent to spy on the trolls, Bilbo feels that "he could not go straight back to Thorin and company emptyhanded" (H 41). Later on, once Bilbo acknowledges the advantage that the Ring has given him over Gollum and the goblins, he feels compelled to "look for *his friends*" as "it was *his duty*", thus evidencing a narrowing of the gap between his self and the dwarves as Other (H 103, emphasis added). And yet, Bilbo also learns through his encounter with the dwarves about the limits of the Other or the Other's imperfection – just as the self is imperfect. Bilbo learns that changing the Other may not be possible, that placing expectations on the Other (that originate from the self) does not mean they will be fulfilled. To serve the Other is to do so with no guarantee of reciprocity or gratitude. Before the company even departs towards the Lonely Mountain, Glóin accuses Bilbo of looking "more like a grocer than a burglar" (H 22). After leaving the Misty Mountains, Bilbo overhears one of them questioning – justifiably or not – whether they should go back to the goblin tunnels to rescue him: "If we have to go back now into those abominable tunnels to look for him [Bilbo], then drat him, I say" (H 104). They appreciate Bilbo and risk themselves to rescue him from trolls, but also avoid sharing the dangers Bilbo encounters when exploring the dragon's lair in his role as master burglar. They even accuse the hobbit of betrayal after taking the Arkenstone. Despite "the opportunism and unreliability of the dwarves", coupled with them also being "loyal and dependable", Bilbo continues the journey and his service to the dwarves (Hynes 23). When he declares "Tell me what you want done, and I will try it", he means it, even if he stumbles along the way (H 22). Bilbo challenges the dwarves' disbelief through his actions. In the process, he also challenges what he believes about himself by following the dictates of his own conscience regardless of the disagreements he may have with the company. Bilbo thus develops his own ethical course of action.

The turning point in the dwarves' opinion of Bilbo is the hobbit's escape from the goblin tunnels. After this incident, Balin once more declares himself to be at Bilbo's *service* (H 106). This time, Balin's declaration implies that the dwarves accept that the relationship with the Other has affected them: in this moment – a reencounter – Bilbo is an Other to which they have become bound and for whom they have accepted responsibility. They are now engaged in an ethical relationship of service with Bilbo rather than simply a chance or contractual one.

Of Dwarves, Elves, and Men

Whilst the text places the hobbit as the starting point for the main idea of self depicted by the narrative, an essential aspect of the hobbit's venture into the wider world is his

experience of the complex relations between different inhabitants of Middle-earth. Although the narrative is hobbit-centric, the existence of different peoples implies the existence of different understandings of the self and Other within this fictional world. Along with the dwarves, the second humanoid group Bilbo meets *en route* to the Lonely Mountain, and up until the Battle of the Five Armies, are the elves. These encounters occur several times and under changing circumstances, which generate ambiguous impressions of the elves' ethics and motives. These meetings represent a different instance in which Bilbo comes face to face with an Other – albeit one not entirely unknown to Bilbo or to the dwarves:

He [Bilbo] loved elves, though he seldom met them; but he was a little frightened of them too. Dwarves don't get on well with them. Even decent enough dwarves like Thorin and his friends think them foolish (which is a very foolish thing to think), or get annoyed with them. For some elves tease them and laugh at them, and most of all at their beards. (*H* 56)¹³

The chapter “A Short Rest” offers one of the few descriptions of the elves in *The Hobbit*: Elrond “was noble and as fair in face as an elf-lord, as strong as a warrior, as wise as a wizard, as venerable as a king of dwarves, and as kind as summer” (*H* 59). Despite the series of reference points that constitute this description, there is still an ineffable quality to Elrond's appearance, for unless the reader knows what an elf-lord looks like, the imagery of physical nobility or fairness of this Other is difficult to pinpoint. The *OED* defines fair as “beautiful and agreeable”, whilst also linking it to being “light as opposed to dark in colour”. It would thus seem that Elrond's fairness in terms of his physical beauty – and in connection to his goodness – is denoted by being light-skinned – exhibiting whiteness. His fairness thus creates contrast with the “Dark Others” of the text, like the goblins and Gollum, analysed later on in this chapter.¹⁴ Different to the elves of Rivendell are the phantasmagorical elves of Mirkwood: “At times they [the dwarves and Bilbo] heard *disquieting* laughter. Sometimes there was singing in the distance too. The laughter was the laughter of fair voices not of goblins, and the singing was beautiful, but it sounded *eerie and strange*, and they were *not comforted*” (*H* 166, emphasis added). Fair as the woodland elves may be, with their “gleaming hair”, their “green and white jewels”, their faces and songs “filled with mirth”, they are unsettling. They are an Other who makes the hobbit and dwarves uneasy in their presence – perhaps because these are “Wood-elves” (different from the High Elves of

¹³ For the contrast in the depiction of the elves in *The Hobbit*, *The Silmarillion*, and *LotR*, see Fimi 25.

¹⁴ I am here referring to Ebony Elizabeth Thomas's terminology, even though her study does not include Tolkien's texts. Although Elves are not central in Young's analysis of race in Tolkien's work, her observation that “the Good peoples of Middle-earth” are “marked as white” could be applied to this instance in *The Hobbit* (23).

Elrond's household) who are "not wicked folk" but "more dangerous and less wise" (*H* 187-8). The differences between these distinct groups of elves are further emphasized by the conditions in which the dwarves and the hobbit become their guests. In Rivendell, the company are made guests of honour in what is known as the "Last Homely House", where they can rest and recover whilst appealing to Elrond's wisdom for help in their mission (*H* 53). By contrast, when the woodland elves meet Thorin, they view him as an enemy and take him prisoner. Their encounter, and that of these elves with the rest of the company, is marked by the remembrance of historical grievances between dwarves and elves, even though they have nothing to do with Thorin's family:

In ancient days they [the wood elves] had had wars with some of the dwarves, whom they accused of stealing their treasure. It is only fair to say that the dwarves gave a different account, and said that they only took what was their due. for the elf-king had bargained with them to shape his raw gold and silver, and had afterwards refused to give them their pay. (*H* 189)¹⁵

Despite Thorin and Company being in desperate need of help after traversing the horrors of Mirkwood, and the elves in a position to grant aid, these ancestral quarrels take precedence over Balin's plea: "is it a crime to be lost in the forest, to be hungry, to be trapped by spiders?" (*H* 194). The company has no choice other than to surrender and subject themselves to the elves, who are unwilling to hear the Other's plea and welcome the dwarves as guests – which, however, does not mean that the elves are cruel, for they provide their prisoners with decent food and shelter during this period. The elves are swift to help the people of Lake-town, which shows them as capable of helping an Other in need. Furthermore, the text underscores the elf-king's "weakness ... for treasure, especially for silver and white gems" (*H* 189) – different from Elrond, who "did not altogether approve of dwarves and their love of gold" (*H* 60). By vowing that "no treasure will come back through Mirkwood without my having something to say in the matter", the Elvenking declares his interests (*H* 223). The wood-elves are thus presented as complex beings, capable both of greed and disinterested help, as well as the advancement of their own desires.

In the final third of the story, the human inhabitants of Lake-town make a distinct appearance. Amongst them, the Master of Lake-town and Bard represent the selfishness and the nobility humans are capable of, as well as different attitudes towards Thorin & Co. Caught between the town's excitement at Thorin's presence – with citizens singing of gold flowing from the mountain should Thrór and Thráin return – and the Elvenking's power, the Master of Lake-town chooses to help the company by "simply cynically going with the tide

¹⁵ This is a reference to the Nauglamír – see *S* 114, 231-237.

of public opinion” (Rateliff 454). His point of departure is his self, his mind dedicated to “trade and tolls, cargoes and gold” (H 220) – similar to Smaug, who reminds Bilbo of “the catch” of taking a fourteenth of the treasure: delivery, cartage, armed guards, and tolls (H 251). The Master supports the motion of taking in the company as the town’s guests. The dwarves are then “doctored, and fed, and housed, and pampered” (H 222). The Master’s support does not originate from any particular empathy or sense of aiding the Other, but in order to gain the favour of the townspeople and a vague possibility of profit, without considering the consequences: “he may have a good head for business – especially his own business” (H 280). This attitude resurfaces after Smaug’s destruction, for the Master’s main worry is his position, not his responsibility towards the Other: “For what fault am I to be deposed? Who aroused the dragon from his slumber, I might ask?” (H 281). The Master’s choices demonstrate how greed is not exclusive to the dwarves, for he also falls prey to the “dragon-sickness” and dies of it “in the Waste” (H 340). When the Master “seizes for his own what should have been shared among his fellows”, he seals his fate (Rateliff 455). His death is ultimately caused by his denial of the Other. Conversely, Bard is depicted as the grim descendant of Girion, Lord of Dale. Instead of being carried away by the excitement of the dwarves’ arrival and the possibility of treasure, Bard insists on the looming threat of the dragon in the Lonely Mountain, as a danger to the people of Lake-town should he be driven out of his lair. Bard holds a unique position because his unwillingness to welcome and aid the dwarves as Other is motivated by the service he provides the Other as the people of Lake-town. For Bard, the lives of the population take precedence over whatever claim the dwarves may have over their ancestral home. In his line of service, Bard reacts promptly to Smaug’s attack and defeats him, but the damage Smaug inflicts on Lake-town is terrible: “Many took ill of wet and cold and sorrow that night, and afterwards died, who had escaped uninjured from the ruin of the town; and in the days that followed there was much sickness and great hunger” (H 283).

The ruin of Lake-Town represents an ethical challenge to the characters of *The Hobbit* as the narrative draws to a close. This event problematises “the dwarves’ relationship with their own treasure” (Hynes 24). As armies of men and elves approach the Gate of the Lonely Mountain seeking to claim the dwarves’ gold, the dwarves now have the opportunity to prevent a war and come to the aid of the people of Lake-town. They would thus not only repay the hospitality shown, but also help the Other after such destruction caused, in part, by the dwarves themselves. In Bard’s eyes, this should be the main purpose of the treasure, which the dwarves could not have gained without him. He thus asks Thorin if the dwarf has “no thought for the sorrow and misery of” the people of Lake-town: if he will not bear

witness to the Other's suffering (*H* 295). But the dwarves, Thorin in particular, show themselves unwilling to meet the Other. Thorin hears in their pleas the threat of force and sees in the elves' aid to men a kindness he did not experience: "but none of our gold shall thieves take or the violent carry off while we are alive" (*H* 289). He thus calls on his cousin Dain in the Iron Hills for aid. The complicated relationships that ensue from these perspectives serve as the backdrop to Bilbo's ethical decisions, especially in the events leading up to the Battle of the Five Armies.

Eagles and Skin-changers

Another particularity of the Other-world of *The Hobbit* is the presence of anthropomorphic beings that challenge the boundaries between animality and humanity. In *The Hobbit*, "nearly everything alive which Thorin and company encounter has a voice: trolls, birds, wolves, spiders, and dragons" (Hartley 116). And with that voice, these creatures commonly exhibit reason and an ethics that brings them closer to Bilbo and the reader, while at the same time remaining a radical Other because of their animality. The encounters Bilbo has with these figures are therefore similar and yet different from those he has with humans and humanoids such as elves and dwarves. In this section I will address this form of Otherness as embodied by the eagles and Beorn. Although these beings prevent the death of the company at the hands of goblins on several occasions, they are framed within the text as dangerous due to their size, power, and the fact that their motivations or reactions are not at all times clear to the members of the company, especially the hobbit.

Gregory Hartley categorizes the great eagles of *The Hobbit* as "oversized animals" who display a lesser degree of "autonomy and intellect" than humanoid creatures and monsters (117).¹⁶ I contend that although the eagles are not depicted as being as complex as humanoid beings, they manifest ethical perspective that enriches the fabric of Middle-earth, and with it, Bilbo's experience of the world and of Otherness. The narrator introduces the eagles by saying that they "are not kindly birds. Some are cowardly and cruel. But the ancient race of the northern mountains were the greatest of all birds; they were proud and strong and noble-hearted. They did not love goblins, or fear them" (*H* 117). In the *legendarium*, the great eagles are under the protection of the Vala Manwë, "to whom they bring news upon Taniquetil from Middle-earth", and whom they aided in his vigilance over Morgoth during the First Age; this could explain their ancestral enmity against the goblins (*S* 110). *The Hobbit*, however, does not detail their origin. The members of Thorin's company – with the

¹⁶ Other birds featured in the text capable of communicating with humans and dwarves – on occasion serving them as messengers – are the thrushes (*H* 279) and the ravens that inhabit the surrounding area of the Lonely Mountain, the latter possessing verbal speech (*H* 287-9).

exception of Gandalf – seem to have no previous knowledge of the eagles and must therefore blindly trust these strange, talking birds of prey despite their fears of “being torn up for supper like a rabbit” (*H* 124).¹⁷ Indeed, the eagles have no need to aid the company: they could simply refuse to help or even destroy their chance acquaintances. But they do not. Instead, the eagles hear the plea of the Other and rescue them from the goblins and wargs, bringing them as guests to their eyrie and feeding them. The eagles engage in the ethical responsibility that arises from this encounter with the company, which coincides with their wish to counter the goblins and a sense of gratitude towards Gandalf for having once healed their chieftain. But the eagles’ aid also has distinct limits, which the company has no other option than to accept: they “are glad to cheat the goblins of their sport, and glad to repay our thanks to you, but we will not risk ourselves for dwarves in the southward plain” (*H* 124). The relationship established between the eagles and the company shows the dwarves and Bilbo being subjected to the Other’s good will. Having a common enemy does not mean that Bilbo’s selfhood and that of the dwarves is equal to the eagle’s selfhood. Therefore, the company cannot predict how the eagles will act, nor can they expect or demand anything from this Other.

Similar to the eagles is Beorn. The etymology of Beorn’s name offers a clear insight into his features, for “beorn” is the Anglo-Saxon equivalent to the Old Norse “bjorn” or bear (Lewis 147). Beorn is a human skin-changer, which means that he sometimes “is a huge black bear, sometimes he is a great strong black-haired man with huge arms and a great beard” (*H* 131). Gandalf discusses the origins of Beorn as follows:

Some say that he is a bear descended from the great and ancient bears of the mountains that lived there before the giants came. Others say that he is a man descended from the first men who lived before Smaug or the other dragons came into this part of the world, and before the goblins came into the hills out of the North. I cannot say, though I fancy the last is the true tale. (*H* 131).

Lewis indicates that this character evidently possesses some form of magic that enables his transformation into a creature of great physical power capable of great violence, reminiscent of the legendary *berserkers* of Germanic tradition (148). The text does not provide insight into Beorn’s mind during his transformation or in his state as a bear, so it is impossible to know how Beorn experiences embodying an animal – if it is mediated by his human identity – or how being a bear influences his human perspective. However, what is clear is that Beorn

¹⁷ On several occasions, the text compares rabbits and hobbits – also noted in the similar names of both creatures. (*H* 42, 127, 148). This repeated comparison underscores Bilbo’s vulnerability in the wider world, for he is a fragile being that could easily be taken as prey, but also the magnitude of the feats he accomplishes whilst being small and apparently defenceless.

comes closer to holding communion with the animal as an Other in Middle-earth than any other character in *The Hobbit*. His magic allows him to communicate and create a cooperative and peaceful coexistence with the creatures that inhabit his homestead – for he is also a vegetarian – thus creating an alternative ecosystem. Nevertheless, Beorn occupies a position within this system that indicates a hierarchy, for the animals are portrayed as working for him and serving him, as servants to a master (*H* 130). Beorn therefore constitutes a very rare example of a creature who potentially oscillates between an animal’s selfhood and that of a human. This bridging simultaneously positions Beorn as an Other for dwarves and hobbits, as well as humans and elves. Beorn is on the fringes of Otherness.

Having never encountered a skin-changer before, the company’s first interaction with Beorn is riddled with uncertainty, for the company has no other choice but to appeal to this Other for protection against a common foe, the goblins. If the company hopes to survive, they must once more subject themselves to an Other: “I don’t need your service, thank you ... but I expect you need mine”, says Beorn (*H* 137). Despite his humanity, Beorn clearly does not share their interests or desire the companionship of humanoid beings other than his own kin. On the contrary, Beorn seems suspicious of the dwarves, stating point blank “I am not over fond of dwarves” (*H* 137). But, upon realising that Thorin leads the company, who Gandalf is, and the nature of their problems with the goblins, Beorn becomes invested in the Other who stands before him. He wants to know more about them: “Beorn did not show it more than he could help, but really he had begun to get very interested” (*H* 140). Gandalf, who is aware of the different facets of Beorn’s character – “he can be appalling when he is angry, though he is kind enough if humoured” (*H* 130) – wins bed and board for the company at Beorn’s home through his storytelling, for in his storytelling Beorn’s hospitality is awakened:

A very good tale! ... The best I have heard for a long while. If all beggars could tell such a good one, they might find me kinder. You might be making it all up, of course, but you deserve a supper for the story all the same. Let’s have something to eat! (*H* 141)

Although the company become Beorn’s guests, it is at first difficult to dispel their sense of uneasiness around this skin-changer. When a great animal seems to prowl around Beorn’s queer lodgings, “Bilbo wondered what it was, and whether it could be Beorn in enchanted shape, and if he would come in as a bear and kill them” (*H* 145). Beorn’s guests are acutely aware that, like the eagles, Beorn is dangerous, a danger made evident in his hostility towards the goblins. The text hints at Beorn retrieving information from a warg and goblin through torture, and then describes Beorn placing the goblin’s head on a pike and nailing the warg’s

skin to a tree as a warning to those who dare come too close to his dwellings (*H* 149). The information Beorn obtains is, no doubt, useful to both himself and the dwarves: “the goblin patrols were still hunting with Wargs for the dwarves, and they were fiercely angry because of the death of the Great Goblin, and also because of the burning of the chief wolf’s nose and the death from the wizard’s fire of many of his chief servants” (*H* 149). Beorn’s violence and apparent cruelty are contextualised as appropriate reactions to the hurts and dangers himself and others have suffered at the hands of these evil creatures. The brutal aggression towards an Other seems justified in the world of the text as long as the Other is understood as evil, an evil with which there can be no agreement and no truce. For Beorn it is not possible to hold an ethical relationship with goblins and wargs, and, on the contrary, he feels compelled to annihilate them as a means of survival and justice.

The ethics displayed by Beorn and the eagles are, therefore, not only intelligible, but also compatible with that of humanoid creatures, for an alliance is achieved as the eagles and Beorn intervene in favour of the dwarves, elves, and humans in the Battle of the Five Armies. Lewis argues that Beorn is “not essentially good incarnate”, but rather representative of an understanding of goodness due to his opposition to goblins and wargs, as well as his communion with the natural world (153). Such a description could also be applied to the eagles in *The Hobbit*. The encounters with these beings expand Bilbo and the company’s – and the reader’s – experience of Middle-earth and of the Other, for they are examples of a radical Otherness that is, ultimately, non-antagonistic toward the main characters, and yet more distant from the members of the company than elves and humans. These experiences signify what it means to become subjected to the Other, and how the willingness to encounter the Other lies outwith the needs of the self. This willingness is not only manifested in the help provided against a common foe, but also in the interest, in the desire creatures like Beorn exhibit when encountering the Other. Beorn and the eagles consequently expands the company’s appreciation of the beings they share the world with as well as the reader’s experience of the ethical perspectives at play in Middle-earth.

The Other as Evil in *The Hobbit*

The following section is a discussion of evil as different embodiments of antagonistic Otherness depicted in the text and which Bilbo encounters throughout his narrative journey. The incapacity or unwillingness that goblins, trolls, and the dragon Smaug exhibit in holding ethical relationships with the Other, and what that means for the spectrum of ethical possibilities presented in *The Hobbit*, are brought into focus in this section.

En route to the Lonely Mountain, Bilbo and Thorin's company also encounter a series of beings who are depicted as evil and hostile within the world of the text. These include humanoid creatures such as trolls and goblins, as well as animals who demonstrate a degree of reasoning and an ability to communicate similar to humanoid beings, such as the wargs, the spiders of Mirkwood, and the dragon Smaug. This means that despite their animality and wickedness, their alterity, these representations of Otherness are capable of communicating with the idea of self put forth by the text. Before even seeing the wolves, the company hears them, and in those howls there is speech, "the dreadful language of the wargs. Gandalf understood it. Bilbo did not, but it sounded terrible to him, and as if all their talk was about cruel and wicked things, as it was" (*H* 114). The spiders of Mirkwood express themselves in a similar fashion, even though the text does not clarify how their voices, described as "sort of thin and creaking and hissing", are intelligible to Bilbo (*H* 176).¹⁸

Furthermore, the text places emphasis on the construction of evil as cruelty towards others. Unlike the eagles, who as birds of prey must inevitably hunt for food even at the expense of men's livestock, wargs and goblins raid villages "especially to get food or slaves to work for them ... and shared the plunder" (*H* 115). Goblins are not portrayed as predatory animals and they could arguably procure their sustenance through livestock or hunting, but instead they resort to attacking and ransacking other peoples. The spiders of Mirkwood are already terrifying by their monstrous size, but adding on to that impression are their "will, intellect, and self-awareness", which differentiates them from other animals (Hartley 127). However, what intensifies the impression of the spiders' malignancy is their gloating over their prey's misfortune: "What nasty thick skins they have to be sure, but I'll wager there is good juice inside" (*H* 177). Although the malevolence of the spiders of Mirkwood could be traced through their ancestry to Shelob and Ungoliant, *The Hobbit* gives sufficient elements *within* the narrative to explain their evil without alluding to their heritage. In *The Hobbit*, their wickedness is explained by the monstrous fashion in which they manifest their natural instinct of feeding. What makes their Otherness evil is not their nature as predators – and that their prey may be dwarves and hobbits – but the added element of knowing cruelty instilled in this natural act. By exemplifying situations in which the encounter with the Other cannot lead to an ethical relationship – and the supremacy of one over the other is inevitable – *The Hobbit* integrates the possibility of negative outcomes and responses to the encounter with the Other. These circumstances add further nuance to the ethical dimension of the narrative.

¹⁸ Whilst Bilbo can understand the spiders of Mirkwood, in *LotR* there is no evidence that either Frodo or Sam are capable of perceiving any form of verbal communication from Shelob. The intelligibility of the spiders of Mirkwood thus brings them uncannily close to both the protagonist and the reader.

Similar to the spiders of Mirkwood, the dragon Smaug is a creature linked to the Elder Days of Arda, in which dragons were essential to Morgoth's purposes.¹⁹ *The Hobbit* does not provide much information about the origin and history of dragons, instead focusing on Smaug as an incarnation of greedy and violent evil (*H* 241). At the beginning of the text, Thorin explains to Bilbo that:

Dragons steal gold and jewels, you know, from elves, men, and dwarves ... and they guard their plunder as long as they live (which is practically forever, unless they are killed), and never enjoy a brass ring of it. Indeed they hardly know a good bit of work from a bad though they usually have a good notion of the current market value; and they can't make a thing for themselves. (*H* 28)

The dwarf's description portrays dragons as creatures who possess and appropriate only for the sake of it. When Smaug discovers that a negligible part of the treasure has been stolen, he falls into "the sort of rage that is only seen when rich folk that have more than they can enjoy suddenly lose something that they have long had but have never before used or wanted" (*H* 243). Smaug fits Tolkien's description in "On Fairy-stories" of those who lock treasures in their hoard: they understand the treasure's value but possessing it is not an act of joy. The depiction of Smaug's greed, of his impulse towards possession, is characteristic of his evil and echoes a wider depiction of evil throughout Tolkien's *legendarium*. Shippey notes that of all the characters in *The Hobbit*, it is Smaug who "talks like a twentieth-century Englishman, but one very definitely from the upper class, not the bourgeoisie at all" (*Author* 37). Smaug's manner of speaking allows the reader to approach this Other as a manifestation of greed framed in human(oid) terms. Furthermore, Smaug's own words indicate that he neither feels the need to excuse his wickedness nor has pity or empathy for those who are his Other:

"Revenge! The King under the Mountain is dead and where are his kin that dare seek revenge? Girion Lord of Dale is dead, and I have eaten his people like a wolf among sheep, and where are his sons' sons that dare approach me? I kill where I wish and none dare resist. I laid low the warriors of old and their like is not in the world today. Then I was young and tender. Now I am old and strong, strong, strong, Thief in the Shadows!" he gloated. (*H* 252)

For Smaug, the Other – dwarves, humans, or elves – are prey and he is the apex predator whose desire to kill, plunder, and consume is unchallengeable. In an inversion of the Levinasian desire for the Other, the Other exists for Smaug only in relation to the fulfilment

¹⁹ See, for example, *S* 192, 242, 252.

of his self. Even when Smaug chooses to spare Bilbo, the dragon takes the opportunity to sow doubt and discord in his heart, suggesting that the dwarves “are skulking outside, and your job is to do all the dangerous work and get what you can when I’m not looking – for them? And you will get a fair share? Don’t you believe it!” (*H* 250). Smaug is partly right, but he perceives Bilbo’s relationship with the dwarves in terms of power and profit, not knowing or even imagining that there is a bond between the hobbit and Thorin’s company that transcends a commercial relationship; a relationship in which serving the Other means more than a contract.

Joseph Tadie suggests the existence of parallels between Smaug and Bilbo insofar as both of these creatures live in holes of some sort that contain a significant level of wealth. A hobbit hole “is in fact, in everything except being underground (and in there being no servants), the home of a member of the Victorian upper-middle class of Tolkien’s nineteenth century youth, full of studies, parlours, cellars, pantries, wardrobes, and all the rest” (Shippey *Author* 5). Tadie further considers the similarities between these two characters to extend to their appearances, for he argues that Bilbo’s pipe-smoking, “sated” belly, colourful clothes in green and yellow, resemble the worm (226). Although Tadie correctly argues that a key difference between them is Bilbo attending “when the voice of an-Other reaches the Self”, another essential difference between the hobbit and the dragon is what they do with their desire for treasure (Tadie 226). There is no denying that Bilbo does not remain indifferent to the sight of the dragon-hoard: “the splendour, the lust, the glory of such treasure had never yet come home to him. His heart was filled and pierced with enchantment and with the desire of dwarves” – a sight that also bridges, if only for a moment, the gap between his self and the dwarves as Other (*H* 241). Both creatures are capable of desiring the dwarves’ treasure, but Bilbo – regardless of his stature or capabilities – is not compelled to take possession of it for himself like Smaug, much less in a way that would entail exerting violence over an Other.

Whereas Smaug is depicted as possessing specific human features, such as speech and greed, other evil creatures are portrayed as what Hartley terms “humanoid monsters” or “twisted humanoids” (117). In *The Hobbit*, these are trolls and goblins who, unlike the orcs and trolls of *LotR*, have no explicit connection to Sauron. Bilbo’s first impression of the trolls is that they are “three very large persons” who go by the name of Bert, Tom, and William or Bill Huggins, who possess “great heavy faces” and whose speech is “not drawing-room fashion at all” (*H* 40). In turn, the goblins lack a consistent physical description beyond adjectives and modifiers such as “big”, “great ugly-looking”, and “rough” (*H* 69). Their bearing and possessions are “signs of civilization”, which “point to

human sapience rather than bestial evil” (Hartley 117). But despite this human sapience, they have a craving desire to eat other humanoids: “Never a blinking bit of manflesh have we had for long enough” (H 40). What finally aligns them to evil is not simply their cannibalism, but their unwillingness to act on the plea of an Other upon encountering them. One of the first questions they ask upon meeting a hobbit is “and can yer cook ’em?” (H 42). Upon realising the dwarves’ vulnerability, the trolls hunt the dwarves and then discuss “whether they should roast them slowly, or mince them fine and boil them, or just sit on them one by one and squash them into jelly” (H 46). Although William momentarily pities Bilbo, the trolls ultimately do not recognise the ethical responsibility they may have towards this Other. This means that trolls can hear the plea of Other, but do not heed it. This is decisive in their portrayal as wicked.

Goblins, on the other hand, are described in the narrative with much more detail.²⁰ For Hartley, “*The Hobbit* incorporates a ‘civilised’ race of goblins, replete with an apparently independent king, a developed culture, and autonomous self-awareness” (114). They are “cruel, wicked, and bad-hearted”, for not only do goblins imprison and enslave others, working them to death, they also employ their creativity in the form of metallurgical skills to produce weapons and implements of torture (H 71).²¹ For the goblins, the Other exists to be dominated and to be harmed. Their vocabulary, as exemplified in their songs, reveals as much through the use of words such as “crush”, “smash” “hammer and tongs”, “whip crack”, “batter and beat” (H 70). Furthermore, Goblins are considered particularly dangerous given their proclivity to eat any creature that crosses their path. Their constant hunger is framed not only as a being’s natural need to feed, but as an act of domination and erasure of the Other. The devouring of the Other ensures the goblin’s supremacy.

Goblins thus evidence an aesthetic and political perspective. After capturing the company and accusing them of being thieves, spies, “murderers and elf-friends” – thus gesturing to the historic conflicts between goblins and elves – the Great Goblin calls upon the company to be slashed and beaten, bitten and gnashed (H 73). They understand these Others as a threat and have a clear idea of how enemies must be dealt with in order to protect themselves. When the goblins ambush the company in the pines and light the trees on fire,

²⁰ It is important to keep in mind that Tolkien used the terms “goblin” and “orc” more or less interchangeably in the early material, with the author preferring the former for more light-hearted contexts, such as *The Father Christmas Letters* and *The Hobbit*, and “orc” for works in the direct line of the Silmarillion tradition (Rateliff 137-8). In this narrative there still “seems to be no connection between the goblins in the Misty Mountains and the Necromancer who lurks in Mirkwood”, whereas Tolkien’s other Middle-earth narratives bring forth the connection between the orcs and Sauron (Rateliff 138).

²¹ The text even goes as far as to say that “it is not unlikely that they invented some of the machines that have since troubled the world, especially the ingenious devices for killing large numbers of people at once, for wheels and engines and explosions always delighted them”, thus linking modern-day ills in our world to the evil of this past Other-world (H 72).

they sing “so dwarves shall die and light the night for our delight” (*H* 120). The pain of the Other is the goblin’s joy. The encounter between Bilbo, the dwarves, and the goblins is another example of how encountering the Other may not conduce to empathy, understanding, or an ethical relationship. Although the characters and readers can intellectually approach the goblins’ selfhood and motivations, the text does not try to bridge the gap between its construction of the self and the goblin Other.

The conjunction of the humanoid qualities present in trolls and goblins, along with the characteristics that underline their Otherness make these beings *uncanny*. In his 1919 article “The Uncanny”, Sigmund Freud posits that “the uncanny is that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar”; the familiar becomes “uncanny and frightening” because there is an added level of uncertainty that surrounds it, for it brings to light the repressed or what should not be (124).²² The uncanny is akin to Attebery’s idea of wonder, Shklovsky’s *ostranenie*, and Brecht’s *Verfremdung* – previously discussed in this chapter – for it is the suggestion of an unnerving quality attached to something deemed familiar, which produces a sense of estrangement and terror in the observer. In addition to their connections to folklore and fairy-tales, goblins and trolls in *The Hobbit* possess traits that suggest a sort of familiarity, if not kinship, with the other humanoid characters as well as the readers. These traits range from speech – with trolls seemingly using cockney slang for comedic effect – and the faculty of reasoning to a certain physical resemblance. Therefore, these creatures do not seem completely alien, and yet there is something unnerving about them even in the comical situations depicted by the narrative. This unsettling quality lies in their absolute hostility to the protagonists of the story, as well as their engagement in behaviours and activities that make them abhorrent in both Primary and Secondary Worlds, such as torture and cannibalism. These creatures are uncanny Others because they are almost knowable, recognisable, through sketches of their ideas and motivations. At times, they do not seem all that Other, and yet they remain so. Their essential alienness and evil justifies an *a priori* distrust or open enmity towards goblins and trolls. As shown by Beorn, antagonism towards these Others is supported and expected. However, evil is not only perpetuated by essentially evil and uncanny beings; and beings capable of evil can awaken feelings of empathy. *The Hobbit* continues the exploration of evil and its borders through the encounter with Gollum, thus complicating Levinas’ notion of the relationship between the self and the Other.

²² I construct a fuller analysis of the uncanny elements of *The Hobbit* and *LotR* in my chapter “A Dark Romantic Gaze: Otherness and Evil in Hoffmann and Tolkien” (2024).

Gollum

Gollum and the magic ring found in his cave are introduced in the fifth chapter of *The Hobbit*, titled “Riddles in the Dark”.²³ However, the text does not elaborate on Gollum’s or the One Ring’s origins, their true identities, or the noxious influence of the latter on the former. Sauron’s Master Ring is referred to in lower case letters throughout this narrative, as opposed to the different titles with which it is named in *LotR*. Only passing references foreshadow the Ring’s true nature in this text: it is “a ring of power, and if you slipped that ring on your finger, you were invisible; only in the full sunlight could you be seen, and then only by your shadow, and that would be shaky and faint” (*H* 92). There is also only a slight suggestion of chance intersecting with the Ring’s magic when Gollum loses it: “whether it was an accident, or a last trick of the ring before it took a new master, it was not on his finger” (*H* 100). The main focus is Bilbo’s finding of an object both beautiful and very useful, rather than the intrinsic qualities of the Ring (as an Other) which are disclosed in *LotR*: “his hand met what felt like a tiny ring of cold metal lying on the floor of the tunnel. It was a turning point in his career, but he did not know it” (*H* 78). The turning point in his career is not only his finding of the Ring, but also his encounter with Gollum.

As for Gollum’s past, the narrator confesses that they “don’t know where he came from, nor who or what he was” (*H* 81). The text describes him as old, small, slimy, large-footed, “as dark as darkness, except for two big round pale eyes in his thin face” (*H* 81). Like in *LotR*, Gollum’s eyes turn green when the obsession and desire for the Ring take hold of him (*H* 98).²⁴ From this scant information it is possible to extrapolate that Gollum is some form of humanoid creature, with aspects of his persona still shrouded in mystery: it is not clear what Gollum’s alleged darkness entails, if it is a metaphorical description of his personality and intentions, or if it is literal description of his physical appearance, and the colour of his skin. If so, Gollum’s darkness would create a contrast with Elrond’s elvish fairness as a sign of nobility and goodness. It is not until *LotR* that Gollum is described by Gandalf as being “hobbit-kind; akin to the fathers of the fathers of the Stoors” (*FR* 1.II.69). Gollum’s ability to reason and speak confirm his humanoid nature, but the text quickly points out his uncanny qualities. The narrative aligns Gollum with trolls and goblins insofar that he is also willing to eat anything, from fish to goblins to hobbits. The first words Gollum directs to Bilbo are: “I guess it’s a choice feast; at least a tasty morsel it’d make us, gollum” (*H* 82). Gollum’s speech is evidently peculiar due the *gollum* noise he makes with his throat, his use of the word “precious” as tag, and his “strange use of pronouns. After his very first remark ...

²³ As noted in Chapter One of this thesis, I am using the fifth edition of *The Hobbit*.

²⁴ See the following chapter of this thesis.

Gollum never again, in *The Hobbit* ... uses the word 'I'. He always calls himself 'we' or 'my precious'" (Shippey, *Author* 30). The manner in which Gollum refers to himself is a symptom of his isolation from the rest of the world and, when considering the information revealed in the first couple of chapters of *LotR*, his fixation on the One Ring. However, despite his uncanniness, Gollum's dietary preferences could be attributed to his survival instinct in the tunnels of the Misty Mountains, rather than a natural inclination towards evil. These interpretational possibilities demonstrate that *The Hobbit* and *LotR* can offer different perspectives on this figure's nature and motivations. Gollum's behaviour can be interpreted by scholars and readers in two different (although not incompatible) ways. Either the fictional world created by *The Hobbit* can be read as a self-contained universe, and the Gollum of this text can be read according to the elements given by *this* text, and therefore the idea that the Ring of Power has a noxious influence over him is only hinted at; or the information provided throughout *LotR* is used to interpret Gollum's character in *The Hobbit*, in which case the Ring explains who Gollum is and has become. Because this thesis understands the importance of the connections between these two texts, my analysis will use certain insights provided by *LotR* to interpret Gollum.

The encounter between Gollum and Bilbo is the meeting between two individuals who, despite holding incompatible strategies for survival, mirror each other. Chance names Gollum "the Dark Hobbit" – similar to Ebony Elizabeth Thomas's "Dark Other" – alluding to the darkness that has already been described as an integral part of this character and his relation to hobbit-kind (*Self* 91). Leslie Stratyner proposes viewing Gollum as Bilbo's – and Frodo's – *apposite*, rather than an opposite (81).²⁵ As Levinas states, "if the same would establish its identity by simple *opposition to the other*, it would already be a part of a totality encompassing the same and the other" (*Totality* 38). Gollum is more than Bilbo's – or Frodo's – qualities and characters reversed, for he is both himself *and* what hobbits can become should the Ring gain control over them. Both Chance's and Stratyner's interpretation engage with the text's emphasis on the parallels between Gollum and Bilbo. But, given that *The Hobbit* does not disclose Gollum's ties to hobbits, I contend that this particular text reveals the similarities between both characters by describing their thoughts with an almost identical discourse. Of Gollum, the narrative says: "He [Gollum] was *anxious* to appear friendly ... *until he found out more about* the sword and the hobbit, *whether he was quite alone* really, whether he was good to eat, and whether Gollum was really *hungry*" (*H* 83, emphasis added). In turn, the text describes Bilbo as "*anxious to agree, until he found out more about* the creature, *whether he was quite alone*, whether he was fierce or *hungry*,

²⁵ Stratyner's idea of the apposite will be further considered in the following chapter of this thesis.

and whether he was a friend of the goblins” (*H* 83-4, emphasis added). From Gollum’s perspective, Bilbo represents a potential source of nourishment; he therefore proposes the riddle game as a means to buy time and learn more from this stranger. Bilbo, on the other hand, most likely senses that Gollum is his only hope of escaping the mountains, and it is perhaps for this reason – or simple carelessness due desperation – that the hobbit reveals his identity and plight to Gollum. Bilbo has no other choice but to fully embrace his encounter with this Other, to subject himself to the Other’s conditions, if he is to survive. These conditions are: if Bilbo fails to answer, Gollum will eat him; if Gollum fails to answer, he will show Bilbo the way out.

The narrator states that “Riddles were all he [Gollum] could think of. Asking them, and sometimes guessing them, had been the only game he had ever played with other funny creatures sitting *in their holes* in the long, long ago, before he lost all his friends and was driven away, alone, and crept down, down, into the dark under the mountains” (*H* 83, emphasis added). *The Hobbit* describes this place as his grandmother’s home, “a hole in a bank by a river”, which coincides with the wizard’s revelation (*H* 84). These brief passages anticipate Gandalf’s findings in *LotR*: that Gollum had been driven away from his former home – “his grandmother, desiring peace, expelled him from the family and turned him out of her hole” (*FR* 1.II.70-1) – and had wandered alone for countless years.²⁶ This would furthermore explain why, beyond a common trope used in myths and legends,²⁷ the riddle exchange between Bilbo and Gollum constitutes a ludic form of communication that emphasizes their common ground in terms of a partly shared cultural framework. The answers to the riddles are objects and forces that both characters (and the readers) are well acquainted with, such as mountains, teeth, and wind. Comments in the narration underscore this idea: one riddle being “rather an old one”, the assertion that “Gollum knew the answer as well as you [the reader] do”, or the claim that “[Bilbo] had once heard something rather like this before” (*H* 84-5).²⁸ The riddle game thus serves as a bridge of understanding through which these strangers arrive to common points in their worldviews. However, the riddle game also showcases these figures’ contrasting anxieties and priorities. With the exception of Gollum’s riddle about mountains and Bilbo’s riddle about sun on daisies, the riddles can be associated, even if tenuously, with ideas of consumption, food, and feeding. However, for Gollum, these riddles also hold an association with a past before his solitary existence in the Misty Mountains, therefore awakening feelings of anger, frustration, and, as is to be

²⁶ That Gollum’s family was ruled by his grandmother was, according to Tolkien, an exception rather than a rule for hobbit-kind (*FR* 1.II.69). See *Letters* 293-4.

²⁷ For example, Oedipus’ encounter with the Sphinx and her riddle game or the fairy tale *Das Rätsel* (*The Riddle*) collected by the Brothers Grimm.

²⁸ Shklovsky also points out that “estrangement ... is also the basis and the only sense of all riddles” (169).

expected, hunger. Gollum's feelings are expressed in the choice of macabre twists to riddles that evidence a sinister take on the world around him: for example, the phrases "Ends life, kills laughter" to describe the dark, or "cold as death" used for fish (*H* 86-7). These riddles simultaneously reveal Gollum's obsession with the act of eating, for he describes the wind as biting toothlessly and time as a power that devours, gnaws, and bites. Bilbo's riddles, on the contrary, also reference food and the mouth, but in a much more innocuous way: teeth are described as horses, an egg yolk as golden treasure, and fish eaten on a table by a man and fish bones eaten by a cat.²⁹

In the end, the riddle exchange represents a unique ethical dilemma. On the one hand, the rules of the game are, as the text explains, old as time itself and its rules respected as something sacred. There is a tacit honour contract bound into the game that the participants are expected to uphold. On the other hand, the reality in which Bilbo and Gollum find themselves creates an extraordinary tension between the moral imperative of following these rules and the practical need to survive at all costs. Gollum's obsession with feeding and indiscriminate attitude towards his source of food does not arise *ex nihilo*, but comes from the very real, bodily experience of prolonged periods of hunger. In turn, what is at stake for Bilbo is his life, for he risks either being consumed by an Other or dying of hunger and exposure if he remains lost in the network of caves. The imperative of reality thus wins against the ethical contract established by the riddle game, as both participants are moved to dishonour their agreement, albeit from different positions. After losing the game, Gollum decides to use the Ring against Bilbo, only to find that he has lost it. This, in conjunction with Gollum's uncanny desire to consume the protagonist of the story, seem to solidify his portrayal as an evil, "miserable little creature" by the text (*H* 91). In turn, Bilbo cheats at the game by posing a last question that is unanswerable – unless his opponent was capable of reading minds or possessed x-ray vision – and that does not strictly follow a riddle format – although Rateliff indicates that, technically, Gollum bids Bilbo to ask him a *question*, which leaves "open the door for a non-riddle" (173). Bilbo does not correct Gollum's mistake in taking this question as his riddle. The hobbit's reasoning for following through with this deception lies in his mistrust of Gollum, which is not wholly unfounded, and unlike

²⁹ Bilbo is assisted throughout the riddle game by the occurrence of happy "accidents" that intervene in his favour: a fish landing on Bilbo's feet, giving him the answer to the penultimate riddle; his half-articulate plea for more time turns out to be the correct answer to the last riddle – and could also be interpreted as a deceitful action, as Bilbo did not *intend* "time" to be his answer; a question that Bilbo poses to himself is fortunately interpreted by Gollum as Bilbo's last riddle – a misunderstanding that the hobbit takes advantage of. Unlike other Middle-earth narratives, there is no indication in *The Hobbit* that superior forces are interfering in the events narrated – which is how this particular event is framed in *LotR*: "Bilbo was *meant* to find the Ring" (*FR* 1.II.73). Instead, these coincidences are framed as luck and Bilbo as a very lucky individual. Luck's final intervention in saving Bilbo from Gollum comes precisely thanks to the Ring: the Ring "quietly slipped on to his [Bilbo's] groping finger", rendering him invisible (*H* 94).

Gollum's betrayal, Bilbo's failure to uphold the rules of the riddle-game remains uncriticised by the text. Even though Gollum complains that "it wasn't a fair question", the narrative states that Bilbo "had won the game, pretty fairly, at a horrible risk" (*H* 94). This notion is further repeated in *LotR*: "The Authorities, it is true, differ whether this last question was a mere 'question' and not a 'riddle' according to the strict rules of the Game; but all agree that, after accepting it, and trying to guess the answer, Gollum was bound by his promise" (*FR* 15).³⁰ This positioning further problematises the ethical in *The Hobbit*, for the text presents conflicting views on "fairness" and justice as understood by different characters, and presents situations in which an individual's ethics may be compromised by the circumstances.

Bilbo now has an ethical choice. At first, the hobbit "could not find much pity in his heart" for Gollum and, because his life is at risk, Bilbo could justifiably use the Ring to his advantage and end Gollum (*H* 93). However, Bilbo decides against this:

No, not a fair fight. He was invisible now. Gollum had no sword. Gollum had not actually threatened to kill him, or tried to yet. And he was miserable, alone, lost. A sudden understanding, a pity mixed with horror, welled up in Bilbo's heart: a glimpse of endless unmarked days without light or hope of betterment, hard stone, cold fish, sneaking and whispering. (*H* 98)

Against the potential threat to his existence that this Other poses, against a being that constitutes a "major monstrous adversary", Bilbo factors into his decision not only Gollum's disadvantage and the absence of an open attack, but also a sense of pity (*Chance, Self* 63). Bilbo thus recognises the responsibility he has towards Gollum's life. Moreover, the experience of the riddle game not only revealed the similarities between himself and this seemingly wicked and dangerous creature, but also the most profound difference between them: unlike Bilbo, Gollum can never find his way back again. Bilbo's choice is thus "a leap in the dark" (*H* 98). At this stage, the hobbit cannot fathom the reverberations his actions will have into the future – as portrayed in *LotR* – where his choice was ultimately for good, not only for himself, but for the rest of Middle-earth.

Bilbo's Ethics

The different encounters between the self and the Other staged throughout *The Hobbit* contribute to the development of Bilbo's sense of what it means to serve the Other, especially in dangerous situations, face-to-face encounters with evil, and encounters which

³⁰ Who these "Authorities" are is, however, not explained by the editor/translator of *LotR* nor by any other figure.

question what the ethical is. Although his comfortable, domestic life never required him to develop the skills necessary for combat and, more importantly, to truly reflect on his responsibility towards the Other, Bilbo manifests the courage, wit, and luck necessary to save his dwarvish companions time and time again. But Bilbo's bravery is not the type that fits the mithril shirt gifted to him by Thorin. It is, as Shippey describes it, "not aggressive or hot-blooded. It is internalized, solitary, dutiful – and distinctively modern" (*Author* 28). From being a frightened creature completely out of his depth in the unknown, unfamiliar, and uncivilized Wilderland, incapable of defending his companions and constantly needing the aid of a wizard, Bilbo changes: he mediates and integrates the multiple qualities and experiences he has acquired along the way as components of his selfhood.

Bilbo begins to accumulate experiences in which he must plan and act "all alone by himself in the dark without the help of the wizard or the dwarves or of anyone else" (*H* 175). When he avoids the elves' imprisonment in Mirkwood thanks to the powers of the One Ring, his situation gestures towards the role he will play prior to the Battle of the Five Armies, for the conflict between the dwarves and elves is wholly alien to him. But Bilbo honours Gandalf's request to "look after all these dwarves for me" and makes it his duty (*H* 156). His sense of ethical responsibility makes him stay and attempt their liberation as a form of service to these Others that have become so close to him, even though he has no conflict with the elves. The method Bilbo uses to free them is in alignment with his being as a hobbit: it is not the deed of a warrior who breaks into a fortress. Rather, it is careful observation and luck – along with personal bravery – that make the company's escape possible.³¹ The Ring is especially significant in this respect, because it gives him the opportunity to "take an active part" in the adventure, as opposed to being "essentially a package to be carried, his name as a 'burglar' nothing but an embarrassment even to himself" (Shippey. *Road* 89). Bilbo reaches the pinnacle of his courage when enters the Lonely Mountain. His incursion into the dragon's lair is "the bravest thing he ever did. The tremendous things that happened afterwards were as nothing compared to it. He fought the real battle in the tunnel alone, before he ever saw the vast danger that lay in wait" (*H* 240). Moreover, as Bilbo holds a cryptic conversation with Smaug, Bilbo names himself, amongst other titles, "clue-finder, the web-cutter, the stinging fly", "guest of bears and the guest of eagles", "Ringwinner and Luckwearer", and "Barrel-rider" (*H* 249). Although the specific purpose of this speech is to confound the dragon and buy time, this linguistic exercise reveals that the "I is not a being that always remains the same, but is the being whose existing consists in identifying itself,

³¹ Even here Bilbo shows consideration towards an Other, for he "kindheartedly put the keys back on" the belt of the chief elven guard in Mirkwood: "that will save him some of the trouble he is in for ... He wasn't a bad fellow, and quite decent to prisoners" (*H* 202).

in recovering its identity throughout all that happens to it” (*Totality* 36). By taking ownership of these identities, Bilbo reconfigures himself as being much more than a respectable Baggins from Bag End. Bilbo can accept that he is also queer and Other.

It is the progression described above and Bilbo’s experience in the service of the Other that leads him to surrender the Arkenstone to Bard and the Elvenking in the hopes of avoiding a war between dwarves, elves, and humans, and helping the people of Lake-town. When Bilbo discovers this great white gem, and later on when he offers it, he is affected by its beauty and the desire it produces (*H* 258, 303).³² By concealing his finding from the dwarves and taking the Arkenstone, he is now “a burglar indeed”, but instead of keeping it secret or claiming it as his fourteenth share of the dwarves’ treasure, he lets go of his temporary possession (*H* 265). Bilbo renounces the desire of treasure and, instead, upholds his desire for and commitment to the Other. As Flieger points out, “it is obvious to anyone reading *The Silmarillion*, *The Hobbit*, and *The Lord of the Rings*, that in each a particular treasure is the carrier of a familiar Tolkien theme: the danger of uncontrolled desire, covetousness grown to obsession” (“Jewels” 66). Flieger posits that, unlike the Silmarils and the One Ring, the Arkenstone in *The Hobbit* is “neither good nor evil” and “has no indwelling nature, no symbolic significance” (“Jewels” 66). But within the narrative, the Arkenstone does have an internal meaning: for Thorin it is a memory of his father, “worth more than a river of gold in itself, and to me it is beyond price. That stone of all the treasure I name unto myself, and I will be avenged on anyone who finds it and withholds it” (*H* 298). The stone is also a generator of desire, and as such “its chief function seems to be to reveal character” (Flieger, “Jewels” 72). The Arkenstone affects characters on both an individual and a collective level, revealing Thorin as “crafty, devious, and not above a crooked deal” and “turn[ing] Bilbo into a real thief” (Flieger, “Jewels” 72). But Bilbo remains “honest”, finding more value in life than material possessions (*H* 303). Despite the consequences that surrendering the jewel might incur, Bilbo returns to the dwarves’ side. The hobbit takes ownership of his actions and returns to face the Other – an Other whom Bilbo has learned to view as his friends, his responsibility, even when they may call him a traitor, even when they cannot see beyond themselves. Bilbo has learned that blind loyalty does not equate to serving the Other and becomes critical of the dwarves’ potential war efforts. The hobbit’s criticality gestures towards Levinas’ understanding of violence and war as making the subject

play roles in which they no longer recognize themselves, making them betray not only commitments but their own substance, making them carry out actions that will

³² For Flieger, the Arkenstone’s appearance is haunted “by the ghost of the Silmarils”, thus manifesting Tolkien’s work on both his *legendarium* and *The Hobbit* during the same period of time (“Jewel” 72).

destroy every possibility for action. Not only modern war but every war employs arms that turn against those who wield them ... it destroys the identity of the same. (*Totality* 21)

Even though dwarves are skilled in battle, should Thorin & Co. go to war over this treasure, they would destroy themselves in the process – not only in terms of their physical self, but their ethical self. Hence when they sing “Under the Mountain dark and tall / The King has come unto his hall! / His foe is dead, the Worm of Dread, / And ever so his foes shall fall” (*H* 293), Bilbo’s “spirits fall in reaction to its bellicose tone” (Hynes 26). His self cannot feel moved by the song of this Other (*H* 294). Whereas Bilbo previously felt the desire of the dwarves, this moment demonstrates how the distance between the self and the Other can fluctuate with each (re)encounter.

The Battle of the Five Armies unites factions who came very close to destroying one another against a common enemy.³³ Thorin cries “To me! Elves and Men! To me! O my kinsfolk!” (*H* 317). Here, not only the dwarves of his company and the army of his cousin Dain are part of his kin, but he has embraced the Other even if out of necessity. Meanwhile, during the battle, Bilbo vanishes from sight with the help of the One Ring. Bilbo’s decision to take a stand on Ravenhill is not simply an act of cowardice, but rather an acknowledgement of the fact that the hobbit cannot contribute to a military conflict in equal proportion as those strong or versed in these affairs. What Bilbo can offer is an outside perspective to the matter of treasure, war, and death. Bilbo reflects on the pointlessness of treasure if lives are lost – the lives of his companions, the people of Lake-town, and the elves alike. From his untraditionally heroic perspective, Bilbo confesses that he has “heard songs of many battles, and I have always understood that defeat may be glorious. It seems very uncomfortable, not to say distressing” (*H* 318). Bilbo’s final meeting with the wounded Thorin is of special significance, because it is a reconciliation with the Other, an acknowledgement of their importance over gold. Gold means nothing at death’s door. What is the point of counting, keeping, and “examining the treasures” of the Lonely Mountain if none of its golden goblets can house “a drink of something cheering out of one of Beorn’s wooden bowls” (*H* 268)? It is the relationship with the Other and the material or corporeal quality through which life is fulfilled and celebrated, the love of “food and cheer and song above hoarded gold”, that is most meaningful (*H* 332). The hobbit openly weeps before the loss of his friend and only takes two small chests of the treasure back to Bag End. Bilbo returns to his home to find that he has been pronounced dead and it is true: the old Bilbo

³³ Although “given Tolkien’s continued interest in the eagles, it is odd that in the Battle of Five Armies the wargs and goblins each count as a ‘people’ for the purposes of the tally yet the eagles do not” (Rateliff, *History* 223).

died somewhere between the Shire, the Lonely Mountain, and the journey back. A queer, not-so-respectable Other has returned. The experience of encountering and serving the Other has transformed him into a hobbit who can mediate between the parameters of his community and the Otherness found in the wider world and himself.

Maria Sachiko Cecire writes that:

While moral certainty and stark social hierarchies have become kid stuff in the light of twentieth century thought, the didactic tradition of children's literature thrives on the expectation that the world is knowable and articulable in precisely the way necessary to make sense of allegorical and symbol-laden narratives across time. Tolkien and Lewis were not children's literature scholars, but they were interested in restoring and maintaining the modes of thought that support such interpretation and composition in spite of changing social conditions. (45)

In this chapter I have argued that *The Hobbit* goes beyond the representation of moral certainties by exemplifying the nuances implicit in contrasting ethical views and divergent narrative trajectories. The text offers a space to reflect on the representation of Otherness and the different paths, possibilities and impossibilities of encountering and engaging with what the Primary and Secondary Worlds may call Other. As Tadie writes, Bilbo's venture into the Wider World is "an ethical adventure composed of conversions ... catalysed by attention to odd others, increased reflective awareness, and surprising linguistic growth (226). Whether or not Tolkien sought to compose an allegorical narrative in *The Hobbit*, its immanent qualities, *the story in itself*, shows different ways in which the self is challenged and invoked to respond to the Other. This experience, as demonstrated by Bilbo in his narrative trajectory, in his modernity, alterity, and queerness, is essential to accompany and participate in the encounters and changing conditions that are part of the outside world. Such an experience will also prove essential in *LotR*.

Chapter Four

Hobbits in *The Lord of the Rings*

The Lord of the Rings (*LotR*), first published between 1954 and 1955, is considered Tolkien's *magnum opus* given its commercial success, narrative intricacy, and sheer size – a work of fiction with an introductory prologue, whose main corpus spans over three volumes, each volume divided into two books, plus appendixes and maps.¹ As mentioned in the method chapter of this thesis, the genre and structure of *LotR* has been the subject of a wide variety of interpretations: in addition to the moniker of Fantasy literature, Tom Shippey has argued that *LotR* constitutes the meeting point between romance and novel, whereas Brian Attebery reads its structure as “that of the traditional fairy tale. It conforms with the morphology described by Vladimir Propp: a round-trip journey to the marvellous, complete with testing of the hero, crossing of a threshold, supernatural assistance, confrontation, flight, and establishment of a new order at home” (15). The main plot of *LotR* is driven by the need to destroy the One Ring of Power found by Bilbo, lest the Dark Lord Sauron, creator of the Ring, should regain it and through its magic exert absolute control over Middle-earth. Thus, the initial volume of *LotR*, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, presents Frodo's journey to take the Ring from the Shire to Rivendell – where it is decided that the Ring must be destroyed – as well as the formation and dissolution of the Fellowship. To unmake Sauron's Master Ring not only means stopping an individual power from instating dominion over Middle-earth, but also protecting Others from what Mordor's rule may bring: captivity, slavery, death. *LotR* is thus permeated with the understanding that beyond the self and the Other incarnated by specific characters who participate in the events narrated, there is an overarching notion of the Other that represents the Free Peoples of Middle-earth or Middle-earth as a collective ideal. This thought compels the main characters to act and react. It is for this Other that the Ring must be undone. How this goal is ultimately achieved is narrated in the second and third volumes of the text, which present “a series of separate strands, or threads” involving the narrative journeys of the members of the Fellowship, “all of them with different ‘ends,’” that in due course contribute to the final goal (Shippey, “Proverbiality” 317). While Book Four of *The Two Towers* presents Frodo and Sam's journey to Mordor in the company of Gollum, Book Three shows the actions of the rest of the Fellowship following Boromir's death. In *The Return of the King*, Book Five takes off as Gandalf and Pippin arrive in Minas Tirith and ends with members of the Fellowship facing the Black Gate of Mordor. The final

¹ The edition consulted by this thesis has over 1500 pages. The “Foreword to the Second Edition” of *LotR* has been included in subsequent publications of the text since 1965.

Book follows Frodo and his companions until the destruction of the Ring, then describes his reunion with the rest of the Fellowship, the journey back home, the battle over the Shire, and Frodo's departure into the West.

This chapter of my thesis is dedicated to analysing hobbits as queer Others in *LotR* whilst specifically examining the ethical journeys of Frodo, Sam, and Gollum. My study will show the transformations of their ethical relationships with the Other through their encounters with different iterations of Otherness until they find themselves together prior to the destruction of the One Ring. The lead up to their encounter, in conjunction with the task of destroying the Ring, provides insight into the meaning of serving the Other as portrayed in the text. The final section of this chapter is an examination of Lobelia Sackville-Baggins as the only female hobbit with a prominent narrative arc who manifests changes in her ethical relationship with the Other.

Hobbits as Queer Others

This section discusses the position hobbits occupy within Middle-earth at the time of the events narrated in *LotR*: from the queerness embodied by Bilbo and Frodo Baggins specifically, to the particularities of hobbit culture and the alterity hobbits represent within this Other-world at large. This context is essential in order to understand the narrative journeys hobbits undertake in the text and how they encounter Otherness along the way – which is then analysed in the following section.

The first section in *LotR* linked to the plot is the “Prologue”, which suggests that the text is a historic document of Middle-earth. In the subsection ‘Concerning Hobbits’, the editor-translator figure states that, in addition to the records contained in *LotR*, “further information will also be found in the selection from the Red Book of Westmarch that has already been published, under the title of *The Hobbit*. That story was derived from earlier chapters of the Red Book, composed by Bilbo himself” (*FR* 1). A link is thus created between Tolkien's former Middle-earth narrative and the one at hand, for both are presented as being part of a larger corpus that retells important events in the history of Middle-earth guided by the plot of the One Ring. In the subsection ‘Note on the Shire Records’, the “Prologue” points out that:

This account of the end of the Third Age is drawn mainly from the Red Book of Westmarch. That most important source for the history of the War of the Ring was so called because it was long preserved at Undertowers, the home of the Fairbairns, Wardens of the Westmarch. It was in origin Bilbo's private diary, which he took with him to Rivendell. Frodo brought it back to the Shire. (*FR* 19-20)

This “‘retelling’ conceit” employed by Tolkien, supported by the five sections of the “Prologue” and the six appendices at the end of *The Return of the King* that elaborate on Middle-earth’s historic and linguistic background, is a narrative strategy that plays with the boundaries of history and fiction in order to produce an immersive, reality effect (Vaccaro and Kisor 4).² Akin to the concepts of wonder and recovery discussed in the previous chapter, *LotR* delivers an account of a Secondary World that reframes elements of the Primary World whilst incorporating fictional elements in order to create both a sense of familiarity and estrangement in the reader. This deepens the sense that the text encountered functions as an Other, an Other-world which, simultaneously, can awaken empathy and recognition.

Much like the Primary World and the diversity of peoples that inhabit it, Tolkien’s Secondary World is populated by different creatures and Free Peoples, some of them represented by the members of the Fellowship of the Ring: elves, dwarves, hobbits, humans, and wizards. By contrast with the narrower worldview of *The Hobbit*, *LotR* mentions the human populations of Bree, the Dúnedain, Dunlendings, Drúedain,³ Easterlings, Gondorians, Haradrim or Southrons, and Rohirrim. In addition to the Elvish strongholds of Rivendell and Mirkwood, the elves of Lothlórien hold a special place within the narrative. Dwarves are said to live in the Iron Hills and Erebor, and the Fellowship discovers the tragic fate of those who returned to Khazad-dûm. Hobbits, who live in the northwest of Middle-earth, can be identified as Harfoots, Fallohides, or Stoors. This fictional world is also inhabited by ents, orcs – the goblins present in *The Hobbit*, of which there are different types, such as those from Mordor, the Misty Mountains, and the Uruk-hai – wizards, and “magical” animals such as talking eagles and the giant spider Shelob. Saxton suggests that through the depiction of these multiple peoples, Tolkien emphasizes “the ethics of creativity: choosing to talk with others or to shut them out, deciding to craft shared stories or domineering monologues” (167). The story of *LotR* is thus also the story of the ethical relationships between these peoples, between ideas of self and the Other.

From the former catalogue of creatures, the “Prologue” places hobbits at the centre of the narrative about to unfold, thus cementing the principal perspective through which the

² In the section “Of the Finding of the One Ring”, the editor/translator comments that “this *History* [*LotR*] begins” as Bilbo prepares to celebrate his 111th birthday (18, emphasis added). Will Sherwood notes that scholars have addressed Tolkien’s editorial practices from a variety of theoretical perspectives, including “literary forgery”, “framework”, and “meta-textual frame” (1). There are, however, brief instants that escape from this “‘retelling’ conceit”: for example, one of Gandalf’s fireworks, in the form of a dragon, is reported to have made noise “like an *express train*, turned into a somersault, and burst over Bywater (*FR* 1.I.36, emphasis added). This anachronism could, however, be explained through the knowledge of the supposed editor/translator (Tolkien), who is presenting the story to contemporary readers from the Primary World.

³ For the alterity incarnated by the Dunlendings, Drúedain, Rangers, trolls, and wood-elves, see Flieger, “Wild Men”.

events are presented – logically so, as it forms part of hobbit historical records: “This book is largely concerned with Hobbits, and from its pages a reader may discover much of their character and a little of their history” (*FR* 1). The choice of hobbits as the focalisers of *LotR* is explained by Luke Shelton as follows:

That readers are intended to identify with hobbits as they read *The Lord of the Rings* does not seem to be an observation that encounters a great deal of debate. Since Tolkien used Bilbo as the character with whom readers identify in *The Hobbit*, it seems that he intended to keep this perspective when he began writing its sequel, and this never shifted. In *The Hobbit* readers follow Bilbo as he undergoes a series of adventures and completes the quest that helps him grow from a sheltered and inexperienced novice into a more worldly and knowledgeable individual. This maturation process is mirrored in the main protagonist of *The Lord of the Rings*, Frodo. (41)

LotR thus continues the pattern established by *The Hobbit* in which hobbit subjectivity functions as a proxy for the Primary World reader. Hobbit protagonists are positioned by the narrative as the point of the departure for the text’s idea of self who then encounters Otherness as the narrative progresses. However, in *LotR*, the scale of the fictional world presented by the text is vastly expanded, and the stakes of Frodo’s task are much higher.

But who or what are hobbits, according to *LotR*? A primary distinguishing feature amongst the creatures of Middle-earth, emphasized more in *LotR* than in *The Hobbit*, is the possession of magical skills, which hobbits and humans seem to lack. With magic I am referring to what Tolkien describes as “the ‘mortal’ use of the word”, in line with what hobbits and humans may perceive as such (*Letters* 199). Tolkien, however, marks a distinction between “magia” and “goeteia”, which may be good or evil depending on the use they are put to (*Letters* 199).⁴ Beings like elves and wizards use “magia” to produce real results for beneficent purposes and “their goetic effects are entirely artistic and not intended to deceive” (*Letters* 200). In turn, the Enemy’s use of magic is that of a magician who goes “in for machinery”, with power as their main motivation (*Letters* 200). Hobbits thus possess special qualities that, from a mortal’s perspective, blur the boundaries between the mundane and the magic, such as “the art of disappearing swiftly and silently” as well as a longer lifespan than human beings, but the “Prologue” insists that “Hobbits have never, in fact, studied magic of any kind, and their elusiveness is due solely to professional skill” (*FR* 2). Likewise, humans are not born with magic as “an inherent power” but can become sorcerers, and those who are descendants of Númenor – like Aragorn – can wield magical objects such

⁴ See also *Letters* 445. Tolkien also differentiates “enchantment” as artistic sub-creation from “Magic”, which “produces or pretends to produce, an alteration in the Primary World ... it is not an art but a technique; its desire is power in this world, domination of things and wills” (*OFS* 143).

as the *palantíri* and have a much longer life span than the average mortal human (*Letters* 200). The text does not depict dwarves using magic, but describes objects made by them as “obviously magical” (*FR* 1.I.35). In comparison to *The Hobbit* – in which magic is portrayed in Gandalf’s fireworks and the transformation of pinecones into makeshift grenades, in addition to the Ring’s powers – *LotR* presents more varied forms of magic, from the Morgul-knife that injures Frodo on Weathertop to Galadriel’s Mirror, and yet the execution of magic does not dominate the plot. Instead, from the hobbit-centric view that *LotR* is told, magic is acknowledged as something real but nevertheless mysterious, *queer*: a power that very few in Middle-earth are capable of fully understanding and using. This has led to the impression amongst humans and hobbits that those who wield magic, like elves and wizards, should either be viewed with suspicion – for the Dark Lord also uses magic – or left alone. Those who wield magic are perceived as Other or should be othered because magic is dangerous, not “natural”. Before entering Lothlórien, Boromir is wary of going into “the Golden Wood”, for “it is said that few come out who once go in; and of that few none have escaped unscathed” (*FR* 2.VI.440). A similar opinion is voiced by Éomer: “Few escape her [Galadriel’s] nets, they say ... But if you have her favour, then you also are net-weaver and sorcerers, maybe” (*TT* 3.II.462). Galadriel is very much aware of these opinions, of the distrust and even fear that the idea of magic produces as she says to Sam: “I do not understand clearly what they mean [by magic]; and they seem to use the same word of the deceits of the Enemy” (*FR* 2.VII.471).⁵

Bilbo and Frodo Baggins’ open association with beings, practices, and situations considered odd and “magical” is crucial to their positioning as *queer* in *LotR*. In the chapter dedicated to *The Hobbit*, this thesis explored Bilbo’s inner struggle between his Took and Baggins sides, as well as his oscillation between embodying a respectable hobbit or a queer one, in addition to other potential identities, such as that of a thief or master burglar. Bilbo’s journey can thus be described as a transformation of the self that then leads him to reconfigure his identity upon his return to Bag End. Bilbo becomes as a queer Other who mediates between hobbit normativity and Otherness. At the time of the events narrated in *LotR*, the Baggins’ home, Bag End, is perceived as “a queer place, and its folk are queerer” (*FR* 1.I.31). Bilbo’s reputation as a queer individual dates back to his departure from and return to the Shire many years ago, as well as his perceived wealth and unnaturally youthful appearance (*FR* 1.I.27). However, it is his mysterious and sudden disappearance from his own 111th birthday party that finalises his identification in the Shire’s popular imagination

⁵ Tolkien acknowledges that throughout *LotR* he “has not used the word ‘magic’ consistently, and indeed the Elven-queen Galadriel is obliged to remonstrate with the Hobbits on their confused use of the word both for the devices and operations of the Enemy” (*Letters* 146).

as either “Mad Baggins, who used to vanish with a bang and a flash and reappear with bags of jewels and gold”, or an unfortunate and foolish individual who “had at last gone quite mad, and had run off into the Blue” thanks to Gandalf (*FR* 1.II.54). Similar to Bilbo before him, Frodo’s queerness is linked in the first instance to his familial connections not only to Bilbo, but also to Buckland, whose inhabitants – the Brandybucks – are perceived by folk in the Shire as strange for living in the shadow of the ominous Old Forest and meddling with boats – Frodo becomes an orphan after his parents drown.⁶ His perceived oddity persists thanks to his enduring – although less intense – friendship with Gandalf and his refusal to declare Bilbo dead, whilst practically taking over Bilbo’s former lifestyle.

The text gestures towards an essential divide perceived by the hobbit community, particularly in the Shire, between a “proper” hobbit culture and worldview – a hobbit “us” – and the Other: the outside world, beyond the borders known to these hobbits from which the strange, unfamiliar, and queer seems to come from. This is expressed at a micro-level, as Hobbiton-folk consider hobbits who live beyond their borders as either queer – for example, the Brandybucks in Buckland – or “dull and uncouth” Outsiders, such as the hobbits of Bree (*FR* 1.IX,196). The macro-level is presented by the third part of the “Prologue”, “Ordering of the Shire”, in which the editor/translator explains that a certain number of Shirriffs, “the name the Hobbits gave to their police, or the nearest equivalent that they possessed ... was employed to ‘beat the bounds’, and to see that Outsiders of any kind, great or small, did not make themselves a nuisance” (*FR* 13). The text then explains how, at the time of the events narrated, the Bounders – the special subdivision of Shirriffs mentioned before – “had been greatly increased. There were many reports and complaints of strange persons and creatures prowling about the borders, or over them” and frames it as a symptom of the unrest to come (*FR* 13). The narrative thus exposes a tension between different circles of Otherness and a fear of the Other coupled with Bilbo and Frodo’s status as queer Others. This fear of the Other is manifested as a form of xenophobia both caused by and producing further insularity – seemingly typical of this hobbit community that identifies Otherness with a potential threat and even evil.

This xenophobia is, however, not limited to the Shire or hobbits in particular, as can be observed by the ambiguous relationship between Bree and the outside world. On the one hand, humans and hobbits have a congenial relationship in Bree; the text remarks that “nowhere else in the world was this peculiar (but excellent) arrangement to be found” (*FR* 1.IX.196). Moreover, Bree is also an exception to xenophobia amongst humans, for “the

⁶ Speculation surrounding the conditions in which Frodo’s parents died – “I heard she [Frodo’s mother, Primula Brandybuck] pushed him [Drogo Baggins, Frodo’s father] in, and he pulled her in after him” – further enhances the aura of queerness surrounding Frodo (*FR* 1.I.30).

Men of Bree ... were more friendly and familiar with Hobbits, Dwarves, Elves, and other inhabitants of the world about them than was (or is) usual with Big People” (FR 1.IX.195). But this does not mean that Bree’s community does not practice the othering of different people. The same townsfolk who ostracise the Rangers react uneasily at the prospect of taking “a large number of strangers into their little land” (FR 1.IX.204). What underscores this tension is the physical description of the Other who predicts the migration of people to the North: “a squint-eyed ill-favoured fellow ... foretelling that more and more people would be coming north in the near future. ‘If room isn’t found for them, they’ll find it for themselves. They’ve a right to live, same as other folk,’ he said loudly” (FR 1.IX.204). The text depicts an Other, constructed according to Orientalist tropes, declaring their right to exist and move before a group of people who are not indifferent, but hesitant in the face of this change.⁷

If hobbits like Bilbo and Frodo are considered queer, it is not solely due to their familial history, but also due to the communion they hold with Others – such as a wizards – and the transgressions they enact by vouching for and venturing into the unknown: a crossing of the Shire’s borders both physically and mentally. To quote Jane Chance,

Tolkien’s narrative in the first three books of *The Lord of the Rings* moves his central characters gradually, in the first book from the Shire and Hobbiton outward to Bucklebury, Buckland, the Old Forest, Tom Bombadil’s house, the Barrow-downs, Bree, and Weathertop; in the second book, to Rivendell, Moria, Lothlórien, and the Great River, when the company of the Fellowship splits; and in the third book to Fangorn, Rohan, Helm’s Deep, and Isengard. From what seems the safety and familiarity of home and homeliness ... the constant change of setting gradually becomes darker and more ominous, alternating between places of danger and threat of violence and places of rescue and harbor. (*Self* 151)

The movement traced by the hobbit protagonists within the text is also a transition from the self and sameness of the Shire and Hobbiton, to what is unknown, Other. Bilbo and Frodo, who have become acquainted with different forms of Otherness, are at the same time painfully aware of what they consider the obtuse mentality of their families and neighbours.⁸ Disagreement with this attitude is one of the reasons why Bilbo mocks his relatives at his birthday with his disappearance – by leaving the Shire in the queerest way possible. Frodo, on the other hand, is torn between feeling that the Shire’s inhabitants are “too stupid and dull for words ... an earthquake or an invasion of dragons might be good for them” and having

⁷ I refer here to Mercury Natis’s presentation on Orientalism in *LotR* (2023).

⁸ In his letters, Tolkien states that hobbits “are made *small* ... partly to exhibit the pettiness of man, plain unimaginative parochial man” (*Letters* 158) and that they “are not a Utopian vision, or recommended as an ideal in their own or any age” (*Letters* 197).

recourse to the ideal of the Shire as a “safe and comfortable” place that represents “a firm foothold” (*FR* 1.II.82). Frodo recognises that behind the Shire’s obtuse insularity and naivety, there are innocent and flawed beings who have the right to remain free and at peace; to have a home.

These tensions thus contextualise Hamfast Gamgee’s – Samwise Gamgee’s father, better known as the Gaffer – attempt to mediate between the Baggins’ queerness and sceptical Shire-dwellers in a conversation at the beginning of the narrative. This conversation also informs the reader about expectations and norms within hobbit-society and, indirectly, their association to class. In addition to dispelling rumours about Bilbo, the Gaffer counters the image of Bilbo’s queerness by attesting to his honourable character: “a very nice well-spoken gentlehobbit is Mr. Bilbo” (*FR* 1.I.28); “Mr. Bilbo never did a kinder deed than when he brought the lad [Frodo] back to live among decent folk” (*FR* 1.I.30). As Shippey indicates, the Gaffer is “careful to give both title and forename ... being both familiar and respectful” to Bilbo (“Noblesse” 288). As a “gentlehobbit”, Bilbo is the equivalent of a gentleman who belongs to a higher economic class along with the Took and the Brandybuck families (Shippey, “Noblesse Oblige” 288). The Gamgees, on the other hand, belong to a “very clear lower class”, and the Gaffer as such is readily aware of the implications of associating with the queer Baggins family (Shippey, “Noblesse Oblige” 290). He therefore reminds both his listeners and the reader where common hobbit-sense lies and the place a hobbit, especially one of the lower class like Sam, ought to keep: “*Elves and Dragons!* I says to him [Sam]. *Cabbages and potatoes are better for me and you. Don’t go getting mixed up in the business of your betters, or you’ll land in trouble too big for you*” (*FR* 1.I.31). The idea that the queer and magical is no matter for an ordinary hobbit is further enforced by the opinion the hobbit community holds of the Baggins’ association with elves and Gandalf. After Bilbo’s party, the latter is labelled “a nuisance and a disturber of the peace” (*FR* 1.II.53), and years later it is suggested that Frodo’s departure from the Shire was part of the wizard’s “dark and yet unrevealed plot” (*FR* 1.III.87). As this conversation takes place, “strange things” are “happening in the world outside”: beings viewed by hobbits as queer Others – dwarves and elves – openly cross the Shire’s borders, whispers of “legends of the dark past” are uttered (*FR* 1.II.57). Otherness thus begins to make an open intrusion into the hobbits’ world.

But despite beginning by establishing the parameters of what hobbit society considers queer and reprehensible, *LotR* later emphasises that hobbits *in general* – not just the Bagginses and their associates – are for the most part strange and even unknown to different inhabitants of Middle-earth. That is, for beings such as the ents, the populations of

Gondor and Rohan, and certain elves, *all hobbits are queer Others*.⁹ As Merry and Pippin meet Treebeard for the first time, Treebeard asks: “What are *you*, I wonder? I cannot place you. You do not seem to come in the old lists that I learned when I was young. But that was a long, long time ago, and they may have made new lists” (*TT* 3.IV.604). Later on, as Théoden meets the same hobbits, he identifies them with the fabled Halflings or Holbytlan, who are said to “dwell in holes in sand-dunes. But there are no legends of their deeds, for it is said that they do little, and avoid the sight of men” (*TT* 3.VIII.727).¹⁰ Even for those like Gandalf who delve into hobbit-lore, “an obscure branch of knowledge”, hobbits remain in their thoughts, actions, and reactions unknowable in their entirety: “as far as I know there is no power in the world that knows all about hobbits ... Soft as butter they can be, and yet sometimes as tough as old tree-roots. I think it is likely that some would resist the Rings far longer than most of the Wise would believe” (*FR* 1.II.64). For the purposes of the narrative’s plot, the unknowability of hobbits, their Otherness, is crucial in the attempt to destroy the One Ring:

Hobbits had, in fact lived quietly in Middle-earth for many long years before other folk became even aware of them. And the world being after all full of strange creatures beyond count, these little people seemed of very little importance. But in the days of Bilbo and of Frodo his heir, they suddenly became, by no wish of their own, both important and renowned, and troubled the counsels of the Wise and the Great. (*FR* 3)

These reactions to and descriptions of the existence of hobbits point towards a relative seclusion enjoyed by hobbit populations at least until the end of the Third Age in Middle-earth.

Although their geographic isolation seems to be one of the roots of their strangeness, the “Prologue” of *LotR* – as opposed to the narrator in *The Hobbit* – takes on the task of introducing hobbits to the reader in a manner that suggests both a proximity and distance via physical and cultural traits. In order to describe hobbits physically, the “Prologue” differentiates hobbits from dwarves, for although they could be considered “little people”, hobbits are “less stout and stocky” and are of an average height range “between two and four feet of our measure”, like that of human children and early adolescents (*FR* 2).¹¹ The

⁹ Even the inhabitants of Bree are unaccustomed to Shire-hobbits, also calling them “Outsiders” with a capital O, a label that Barliman Butterbur applies to Frodo and his companions and then apologises for. Later on, Butterbur describes Frodo and his friends as behaving “very queer all the time they were here: wilful you might say” (*FR* 2.II.343).

¹⁰ See also *TT* 3.II.565. The language used here is very similar to the opinion voiced by Ted Sandyman (*FR* 1.II.58).

¹¹ When describing Merry and Pippin to Éomer and his *éored*, Aragorn says “They would be small, only children to your eyes, unshod but clad in grey” (*TT* 3.II.565).

“Prologue”, however, introduces subtle elements of difference between humans and hobbits in the portrayal of the latter through, for instance, the description of hobbit feet: “they [hobbits] seldom wore shoes, since their feet had tough leathery soles and were clad in a thick curling hair, much like the hair of their heads, which was commonly brown” (*FR* 2). The claim that hobbits *are* very much human and yet *different* from humans is finally reinforced by the following statement: “It is plain indeed that in spite of later *estrangement* Hobbits are relatives of ours: far nearer to us than Elves, or even than Dwarves. Of old they spoke the languages of Men, after their own fashion, and liked and disliked much the same things as Men did. But what exactly our relationship is can no longer be discovered” (*FR* 2-3, emphasis added).¹² In his 1951 letter to Milton Waldman, Tolkien indeed specifies that “Hobbits are, of course, really meant to be a branch of the specifically human race (not Elves or Dwarves)” (*Letters* 158).¹³

As for cultural traits manifested through language, Deidre Dawson contends that “in a similar manner to Lévinas’s concept of language as the primary manifestation of absolute otherness between individuals”, language “makes each people” of Middle-earth “unique” and “defines their otherness in relation to other peoples” (186).¹⁴ Taking into consideration that Tolkien positions himself as having translated *LotR* “from Westron or Common Speech ... into English equivalents”, hobbits are unique and different from other inhabitants of Middle-earth because their use of Westron is closer to the expression of Tolkien’s contemporary readers (*RK* Appendix E.I.1461). Hobbit speech, even after the manner of the Gaffer, feels more recognisably modern than the speech of other human populations of Middle-earth, such as the Rangers of Ithilien, who use “the Common speech, but after the manner of older days” and “the elven-tongue” (*TT* 4.IV.861). The Rangers use expressions such as “’twill” (*TT* 4.IV.858) or “’tis” (*TT* 4.IV.859) in their everyday communication. Hobbits are therefore linguistically near enough for humans from the Primary World to find elements of identification both intra- and extradiegetically, but far enough so that in both cases they may still be considered Other – not exactly *us* – thus remaining at times ambiguous or wholly unknowable.

In addition to their physicality and language, the “Prologue” highlights the importance of corporeal pleasure within hobbit culture – as opposed to intellectual pleasure: hobbits are a “merry folk”, with faces “good-natured rather than beautiful, broad, bright-eyed and read cheeked, with mouths apt to laughter, and to eating and drinking” (*FR* 2). The

¹² It might therefore come as no surprise that within the text statements such as the expression one Gross “was not considered proper to use of *people*” (*FR* 1.I.36, emphasis added).

¹³ See also *Letters* 406.

¹⁴ However, I do not consider language to be the single distinguishing factor amongst the different peoples of Middle-earth. I problematise this idea in my chapter “Method as Company”.

“Prologue” also notes that “at no time had Hobbits of any kind been warlike and they had never fought among themselves. In olden days, they had of course, been often obliged to fight to maintain themselves in a hard world; but in Bilbo’s time that was very ancient history” (*FR* 7). As anticipated by Bilbo in *The Hobbit*, combat and skills related to martial prowess do not feature prominently if at all in the hobbits’ world during the Third Age. This difference in *modus vivendi* further distances hobbits from the Dúnedain, the Rohirrim, and the soldiers of Gondor in a world that prioritises the intervention of human warriors and rulers given the imminence of war with Mordor.¹⁵ With the exception of Éowyn – who must disguise herself as a man in order to make it to the battlefield – these warriors and rulers are men who are chiefly portrayed with the masculine features of heroic figures from medieval legend and epics. Hobbits, in turn, are characterised by their love for “peace and quiet and good tilled earth: a well-ordered and well-farmed countryside was their favourite haunt” (*FR* 1). Their love and appreciation of domesticity also implies that male hobbits take on activities traditionally assigned to women, such as cooking, cleaning, and running baths (Craig 15). Whereas David M. Craig argues that “the definition of masculinity” in hobbit culture “is necessarily shifted because of the absence of women”, I contend that whether female or male, hobbits are feminine characters (15). Their femininity comes with the full recognition that both femininity as a characteristic and the hobbits’ ignorance of war and its implications – which might also be found in the average reader of *LotR* of the 21st century – does not equal an incapacity to react to this aspect of existence. As the “Prologue” states, hobbits were:

if it came to it, difficult to daunt or to kill; and they were, perhaps, so unwearingly fond of good things not least because they could, when put to it, do without them, and could survive rough handling by grief, foe, or weather in a way that astonished those who did not know them well and looked no further than their bellies and their well-fed faces. Though slow to quarrel, and for sport killing nothing that lived, they were doughty at bay, and at need could still handle arms. (*FR* 7)

Thus, at first glance, hobbits occupy a seemingly paradoxical position within the narrative: *LotR* is a hobbit-centric story, with the idea of self constructed by the text through its hobbit characters, which simultaneously positions hobbits as both its protagonists and as Other. Because the wider reaches of Middle-earth are either only vaguely familiar to hobbits through the transmission of lore and knowledge, or are entirely foreign; and because of their cultural and physical similarities, hobbits and readers walk hand in hand in the exploration

¹⁵ This does not mean, however, humans in *LotR* do not enjoy the same things, but rather this is not its focus when presenting human characters.

of this fictional world as the plot progresses. For this reason, Farah Mendlesohn describes *LotR* as being a portal-quest fantasy (2). Frodo (and Bilbo) Baggins, Meriadoc Brandybuck, Samwise Gamgee, and Peregrin Took, as queer, feminine, and earthy hobbits, journey across Middle-earth in the service of the Other. Their narrative trajectories bring them into contact with different forms of Otherness, encounters which mould their ethical responses and choices, culminating in the destruction of the One Ring. These encounters and their consequences demonstrate the spectrum of possibilities manifested by the relationship between the self and the Other, from the impossibility of empathy to the bridging of gaps that separate them.

Frodo, self, and (his queer) Otherness

In what follows, I will analyse Frodo as a protagonist who embodies the tension between the self and the Other, exploring how his multiple encounters with different Others serve as a preparation for his meeting face-to-face with Gollum. Frodo begins his narrative trajectory by mirroring several of Bilbo's experiences during the first stages of his trip to the Lonely Mountain. Frodo is another reluctant hero, at first torn between the wish to remain at peace in the Shire, constitutive of his sense of self, and the "regret that he had not gone with Bilbo ... He found himself wondering at times, especially in autumn, about the wild lands, and strange visions of mountains that he had never seen came into his dreams" (*FR* 1.II.56). These feelings intensify around Frodo's 50th birthday, for like Bilbo before him, Frodo is a bachelor who feels a calling that propels him forth into the world, to no longer remain the same: "he looked at maps, and wondered what lay beyond their edges: maps made in the Shire showed mostly white spaces beyond its borders" (*FR* 1.II.57). However, once Bilbo's ring is revealed as Sauron's One Ring, Frodo is forced to accept the ethical responsibility the Ring entails (*FR* 1.II.78). Frodo is compelled to protect the faces known and unknown of the Shire, to protect his relatives and friends, but also beings beyond his likes and dislikes. Frodo must protect the Shire but also Middle-earth and its peoples. He is ethically compelled to serve an Other who is unaware of the danger they are in. After Frodo laments the finding of the One Ring and the resurgence of Sauron happening in his time, Gandalf answers that "all we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us" (*FR* 1.II.67). In the face of events that are out of an individual's control, the wizard's words signal a call for ethical action: to choose that which one *can* do, to fulfil the ethical responsibilities that are in each person's hands.

For Frodo, the ethical implications of the One Ring's finding and keeping are surrounded by a series of complex if not contradictory emotions. Simultaneously, this event

intersects with the themes of heroism and the dichotomy of fate and free will. Gandalf theorises in his conversation with Frodo that:

There was more than one power at work, Frodo. The Ring was trying to get back to its master ... So now, when its master was awake once more and sending out his dark thought from Mirkwood, it abandoned Gollum. Only to be picked up by the most unlikely person imaginable: Bilbo from the Shire!
Behind that there was something else at work, beyond any design of the Ring-maker. I can put it no plainer than by saying that Bilbo was *meant* to find the Ring, and *not* by its maker. In which case you also were *meant* to have it. And that may be an encouraging thought. (*FR* 1.II.73)

As a wizard, Gandalf knows the powers that work in the world, including an unseen Otherness, different from and even superior to Sauron, that may steer the course of certain events and actions, as depicted in *The Silmarillion*.¹⁶ The interplay of these forces and powers in *LotR* is described by Shippey as “Providential” and is in his opinion “the ‘ideological core’” of the text (“Proverbiality” 317). But even if they do exist, they have not played a transparent role in Frodo’s life experience up until the finding of the One Ring, nor does this possibility offer him initial consolation, for he still asks “Why did it come to me? Why was I chosen?” (*FR* 1.II.80). Even if Frodo was chosen, it is he who, in turn, must freely choose to bear the Ring away from the Shire. As the text points out, “the decision lies with” Frodo’s free will to take the Ring, first to Rivendell, and later to Mordor (*FR* 1.II.81). The intermingling of fate and free will, as well as the tension between the self and the Other in Frodo’s role as the Ring-bearer, are reemphasized in the conclusion of the Council of Elrond:

A great dread fell on him [Frodo], as if he was awaiting the pronouncement of some doom that he had long foreseen and vainly hoped might after all never be spoken. 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*, 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.’ (*FR* 2.II.352, emphasis added)

This excerpt brings together the multiple threads that make up the relationship between the self and the Other in Frodo. It once more illustrates the struggle between the desire to remain himself, as Frodo Baggins of the Shire – the one who has no wish to leave home and would rather leave to be on holiday with Bilbo – and the desire to be the Other who leaves to fulfil

¹⁶ From a hobbit’s perspective, however, Gandalf’s understanding of the workings of the world is not common knowledge – at least not at this point in the narrative – nor is it part of what could be called hobbit-faith (if there is any). For this reason, I am placing the emphasis on how the hobbit perspective works as the text’s focalisation.

his duty to the Other. Like Bilbo's departure from Bag End years before, Frodo leaving the Shire is an act of transgression that heightens the inner tension between remaining the same and being confirmed as a queer Other: "'But I feel very small, and very uprooted, and well – desperate. The enemy is so strong and terrible' ... He did not tell Gandalf, but as he was speaking a great *desire* to follow Bilbo flamed up in his heart ... It was so strong that it overcame his fear" (*FR* 1.II.82 emphasis added). The "other will" Frodo feels at the end of the Council of Elrond is therefore more than an external force that meant for Frodo to find the Ring. It is a part of Frodo and his free will: it is his queer Other(ness) that acknowledges the plea of the Other who may suffer at the hands of Sauron and accepts his responsibility as an instinctual rather than intellectual act.

The specific nature of Frodo's task requires him to be conscious that he would not only be a queer Other like Bilbo: to bear the Ring means being othered from the Shire in a condition described by Yvette Kisor as exile ("'Poor Sméagol'" 153). Once Frodo discovers that he has the One Ring in his keeping, he realises that he is now "a danger, a danger to all that live near me. I cannot keep the Ring and stay here. I ought to leave Bag End, leave the Shire, leave everything and go away" (*FR* 1.II.82). He is also in danger because he risks becoming a monstrous Other, like Sméagol has become Gollum. By taking the Ring, Frodo exposes his self to being either corrupted or eroded by temptation as part of a sacrifice made in the name of the Other: "I suppose I must keep the Ring and guard it, at least for the present, *whatever it may do to me*" (*FR* 1.II.80, emphasis added). The knowledge of these possibilities contributes to the recurring feelings of isolation and hopelessness that Frodo feels throughout this journey. Over and over again Frodo cannot help but wish "that his fortune had left him in the quiet and beloved Shire" (*FR* 1.XII.246). Thus, the awareness Frodo expresses in relation to his (potential) shortcomings and contradictions as a Ring-bearer evidence a "reflectively grasped and honestly confessed weakness" that "is needed in order to respond obediently to the call of the other" – a description used by Tadie in his analysis of Bilbo in *The Hobbit*, but which is nevertheless apt when considering the implications of Frodo's task (223). Both literally and metaphorically, Frodo does "not know the way": he knows *what* he must do, which is serve the Other, but not necessarily *how* to do it. He comes closer to understanding this through his various encounters with Otherness *en route* to Mordor.

Before the Ring's origin is confirmed, Frodo has evidently known about and met creatures other than hobbits, thanks primarily to Bilbo's experiences, acquaintances, and friendships – Gandalf, dwarves, perhaps even elves. Moreover, the members of the Fellowship of the Ring "represent the other Free Peoples of the World: Elves, Dwarves, and

Men”, and so form a collaboration between different subjectivities (*FR* 2.III.359). But what interests me is how Frodo’s personal, face-to-face encounters with different forms of Otherness deepen the meaning of serving the Other beyond theoretical notions, beyond his knowledge that Sauron must never recover the One Ring and that the Ring must be destroyed. These encounters include the meetings with Gildor Inglorion and Tom Bombadil, as well as the journeys into the Old Forest, the Barrow-downs, and Lothlórien. The point of these encounters is expressed in Aragorn’s correction of Boromir’s belief regarding Lothlórien: “few come out who once go in; and of that few none have escaped unscathed” (*FR* 2.VI.440). Aragorn refutes this claim thus: “Say not *unscathed*, but if you say *unchanged*, then maybe you will speak the truth” (*FR* 2.VI.440). The encounter with Otherness ultimately changes Frodo and prepares him for his meeting with Gollum.

The moments preceding Frodo’s encounter with the elves outside of the Shire and before his entrance to Caras Galadon in Lothlórien are marked by *non-rational* moments (as opposed to irrational), as the senses anticipate the face-to-face encounter before any concrete dialogue or intellectual act. In a movement that resembles Bilbo hearing the dwarvish song “Far Over the Misty Mountains Cold”, Frodo and his companions Sam and Pippin *hear* Gildor’s troop of elves before actually meeting them on the borders of the Shire: they hear “singing in the fair elven-tongue, of which Frodo knew only a little, and the others knew nothing. Yet the sound blending with melody seemed to shape itself *in their thought* into words which they only *partly understood*” (*FR* 1.III.103, emphasis added). The Elvish song about Elbereth Star-kindler does not awaken a Tookish side in Frodo as another song did with Bilbo before him, but it does prepare him for the ineffable, inscrutable dimension of the elves’ Otherness, which Frodo *sees* in Cerin Amroth before meeting Galadriel and Celeborn in the City of the Trees:

It seemed to him that he had stepped through a high window that looked on a *vanished world*. A *light was upon it for which his language had no name*. All that he saw was shapely but the shapes at once clear cut, as if they had been first conceived and drawn at the uncovering of his eyes, and ancient as if they had endured for ever. He saw no colour but those he knew, gold and white and blue and green, but they were fresh and poignant, as if he had at that moment first perceived them and made for them names new and wonderful. (*FR* 2.VI.456, emphasis added)

The ineffable is not in the shapes or colours themselves, which Frodo recognises, but in the quality or light that makes them other-worldly; that indicates their Otherness as touched by elvish enchantment. Through this moment, the text presents Frodo as feeling, experiencing, being within that Otherness – “*inside* a song” – which expands his perception of Middle-earth’s past and accompanies him even after he has left Lothlórien (*FR* 2.VI.457). This

experience heightens Frodo's awareness of the multiple lives and beings interwoven with the Ring and his actions: it is not only his story, but the story of Middle-earth and those within it. Frodo sees Middle-earth anew.

The linguistic component of Frodo's – and the Fellowship's – encounter with the elves exemplifies how different ideas of the self and the Other can enter into a relationship. Despite sharing common ground and a common foe, the different individuals involved evidently belong to different peoples, cultures, and subjectivities, a difference manifested by language. The endeavour to use the language of the Other is, therefore, more than the practical need for communication; it is an in-text example of an attempt to close the gap between the self and the Other. Frodo thanks Gildor for his offer of temporary protection with the phrase “*Elen síla lúmenn' omentielvo*, a star shines on the hour of our meeting” (*FR* 1.III.105). Frodo refers here to the fact that a lucky star has led the hobbits to meet Gildor as they were being followed by Black Riders, which Gildor interprets as more than a chance meeting, thus also alluding to the different powers at work in Middle-earth. Frodo's effort to respond to this Other in the elven language earns him the name “Elf-friend” as a sign of trust, as it is not often that elves have “such delight in strangers ... it is fair to hear the words of the Ancient Speech from the lips of other wanderers in the world” (*FR* 1.III.111). Then, in Lothlórien it is Haldir who makes an effort to communicate in Westron with the members of the Fellowship, as the Galadhrim “seldom use any tongue but our own” (*FR* 2.VI.446). These sentences point to the elves' isolation at the end of the Third Age, which is presented by the text as a form of self-preservation and protection. As Gildor puts it, “the Elves have their own labours and their own sorrows, and they are little concerned with the ways of hobbits, or of any other creatures upon earth. Our paths cross theirs seldom, by chance or purpose” (*FR* 1.III.110). However, a drawback of the elves' solipsism – and the similar insularity of many of the Free Peoples of Middle-earth – is “the estrangement that divides all those who still oppose” Sauron, exemplified through the age-old hostility between the elves and dwarves, which leads to an initial hesitation regarding Gimli's admittance to Lothlórien (*FR* 2.VI.453). Both Gildor's group and the Galadhrim are compelled momentarily to forego their reclusive ways and heed the call of the Other: the hobbits avoiding the Black Riders, and the Fellowship fleeing from the orcs after leaving Moria. For the Galadhrim, this means admitting the Fellowship, and amongst them, a dwarf into their territory (*FR* 2.VI.446). It is therefore significant that in the Lothlórien episode, Galadriel insists on welcoming Gimli by using names from the dwarves' language:¹⁷

¹⁷ For a more in-depth analysis of this moment, see Dawson (2017).

‘Dark is the water of Kheled-zâram, and cold are the springs of Kibil-nâla, and fair were the many-pillared halls of Khazad-dûm in Elder Days before the fall of mighty kings beneath stone.’ She looked upon Gimli, who sat glowering and sad, and she smiled. And the Dwarf, hearing the names given in his own ancient tongue, looked up and met her eyes; and it seemed to him that he looked suddenly into the heart of an enemy and saw there love and understanding. (*FR* 2.VII.463)

Instead of insisting on the historical enmity between elves and dwarves, Galadriel’s words embrace the Other, creating a bond between them as host and guest. Galadriel knows there is a reason why Gimli was chosen as part of the Fellowship and it is possible that, through her love for Lothlórien and the position of elves as exiles in Middle-earth from Valinor, she can understand and appreciate Gimli’s unique ties to and sorrow for the lost Dwarrowdelf: “Do not repent of your welcome to the Dwarf. If our folk had been exiled long and far from Lothlórien, who of the Galadhrim, even Celeborn the Wise, would pass nigh and not wish to look upon their ancient home, though it had become an abode of dragons?” (*FR* 2.VII.463).¹⁸ Galadriel too lost her home once, and will lose it again should the Ring-bearer’s task be fulfilled.

Frodo’s conversations with the elves, especially Gildor and Galadriel, touch upon the responsibility and possessiveness of the self, as well as their impact on the relationship with the Other. These reflections ultimately affect Frodo’s – and the reader’s – understanding of his task. Gildor and Galadriel are both wary of giving concrete advice or guidance to Frodo and his companions as to what Frodo should do or how the Fellowship should accomplish the destruction of the One Ring. Gildor says: “Elves seldom give unguarded advice, for advice is a dangerous gift, even from the wise to the wise, and all courses may run ill. But what would you? You [Frodo] have not told me all concerning yourself; and how then shall I choose better than you?” (*FR* 1.III.110). Galadriel “will not give you [the Fellowship] counsel, saying do this, or do that. For not in doing or contriving, nor in choosing between this course and another, can I avail; but only in knowing what was and is, and in part also what shall be” (*FR* 2.VII.464). This caution regarding giving advice is an ethical act in which a specific subjectivity (or self) respects the Other’s choices as part of their Otherness. Such wariness is not the same as withholding aid, but rather represents a refusal to impose a personal perspective unto an Other. It is from this stance that I interpret Galadriel’s intentions in showing Frodo and Sam the Mirror of Galadriel. The Mirror is a paradoxical object insofar, as a mirror, it would be expected to reflect the image of those who gaze upon it – the self seeing the self – and yet it delivers visions of “things that were, and things that are and things that yet may be”, as if it were a magical window into the known and the unknown,

¹⁸ An echo perhaps of Erebor and Smaug.

the self and something else (*FR* 2.VII.471). If “the Mirror is dangerous as a guide of deeds” (*FR* 2.VII.472) and Galadriel “is not a counsellor” (*FR* 2.VII.473), what are the consequences of this experience for Frodo? By sharing the Mirror’s reflection, Galadriel shows Frodo the import of a mutual experience and strain as Ring-bearers, as those whom the Dark Lord “gropes ever to see”, who feel the temptation of the Ring and its Power (*FR* 2.VII.474). Galadriel’s later refusal to take the Ring signifies that the keeping and the destruction of the One Ring is for Frodo alone to accomplish. If Frodo is to accept this, he must also accept that to be of service to the Other, to prevent Middle-earth from succumbing to Sauron, may simultaneously mean to precipitate the end for other people, like the elves, in the same world he is trying to protect.

Galadriel’s words tie in with Frodo’s concerns about losing the sense of familiarity and safety he once perceived in the Shire, which he voices to Gildor. Gildor, in turn, reminds him that “Others dwelt here before hobbits were; and others will dwell here again when hobbits are no more. The wide world is all about you: you can fence yourselves in, but you cannot for ever fence it out” (*FR* 1.III.109). Gildor’s words gesture towards the relationship an individual or a community may hold with a certain place and the tension between a community’s claim to it and the unavoidable “footstep of Doom”: the incursion of the Other. Although hobbits may seem like the natural inhabitants of the Shire at that current moment in time, as the elves do in Lothlórien, no one can ever truly *possess* these spaces: existence in Middle-earth does not lose its transient quality, even for the immortal elves. It thus becomes, on the one hand, an ethical issue to release the self from the pretension of possession and to acknowledge that the Other cannot be fully controlled or blocked out. On the other lies the following ethical question: what are the boundaries between protecting the self from a threatening Other and allowing the Other to persist in their Otherness? These questions are closely connected to the (potential) loss or absence of a place to be called home and the status of exile, shared by many characters and populations throughout Middle-earth and the *legendarium*, like the elves, the Dúnedain, and Thorin and his group of dwarves in *The Hobbit* (Kisor, “Poor Sméagol” 154). As Gildor introduces himself to Frodo, Sam, and Pippin, he describes himself and his companions as “Exiles ... and we too are now only tarrying here a while, ere we return over the Great Sea” (*FR* 1.II.105). From the hobbits’ perspective, encountering Gildor and the elves of Lothlórien accentuates the contradictory nature of beings that embody immortality and yet hold an impermanent existence on the face of Middle-earth, for they are neither “wanderers or homeless ... they seem to belong here, more even than Hobbits do in the Shire. Whether they’ve made the land, or the land’s made them, it’s hard to say”, and yet they must leave (*FR* 2.VII.469). This condition of exile and

the longing for a lost home is shared by Frodo at multiple points during his quest, from his departure from the Shire, to his staged move to Crickhollow, and finally, to the completion of his task as the Ringbearer, when he realises that his changed and fractured self can no longer feel the Shire as his home.

A “strange creature” that embodies the sense of being at home and yet not laying a claim of possession on a particular space is Tom Bombadil (*FR* 2.II.345). Parallel to the encounter with Gildor, an un-rational instance of song precedes the face-to-face, chance meeting with Bombadil. Tom Bombadil is depicted in his first interaction with Frodo, Sam, and Merry as “a man, or so it seemed . . . he was too large and heavy for a hobbit, if not quite tall enough for one of the Big People, though he made noise enough for one” (*FR* 1.VI.157). “Oldest and fatherless”, Bombadil does not belong to any of the humanoid peoples that inhabit Middle-earth (*FR* 2.II.345). The “enigma” Bombadil represents or the impossibility of classifying him signifies his Otherness (*Letters* 174). In remaining unknowable – much more than many other creatures in Middle-earth – Tom Bombadil shows the hobbits the possibility of (simply) being and taking “delight in things for themselves without reference to yourself” (*Letters* 179). “He is”, Goldberry says (*FR* 1.VI.163). Goldberry describes Tom Bombadil as “Master of the house” (*FR* 1.VI.162) and “Master of wood, water, and hill”, but beings and land do not belong to him (*FR* 1.VI.163). For Tolkien, Bombadil’s mastery resides in having “no fear, and no desire of possession or domination at all. He merely knows and understands about such things as concern him” (*Letters* 192). Tom Bombadil has in fact great power of his own, a power through which he can influence others – such as Old Man Willow – but this power is not in possessing a place or a living creature, for “the trees, the grasses, and all things growing or living in the land each belong to themselves” (*FR* 1.VI.163). He could potentially do away with Old Man Willow and other evil creatures in the Forest, but he does not. Rather, Bombadil represents “the spirit that desires knowledge of other things, their history and nature, *because they are ‘other’* and wholly independent of the enquiring mind” (*Letters* 192). It is through the idea of creatures belonging to themselves, of the Other having an independent existence, and Bombadil’s tales of his coexistence with the forest, of things that were and are, that the hobbits “began to understand the lives of the Forest, apart from themselves, indeed to feel themselves as the strangers where all other things were at home” (*FR* 1.VI.170). Kris Swank argues that “at the beginning of *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien throws his innocent hobbits out into the wide world without knowledge of Middle-earth’s history sufficient enough to appreciate the context and gravity of their quest. Tolkien needed to provide them with a teacher” (189). Consequently, Swank suggests that Bombadil teaches the hobbits “about the great chain of events in which they now find

themselves” (190). As Gildor had anticipated in his conversation with Frodo, through their experiences outside of the Shire the hobbits become more perceptive of the relationship between their existence and that of the Other.

By expanding his understanding of the vastness and complexity of Middle-earth, Frodo’s encounter with different forms of Otherness prepare him for his face-to-face meeting with Gollum. Frodo recognises that his ethical responsibilities and choices become part of a shared (his)tory with the Other. He is increasingly aware of his position of exile, of what it means to care for a home he does not have and may not be able to return to; of being alone without recourse to a sense of safety or consolation.

Frodo, Gollum and Sméagol

This section pertains to the study of Frodo’s encounter with the Other as embodied by Gollum: the complexities surrounding this face-to-face meeting, the creation of an ethical relationship between these two characters, and Frodo’s incipient transformation into the Other. Before Frodo encounters Gollum, he already holds a pre-conceived notion of this Other. This notion is constructed by Frodo’s emotions as he discovers the true nature of Bilbo’s ring – confusion, despair, fear, reluctance – as well as what Frodo can garner from others, such as Bilbo’s recollections, Gandalf’s reconstruction of Gollum’s past, and what is related during the Council of Elrond by Aragorn and Legolas. Frodo rejects Gollum at the beginning of his journey: he finds the possibility of a kinship between hobbits and Gollum “abominable” (*FR* 1.II.71) and states that it is “a pity that Bilbo did not stab the vile creature, when he had a chance!” (*FR* 1.II.78). Frodo’s initial judgement equates Gollum’s wickedness with being “as bad as an Orc, and just an enemy. He deserves death” (*FR* 1.II.78). He is incapable of feeling Bilbo’s pity because, as Gandalf points out, “You [Frodo] have not seen him” (*FR* 1.II.78). Frodo has not seen Gollum’s face.¹⁹ But Frodo’s theoretical knowledge of Gollum – theoretical because it is not based on a first-hand, personal experience – proves in the long run unsustainable as a guide to his ethical choices: “the relation between the same and the other is not always reducible to knowledge of the other by the same, nor even to the *revelation* of the other to the same” (Levinas, *Totality* 28).

In addition to feeling how the One Ring’s power affects him personally, a significant moment that marks a change in Frodo’s consideration of Gollum is witnessing the change produced in Bilbo by his desire for the Ring. In Rivendell, as Bilbo asks Frodo to show him the Ring, Frodo cannot help but feeling “a strange reluctance” (*FR* 2.I.302). The text leaves

¹⁹ And neither has the reader, unless they have read *The Hobbit*, which, nevertheless, does not present a complete picture of Gollum.

Frodo's hesitation open to interpretation: it may be that he anticipates Bilbo's transformation or that Frodo already feels a claim to the Ring. The revelation soon follows:

Slowly he drew it out. Bilbo put out his hands. But Frodo quickly drew back the Ring. To his distress and amazement *he found that he was no longer looking at Bilbo*; a shadow seemed to have fallen between them, and through it he found himself eyeing a little wrinkled creature with a hungry face and bony groping hands. *He felt a desire to strike him.* (FR 2.I.302, emphasis added)

The change in Bilbo holds multiple implications. It underscores the tension between wanting to attack the Other and the staying of the hand. Simultaneously, his transformation foreshadows Frodo's encounter with Gollum, for both Bilbo and Gollum exhibit similar behavioural patterns, such as feelings of paranoia, reluctance or refusal to part with the Ring, and the usage of the word "precious". Bilbo has already declared that "it [the One Ring] is mine, I tell you. My own. My Precious. Yes, my precious" (FR 1.I.44).²⁰ Although Bilbo and Gollum never meet again and are not seen side by side in *LotR*, the bodily dimension they begin to share *reveals* an equal, unappeasable desire for the Ring. Bilbo's reaction to the presence of the Ring is, at the same time, a "projection" of Frodo's growing "inner darkness, his own desire" (Flieger, "The Jewels" 75). In the lead up to the Ring's destruction in Mount Doom, Frodo's own hand will be the one to grope the Ring: Frodo will become the Other who is Gollum and who Bilbo has become in this moment. In Frodo the Other shall be revealed.

After the Fellowship leaves Rivendell, Frodo becomes aware that Gollum has followed them through Moria, to the borders of Lothlórien, along the Anduin, and that Gollum continued to follow him and Sam through the Ephel Dúath. The first moment of Frodo's face-to-face encounter with Gollum is marked by the need to protect Sam and himself from the threat that is the abject Other. Frodo threatens Gollum's life – "This is Sting. You have seen it before once upon a time. Let go, or you'll feel it this time! I'll cut your throat!" (TT 4.I.802) – but then spares him. The text emphasises Frodo's feelings of pity and mercy towards Gollum as he finally witnesses this Other's utter state of wretchedness by reproducing in italics conversation fragments between Gandalf and Frodo included in "A Shadow of the Past", in which Bilbo's mercy towards Gollum is discussed. As these memories inundate Frodo's reflections, he chooses to follow Bilbo's example and spare Gollum: "Very well,' [Frodo] answered aloud, lowering his sword. 'But still I am

²⁰ During the Council of Elrond, Gandalf reveals that it was most likely Isildur who first described the One as "*precious to me, though I buy it with great pain*" (FR 2.II.329).

afraid. And yet, as you see, I will not touch the creature. For now that I see him, I do pity him” (TT 4.I.803).

Frodo’s words, and his subsequent actions up until reaching Cirith Ungol, exemplify how his heeding the call of Gollum as the Other means fulfilling an ethical responsibility that also puts Frodo at risk. Benjamin Saxton observes that “through Frodo’s relation to Gollum, he also creates an open and ongoing *obligation to respond* to those who, at first glance, might be brushed aside in the interest of reason or convenience” (176, emphasis added). That is, even though Gollum “is only a chance companion” and Frodo is truly “not answerable for him”, and even though Gollum “is only a wretched gangrel creature”, he is for the moment Frodo’s responsibility: “I [Frodo] have him [Gollum] under my care for a while” (TT 4.IV.860). But as the Other who would suffer should Sauron recover the One Ring is also Frodo’s responsibility, Frodo must ensure that Gollum cannot cause further harm, as Gollum is still “full of wickedness and mischief” (TT 4.I.803). At the same time, if Frodo is ever to reach Mordor, he must place himself in Gollum’s hands although he is well aware that Gollum may betray him: “I will trust you once more. Indeed it seems that I must do so, and that it is my fate to receive help from you, where I least looked for it, and your fate to help me whom you long pursued with evil purpose” (TT 4.III.836). In doing so, Frodo accepts that their encounter is more than the sum of their individual actions, as they were perhaps fated to meet each other: just as Frodo was *meant* to bear the Ring, Frodo was also meant to encounter Gollum. Consequently, Flieger argues that if Frodo was fated to find the One Ring, then Gollum was “fated to follow his one desire” (“The Music” 34). This notion adds further nuance to Gollum’s role in the text as the abject Other, for his abjectness becomes key in the destruction of the One Ring. Julia Kristeva refers to the abject and abjection as

This massive and abrupt irruption of a strangeness which, if it was familiar to me in an opaque and forgotten life, now importunes me as radically separated and repugnant. Not me. Not that. But not nothing either. A ‘something’ that I do not recognise as a thing. A whole lot of nonsense which has nothing insignificant and which crushes me. At the border of inexistence and hallucination, of a reality which, if I recognise it, annihilates me. Here the abject and abjection are my safety railings. (126)

Whereas *The Hobbit* gives little to no concrete information on Gollum’s past and real name, *LotR* offers a fuller recollection of this figure’s life and character, beginning with the fourth

section of the “Prologue”, ‘Of the Finding of the Ring’.²¹ It describes Gollum very much in the same terms as *The Hobbit*, and as Frodo would see Bilbo when the latter catches sight of the Ring in Rivendell: as “a loathsome *little creature*”, with “his large flat feet, peering with pale luminous eyes and catching blind fish with his *long fingers*”, eating “any living thing” (*FR* 15, emphasis added). His earlier years, his transformation from Sméagol to Gollum via the Ring, meeting Bilbo, and his activities up until Frodo’s conversation with Gandalf in the Shire are described in the second chapter of *LotR*, albeit voiced by the wizard and not Gollum himself. From *The Two Towers* onwards, the text explores Gollum and Sméagol’s fraught coexistence. *LotR* thus provides two distinct and yet intertwined perspectives from which to observe and understand Gollum. Gollum stands as Frodo’s – and Bilbo’s – *abject Other*, as that Other Frodo would become or that would emanate from himself should the Ring gain complete control. Gollum is positioned as Frodo and Bilbo’s abject Other because he is and is not them. He remains at a distance, and yet fully present in what remains familiar and recognisable, for “we recognise the potential of seeing Gollum within Frodo and, through this understanding, Gollum ceases to be simply Other and separate” (Brown 68). He makes himself known through the aversion and horror he produces as the Other who is to (be)come.²² Frodo can understand this thanks to his experience of the Other and his experience in desiring the One Ring. But, as an abject Other, Gollum does not stand as Frodo’s opposite. Instead, he functions in the text as an “*apposite*, meaning we are supposed to view the two characters side by side” (Stratynier 81). This apposite is a shadow or wraith of the self, “the ominous hint of danger to each character should they become corrupted”, who causes both pity and horror (Stratynier 82). At the same time, the text affords the possibility of witnessing Gollum as Sméagol’s complex Other, for Gollum emanates or results from Sméagol, and thus they are bound to one another despite having distinct – although not entirely different – selfhoods. It is therefore worth asking if Frodo’s attempt to rehabilitate Gollum does not end up violating Gollum’s Otherness and expecting the return of Sméagol, a selfhood seemingly closer to Frodo’s own – the return of the same: “but how can the same, produced as egoism, enter into relationship with an other without immediately divesting it of its alterity?” (Levinas, *Totality* 38). I argue that the text does not give a definite answer to this question, but rather, through Gollum’s triumph over Sméagol, reaffirms the irreducible alterity of the Other regardless of any expectations or actions.

²¹ Kisor elaborates an inventory of scholars who have used both Sméagol and Gollum (separated by a dash or hyphen and in different order) as the full name of this character (“Poor Sméagol” 158). For her part, Kisor refers to this character throughout her essay as Gollum. For the purposes of this thesis, I use either Gollum or Sméagol depending on who is being encountered by the reader, developing actions or speaking within the narrative, with the understanding, however, that they cannot truly be partitioned into distinct entities.

²² See also Brown 105.

The Story of a Wretch

Whereas the previous section highlighted the encounter between Frodo and Gollum from Frodo's view and Gollum's position in relation to Frodo, this is an exploration of Gollum's selfhood: his history, motivations, and perspective throughout the events depicted in *LotR*. This includes Gollum's relationship with his self as Sméagol, with Frodo, and, ultimately, with the world around him. In "A Shadow of the Past" Gandalf shares with Frodo his reconstruction of Gollum's past and his movements after leaving the Misty Mountains in pursuit of his lost Precious – what Kisor names his second exile – as extrapolated from a series of conversation the wizard held with the creature ("Poor Sméagol" 157).²³ Gandalf reveals to both Frodo and the reader how Gollum was captured and interrogated by Sauron, and then released so that he could continue his mission to find the One Ring, consequently leading the Dark Lord to this Ring should Gollum find it. Gandalf's retelling of Gollum's past also allows a certain degree of insight into Gollum's subjectivity, and the similarities that he relates between Gollum and hobbits seem to be confirmed by the resurfacing of Sméagol – for example when he remembers how he and his kin "used to tell lots of tales in the evening, sitting by the banks of the Great River, in the willow-lands", and then proceeds to "weep and mutter" (*TT* 4.III.838). However, Gandalf's account gives very little information as to Gollum's bodily reality, the physical being Frodo will encounter later, other than what can be inferred through a similarity with the Hobbit-branch of the Stoors and the fact that his abject corporeal aspect makes Gandalf share Bilbo's immense pity for Gollum. As mentioned before, an inkling of this abject appearance is manifested by Bilbo thanks to the pernicious influence of the Ring. If, as Shippey says, "Gollum has only just been saved" from the fate of becoming a wraith by losing the Ring in the Misty Mountains, Bilbo finds himself at the beginning of *The Fellowship of the Ring* in similar circumstances (*Author* 75). In both cases, the Ring starves the self until it is lost, until the only things left are the ravenous impulses generated by the desire itself, which make Bilbo and Gollum – and eventually Frodo – so similar in speech, thought, and action. Through the power of the Ring, they become each Other – or opposites rather than opposites.

Despite sharing a common background and desire for the Ring, the context from which this desire springs forth varies greatly for all three characters. As discussed in the former chapter, Bilbo's first impression of the Ring was that it was a useful object that could

²³ Shippey compares the role of this chapter with "The Council of Elrond": "both Books I and II, in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, contain a second chapter which is largely an explanation of the past building up to decisions about the future – and ending with much the same decision, that Frodo has to take the Ring to the Cracks of Doom" (*Author* 51). At the same time, the Council represents a moment in which different beings, perspectives, and embodiments of the self come together in a face-to-face encounter (see Shippey, *Author* 69-73).

help him find his way back to his dwarvish companions to complete their mission – which is to recover a treasure that is not even Bilbo’s. In *The Hobbit*, Bilbo does not desire the Ring for himself (nor does he have any notion of the power it contains) but he is willing to use it whenever it comes in handy. As Gandalf suggests, Bilbo’s initial act of mercy towards an enemy as he took custody of the Ring, followed by his use of it to save his life and that of the Other from imminent danger, seems to have insulated him from the Ring’s evil. In an “exact inverse parallel”, as Stratyner rightfully points out, Sméagol obtains the Ring by murdering Déagol, an act which is both a refusal of Sméagol’s responsibility towards the Other and the prioritization of a desire of the self that will become all-consuming (83).²⁴ Sméagol’s further use of the Ring is a continuous repetition of this principle, for he uses the Ring “to find out secrets, and he put his knowledge to crooked and malicious uses. He became sharp-eyed and keen eared for all that was hurtful” (*FR* 1.II.70). These actions lead him to the corruption of his self until he becomes Gollum, an Other “haunted” by the memory of his first murder and who is eventually expelled from his community (*FR* 1.II.74). Frodo’s inheritance of the Ring, on the other hand, does not instantaneously produce a desire for the object, but rather this occurs over an extended period of time due to a voluntary exposure. In Frodo’s case, to be exposed to and consequently tempted by the Ring is an unfortunate by-product of the hobbit heeding his responsibility towards the Other.

Gollum’s departure from his subterranean abode with a specific objective in mind is the obverse of Frodo’s departure from Bag End: Gollum desires the One Ring, which he understands as his, and leaves to regain it. Frodo, who has inherited the Ring by no action of his own, leaves to lose it. Sauron’s intention to let Gollum find the One Ring attests to his knowledge of the Ring’s power over mortals and to an accurate interpretation of Gollum’s desire. The Ring is “so powerful that in the end it would utterly overcome anyone of mortal race who possessed it. It would possess him” (*FR* 1.II.61). The Ring becomes the only point of reference Gollum has for his self – he is defined by the Precious’ presence or absence. Losing it means to lose a sense of his selfhood: “Poor, poor Sméagol, he went away long ago. They took his Precious, and he’s lost now” (*TT* 4.II.805). Consequently, recovering the Ring means recovering some semblance of his self, and punishing those who have robbed him of his Precious means punishing those who have deprived him of what is left of his self. Frodo suggests that ““Perhaps we’ll find him again, if you come with us””, most likely referring to Sméagol, not only because Frodo already has the Ring, but because Frodo has

²⁴ Stratyner suggests that Gollum “is essentially a fratricide” (84), a reading Kisor agrees with as she identifies Gollum as a Cain-like figure in the murder of Déagol (““Poor Sméagol”” 155). Kisor further adds: “the idea of exile as punishment for crime, particularly murder of a close kin, is echoed as well in the exile of the Noldor from Valinor after the kin-slaying at Alqualondë” (““Poor Sméagol”” 155).

become invested in Gollum and already senses a change in him. This change is precisely what Sauron fails to consider, for although he rightly assesses the extent of Gollum's desire, he is blind to the enduring consequences of Bilbo's encounter with Gollum and the resurfacing of Sméagol as a product of Gollum's encounter with Frodo.

When Frodo finally encounters Gollum in the Eryn Muil, Gollum is equated to "an animal" that "goes on all fours" (Flieger, "Tolkien's Wild Men" 125). Sam describes him as "a nasty crawling spider on a wall" as he climbs down a precipice, and according to the text, his creeping down suggests him having "sticky pads, like some large prowling thing of insect-kind" (*TT* 4.I.800). By contrasting Gollum's seemingly animalistic behaviour and traits with the knowledge of his past and his connection with hobbits, the text highlights how Gollum becomes an "abject figure ... to all intents and purposes abhuman" (Zlosnik 54). Othered and exiled from home, Gollum has been forced to become less human and hobbit-like and more animal or beast-like, which explains his habit of catching wild prey and eating it raw, as well as the way in which "he wormed his way like a maggot into the heart of the hills" (*FR* 1.II.72). The consumption of the Other has become Gollum's main survival strategy. In comparing Gollum's abjectness with Gothic figures like Count Dracula and Mr Hyde, Zlosnik gestures towards a monstrosity that not only produces "repulsion and terror", but also questions "the boundaries of the self" (55). What Zlosnik here names the abject, I identify with an Otherness that, despite originating in a recognisable construction of the self (as a hobbit), becomes antagonistic towards everyone and everything.

Gollum's status as an Other is marked not only by the type of (non)relationships he holds with other creatures, but also by an increasing difficulty in communicating with the world around him. This unintelligibility is manifested in one of Gollum's most striking qualities: his speech patterns, already portrayed in *The Hobbit*. Language is once more a distinctive feature of the Other. Kisor asserts that

Gollum's use of pronouns reveals a separation not only of self from home but of self from self, and as his use of pronouns changes through the course of his journey, one can chart the course of Gollum's changing relationship with the world – and the degree to which he determines that relationship through his use of referential language. ("Poor Sméagol" 155)

As Kisor notes, Gollum first refers to others by using "the nongendered third person pronoun rather than the gendered one: 'it' when 'he' or 'she' would be more appropriate" ("Poor Sméagol" 161). Gandalf quotes him saying "What had it got in its pocket?" he said, 'It wouldn't say, no precious. Little cheat ...'" (*FR* 1.II.75-6). "It" refers to Bilbo, whom Gollum does not acknowledge as a subject or an equal, but rather as an object on which

Gollum wishes to exert violent revenge. In turn, when Gollum does use the third person instead of the second to address his speech partner, it seems “a gesture of exclusion, a refusal to enter into direct relationship with another being” (Kisor, ““Poor Sméagol”” 162). As Gollum pleads for his life, he cries ““Don’t hurt us! Don’t let them hurt us, precious! They won’t hurt us will they, nice little hobbitses? ... We’ll be nice to them, very nice, if they’ll be nice to us, won’t we, yes, yess”” (TT 4.I.802). Gollum referring to himself in the plural indicates a sharing of his identity with Sméagol (and the Ring), while his addressing the Frodo and Sam in the third person constitutes a refusal to encounter the Other face-to-face and acknowledge them through the use of “you”.

A further layer of complexity is added when, in exchange for the mercy shown, Frodo shifts from asking Gollum to asking Sméagol for practical help: “Frodo looked straight into *Gollum’s eyes* which flinched and twisted away. ‘You know that, or you guess well enough, *Sméagol*, ... We are going to Mordor, of course. And you know the way there I believe.’” (TT 4.I.804 emphasis added). Gollum’s memories of his captivity in Mordor in addition to the reminder of his identity lead him closer to Sméagol – his former selfhood – which expresses itself in another shift, this time in Gollum-Sméagol’s speech pattern: ““Leave me alone, *gollum!* You hurt me. O my poor hands, *gollum!* I, we, I don’t want to come back. I can’t find it. I am tired. I, we can’t find it, *gollum, gollum*, no, nowhere” (TT 4.II.804). As Sméagol resurfaces, the verbal expression fluctuates from “he” or “we” to “me” and “I” when referring to himself: when questioned by Frodo if he indeed escaped from Mordor or if he was allowed to leave, Gollum responds “*I* did escape, all by *my* poor self. Indeed *I* was told to seek for the Precious; and *I* have searched and searched, of course, *I* have. But not for the Black One. The Precious was *ours*, it was *mine* I tell you. *I* did escape” (TT 4.III.840-1, emphasis added). This does not go unnoticed by Frodo: “he noted that Gollum used I, and that seemed usually to be a sign, on its rare appearances, that some remnants of old truth and sincerity were for the moment on top” (TT 4.III.841). As observed in *The Hobbit*, the fluctuation between Gollum and Sméagol is further highlighted by a change in their eyes depending on who is speaking: a white light shining through for Sméagol and a “greenish light” (TT 4.II.812) or “glint” for Gollum (TT 4.VIII.936).

As Gollum promises to do what Frodo wants, Sméagol seems to take over – at least momentarily – and say “*Sméagol* will swear on the *Precious*”, an apparently contradictory statement that unites his self with the source of his erosion (TT 4.II.807, emphasis added). The proximity to Sméagol, to the understanding of the self without the Ring and the possibility of fuller interactions with the Other, facilitates a pledge of service to the Frodo. This pledge is demonstrative of how Gollum is situated “at a nexus of fate and free will in

which each act on the other and both act on Gollum” (Flieger, “The Music” 34). Gollum is fated to follow his desire for the One Ring while willingly binding himself to the Other who will bring about – and yet not fulfil – the destruction of the Ring and of himself. Frodo nevertheless reminds Gollum that he should not swear *on* the Precious, but rather *by* it. The *Oxford English Dictionary* differentiates these phrasal verbs as follows: “to swear by” means “to appeal to ... a divine being or sacred object, or something affectedly or trivially substituted therefor [sic] in swearing ... as a form of oath”, which I interpret in connection to the Ring as swearing by the knowledge the characters and readers have of its power and effects. “To swear on”, on the other hand, would mean “to take an oath, symbolically touching or placing the hand on (a sacred object)” and it is this indication of a direct contact, of wearing the Ring on the hand – “All you wish is to see it and *touch it*, if you can, though you know it would drive you mad” – and thus being vulnerable to its effect that makes such a promise dangerous: “But it [the Ring] is more treacherous than you [Sméagol] are. It may twist your words! Beware!” (*TT* 4.I.807, emphasis added). Although the text places Gollum as making the oath – “‘We promises, yes I promise!’ said Gollum” – it is only Sméagol who takes the oath: “I will serve the master of the Precious. Good master, good Sméagol” (*TT* 4.I.808). This, along with a literal interpretation of the oath – should Sméagol become master of the Ring – provides Gollum sufficient space to act against Frodo and betray him.

Thus, what begins from Gollum’s perspective as an effort to satisfy the desires of a destroyed self, and to destroy those who interfere with this desire, is transformed by the restoration of a self once effaced or suppressed by the Ring into an act of service to an Other. This Other, in this case Frodo, is at the same time Gollum’s enemy, an enemy whose desire for the Ring is simultaneously growing. Gollum literally becomes a subject of the Master of the Precious and subjected to Frodo, for whom Gollum begins to feel affection: “Gollum’s love for Frodo, his gratitude for his trust and companionship is at least at one point as strong as his twisted love for the Ring” (Stratyner 83). And yet, the love felt by Sméagol is incapable of erasing Gollum’s desire for the Ring. The small window of opportunity given to Gollum’s return is enough for him to finally triumph over Sméagol’s resurfacing, thus leading to the betrayal of Sméagol’s promise. By delivering Frodo and Sam to Shelob, Gollum twists the meaning of his oath, for he does not harm them personally. Gollum then takes up his original goal, to become master of the One Ring, submitting Sméagol to his service: the self becomes a slave to the Other. Gollum’s return and final dominion over Sméagol is aided in large part by Samwise Gamgee’s unintentional cruelty. In what follows, I will discuss Sam through the affordances and limitations of his service towards the Other,

which plays a decisive role in his relationship with Gollum and, eventually, the destruction of the One Ring.

The Ethical Choices of Master Samwise

Samwise Gamgee begins his participation in the events portrayed in *LotR* as Frodo's trustworthy servant, who supposedly will accompany Frodo to Crickhollow in order to tend his garden – when in fact he will follow Frodo to take the Ring to Rivendell in the first stage of their journey, and then to Mordor. As a hobbit whose family has long worked for the Bagginses at Bag End, Sam is a distinct embodiment of service as Frodo's gardener and as part of the Shire's working class. This clearly distinguishes Frodo's sense of service from Sam's: Frodo accepts the role of Ring-bearer as an act of service towards the Shire and the unknown Other that may suffer at Sauron's hands. Sam follows Frodo not only because it is part of his job description – and Gandalf's "punishment" (*FR* 1.II.84) – but because his service is an expression of loyalty and love to Frodo. Sam plainly articulates his feelings for Frodo as *love*: "I love him. He's like that, and sometimes it shines through, somehow. But I love him, whether or no" (*TT* 4.V.853).²⁵ Sam's love for Frodo is particularly evident in his role as "chief investigator" for the conspiracy formed with Merry, Pippin, and Fatty Bolger; Sam is the secret group's "collector of information" and agrees that Frodo needs more than one companion in order to travel safely from the Shire to Rivendell during the first stage of the Ring-bearer's journey (*FR* 1.V.137). Furthermore, Sam's perception of what is needed, of what his task is – his ethical responsibility in order for Frodo to achieve his own task – is so profound that he is willing to go into Mordor with his Master despite never having "any real hope in the affair from the beginning; but being a cheerful hobbit he had not needed hope, as long as despair could be postponed" (*TT* 4.III.833). The ethical relationship between Frodo and Sam is marked by tenderness and Sam's unwavering devotion, thus transcending the relationship between employer and employee. Sam and Frodo are heroic not in terms of

the traditional male hero leading his men on the field of battle in great deeds of arms – that role is left to other secondary characters in the book. Instead, the relationship between Frodo and Sam allows Tolkien to create heroes who accomplish their deeds supported by mutual emotional and physical intimacy. (Smol, "Male" 956-7)

Sam and Frodo's relationship demonstrates an array of attitudes and attributes that may simultaneously be considered as reflective of femininity and as an expression of

²⁵ Whether Frodo and Sam's relationship can also be understood as queer, erotic, or homosexual lies outwith the scope of this thesis. For examples of studies that deal with this possibility, see Daniel Timmons (2001), Valerie Rohy (2004), and Esther Saxey (2005).

masculinity.²⁶ Parallel to the idea of femininity explored in the Chapter Two of this thesis, masculinity may “refer to those (variable) sets of values, capacities, and practices that are identified as exemplary for men” and which “are normally defined in contrast or opposition to a feminine other” (Hutchings 402). And yet, as in the case of femininity, “many other lines of identification traverse the terrain of masculinity, dividing its power into complicated differentials of class, race, sexuality, and gender”, including the expression of masculinity by bodies and genders that are not male (Halberstam 2). Thus, while the intimacy and tenderness displayed by Frodo and Sam may be interpreted as qualities associated with femininity in addition to the feminine attitudes they enact as hobbits, scholars like Anna Smol have also perceptively argued that “Tolkien's representation of the Frodo-Sam relationship ... reflects his unique twentieth-century experience of male friendship” (955) as one found between “many British soldiers in the First World War” (956).²⁷ As feminine and/or masculine, the friendship between these two beings, who are so similar and close to one another, and yet distinct in their subjectivities, social standings, and even worldviews, opens up the possibility of viewing their journeys as “a co-endeavor, as a kind of shared story that is carried out in a spirit of mutual recognition and trust” (Saxton 175). Their relationship is also *collaborative* rather than simply hierarchical.

Sam is depicted as a naïve and inexperienced hobbit, ignorant of what populates the wider world outside of the Shire, having never left its borders and rarely met outsiders except for Gandalf. What Sam knows about the world beyond the Shire is mostly thanks to Bilbo, who has “learned him his letters”, and to the tales passed down or circulated amongst hobbits (*FR* 1.I.31). Sam’s literacy and passion for “stories of the old days” is not viewed positively by hobbits of his own class, like his father, as danger could come of it – such as the risk of being Othered like Bilbo, as indicated in the beginning of this chapter. In a conversation that parallels the Gaffer’s words at *The Ivy Bush* inn, Sam speaks to Ted Sandyman at *The Green Dragon* about the “queer things you do hear these days” (*FR* 1.II.58). The latter manifests an open scepticism and scorn regarding what he calls “fireside-tales and children’s stories” (*FR* 1.II.58) – the realm where he believes Otherness belongs, a view shared by the generality present at the pub. Sandyman’s view is juxtaposed with Sam’s belief in the kernel of truth contained in every story and the sadness he feels regarding the departure of the elves: “Of all the legends that he had heard in his early years such, fragments of tales and half-remembered stories about Elves as the hobbits knew, had always moved him most deeply”

²⁶ For a wider exploration of masculinity in Tolkien’s Middle-earth narratives, see Holly A. Crocker (2011), John Miller (2016), and Derek Pacheco (2021).

²⁷ In addition to the extensive bibliography provided by Smol on masculinity and friendship during the Great War, see also Michael Roper (2005).

(*FR* 1.II.59). Stories about “the Elves before the fading time” represent for Sam a beacon of hope and light when “the dark seems to press round so close” (*FR* 1.XI.250). Sam’s initial, theoretical knowledge of the elves awakens in him a queer desire towards this Other – queer insofar as it is different and even contrary to what may be expected from an average hobbit of his class. He longs to encounter the elves and their magic: “He believed he had once seen an Elf in the woods, and still hoped to see more one day” (*FR* 1.II.59).²⁸ Thus, when Sam is caught listening in on Gandalf and Frodo, he specifically frames his actions through his desire of the Other:

I heard a deal that I didn’t rightly understand, about an enemy, and rings, and Mr. Bilbo, sir, and dragons and a fiery mountain, and – and Elves, sir. I listened because I couldn’t help myself, if you know what I mean. Lor bless me, sir, but I do love tales of that sort. And I believe them too, whatever Ted may say. Elves, sir! I would dearly love to see them. Couldn’t you take me to see Elves, sir, when you go? (*FR* 1.II.83-4)

As observed in the section “Frodo, self, and (his queer) Otherness”, the moments prior to the encounter with Gildor Inglorion and his companions are marked by the sudden sound of “mingled song and laughter”, a song with words that Sam does not know or understand (*FR* 1.III.103). That is, before any attempt to visualise or decipher the Other through the intellect, an expression of joy linked to the bodily sensation and pleasure of hearing occurs first. Afterwards, Sam cannot “describe in words, nor picture clearly to himself, what he felt or thought that night, though it remained in his memory as one of the chief events of his life” (*FR* 1.III.109). The Other’s Otherness as embodied by the elves remains ineffable for Sam’s subjectivity. What remains in Sam’s memory of this encounter with the Other are elements that speak to him as a hobbit who finds enjoyment in food and music, and a gardener who loves the earth and its fruits: “The nearest he ever got was to say: ‘Well, sir, if I could grow apples like that, I would call myself a gardener. But it was the singing that went to my heart, if you know what I mean.’” (*FR* 1.III.108).

Sam’s perception of elves and their magic, however, changes upon his arrival in Lothlórien, which he describes as “being at home and on a holiday at the same time” (*FR* 2.VII.469). As Galadriel directs her thoughts to each member of the Fellowship during their first encounter, Sam perceives her “to be looking inside me and asking me what I would do if she gave me the chance of flying back home to the Shire to a nice little hole with – with

²⁸ Who Sam actually thinks or believes elves are prior to encountering them is not detailed by the text. It is likely that he idealises, if not exoticizes, this Other early in the narrative. This possibility lies outside of the scope of this thesis, but would be a promising avenue for further inquiry into how a hobbit subjectivity like Sam’s perceives elvish Otherness.

a bit of garden of my own” (*FR* 2.VII.465). Although certain members of the Fellowship find this experience unsettling and even uncanny, like Boromir, Sam is not deterred in his wish “to see some Elf-magic” (*FR* 2.VII.472). But Sam’s understanding of what magic can do or make one realise changes as he peers into the Mirror of Galadriel: there he sees scenes from the Scouring of the Shire, thus provoking an internal conflict within him. In addition to discovering that his idea of and desire for the Other does not reflect the Other’s alterity, Sam is torn between his desire to save the Shire from what seems an impending doom and his desire to be of service to Frodo, even if that means the impossibility of preventing every evil occurrence from happening. Sam thus demonstrates that to uphold an ethical responsibility towards *an* Other may result in the inability to serve *all* Others. After gaining this knowledge, Sam confesses that he wishes to “see no more magic” (*FR* 2.VII.472).

But the elves are only one of the many incarnations of Otherness that Sam encounters throughout the quest. His initial eagerness to meet elves contrasts with the several instances of suspicion or fear of what he considers unorthodox or unknown, especially in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, therefore revealing his pre-conceived notions about the Other and how that may affect his desire to encounter them. For instance, in Bree, Sam fears meeting “giants taller than trees, and other creatures even more terrifying” (*FR* 1.XI.199), and finds the idea of staying in a house designed for humans abhorrent, for it is not “homelike” (*FR* 1.XI.199), not to mention his initial mistrust of Strider. However, after the different encounters Sam holds with different iterations of Otherness – dwarves, elves, men, Tom Bombadil, Old Man Willow, and so on – Sam’s experience of the Other changes and acquires depth. This is evidenced in his reaction to the death of a Haradrim warrior, “his black plaits of hair braided with gold were drenched with blood. His brown hand still clutched the hilt of a broken sword” (*TT* 4.IV.864). Sam does not take for granted his theoretical knowledge of who this Other is supposed to be according to the hobbit tales of Swertings and the statements made by the Rangers of Ithilien. Instead, he asks “what the man’s name was and where he came from; and if he was really evil of heart, or what lies or threats had led him on the long march from his home; and if he would not really rather have stayed there in peace” (*TT* 4.IV.864). Sam will never be able to hear the Southron’s voice or know his thoughts – will never be able to grasp him – and yet his reflections place, if only for a moment, this Other at the forefront: *his* name, *his* origin, *his* heart. Perhaps Sam can also perceive how in their leaving home, the Southron, Frodo, and himself share a common experience. For Margaret Sinex, “in speculating about his foe’s proper name, he [Sam] makes him [the Haradrim warrior] an individual. And most impressively, he wonders whether the dead man was torn inwardly by conflicting motivations as he himself has at times” (189). The presence

of this Other demands from Sam an ethical responsibility expressed by the faltering of the assumption that this Other is undoubtedly his enemy.

Simultaneously, the presence of the Other demands that Sam question the assumption that the fallen man's brown hand is truly different from his own. *LotR* also describes Sam's hands as being brown: "In his lap lay Frodo's head, drowned deep in sleep; upon his white forehead lay one of Sam's brown hands, and the other lay softly upon his master's breast" (*TT* 4.IX.935). The text does not clarify if Sam's brown hands are due to his employment as a gardener or the result of a potential Harfoot heritage.²⁹ In turn, the narrative does disclose a "strong Fallohidish strain could still be noted among the greater families, such as the Tooks and the Masters of Buckland", relatives of Bilbo and Frodo (*FR* 4). By interpreting Sam as a racialised character, a nuanced perspective is gained regarding his encounter with another racialised character, one who is perceived as an Other in the context of the War of the Ring. They perhaps have more in common than Frodo would with the man from Harad, as Frodo is coded as a white hobbit guarded by brown hands. Sam's hands may not know how to wield a sword, but perhaps the brown hands of the Other have known, like Sam's, what it means to protect loved ones.

Samwise Gamgee's reaction to the Southron stands in opposition to his response to – and lack of pity for – Gollum, a relationship which ultimately represents an ethical aporia. Unlike Frodo, Sam is not moved to pity by the face-to-face encounter with Gollum. Although he was also present during that moment, his eagerness to accompany and protect Frodo, to honour that ethical relationship to the fullest extent, trumps his meeting Gollum. Knowing Gollum's history, his encounter with Bilbo, and the potential threat that he represents, Sam is incapable of trusting Gollum: Gollum "meant to *and* he means to" do them harm (*TT* 4.I.803). If there is any truth to Sam's belief that "the kindness of dear Mr. Frodo was of such a high degree that it must imply a fair measure of blindness", something similar can be said about Sam: he can only see through the prism of his love for Frodo (*TT* 4.III.837).³⁰ Thus, Sam cannot fully engage in an ethical encounter with Gollum. Through his actions, Sam further perpetuates Gollum's othering: he mentally conceives of Gollum not as Sméagol and Gollum, but as "Slinker and Stinker" (*TT* 4.III.834). In his mind, Frodo's "soft-hearted" stance towards Gollum is a kindness and a luxury that Sam believes he himself cannot afford

²⁹ See Chapter Two of this thesis.

³⁰ Tolkien describes this as the "pride and *possessiveness*" present in Sam's "service and loyalty to his Master", which "prevented him from fully understanding the master that he loved, and from following him in his gradual education to the nobility of service to the unlovable and of perception of damaged good in the corrupt" (*Letters* 329, emphasis mine).

if he is to keep both himself and his master safe, as well as accomplish the destruction of the One Ring (*TT* 4.III.835).³¹

Underlying Sam's rejection of Gollum is the repulsion he feels when witnessing the abject Other that a fellow-hobbit creature has become and, potentially, a wish to deny that his master may follow the same path. Against Frodo and Sam's "supportive and nurturing relationship" stands "Gollum's isolation and abjection" (Brown 82). But this relationship has led Sam to conceptualise Frodo as the same and, consequently, he cannot bear to think of him as Other, even though he knows that Frodo and Gollum are "in some way akin and not alien: they could reach each other's minds" (*TT* 4.I.805). Whilst in Ithilien, Sam stumbles

on a ring still scorched by fire, and in the midst of it he found a pile of charred and broken bones and skulls. The swift growth of the wild with briar and eglantine and trailing clematis was already drawing a veil over this place of dreadful feast and slaughter; but it was not ancient. He hurried back to his companions, but he said nothing: the bones were best left in peace and not pawed and rooted by Gollum. (*TT* 4.IV.851)

The text leaves open who these bones and skulls originally belonged to, but the negative association with "Orcs and other foul servants of the Dark Lord" is clear (*TT* 4.IV.851). At this point, however, what interests me most about this passage is how Sam's fears relate to Gollum: he fears that, unlike himself and his understanding of what hobbits would naturally do, Gollum will be incapable of leaving the remains untouched, for he no longer possesses restraint. Sam fears that Gollum will behave like an animal that paws, a pig that roots – a latent anxiety generated by knowing how Gollum has nourished himself all these long years with raw and foul meat. For Sam, this makes Gollum much closer to the monstrous Otherness of orcs and trolls than the selfhood of a hobbit, a contrast reinforced by Sam's storage of the *lembas* bread and his intention to make rabbit stew with the cooking gear he had brought all the way from the Shire. This contrast also speaks of the feminine aspect of Sam's character as he takes on the domestic task of cooking. Cooking, the act of preparing nourishment for the self and the Other, however, becomes a path through which Sam communicates with Gollum and offers him a form of care:

But be good Sméagol and fetch me the herbs, and I'll think better of you. What's more, if you turn over a new leaf, and keep it turned, I'll cook you some taters one of these days. I will: fried fish and chips served by S. Gamgee. You couldn't say no to that. (*TT* 4.IV.856)

³¹ Sam is not the only one to treat Gollum harshly, as both Gandalf (*FR* 1.II.75) and Aragorn (*FR* 2.II.330) take on similar approaches. See also Adam Rosman (2005).

Sam is offering a form of service such as the one he performs for his master, but Sam's offer is conditioned by Gollum continuing to be Sméagol and embracing a behaviour thought acceptable by Sam (consuming cooked meat), which would infringe on Gollum's Otherness. Regardless of its failure, for Gollum declines the offer, in this moment Sam finds in cooking and serving food a way to enter into an ethical relationship with Gollum. Furthermore, the text describes instances in which Sam and Gollum resemble one another in their attitude towards Frodo. In 'The Shadow of the Past', Sam reacts to the news that he is allowed to "go away with Mr. Frodo" by "springing up like a dog invited for a walk" (*FR* 1.II.84). Similarly, Gollum appears to Sam as "a little whining dog" when the former swears to serve the Master of the Precious (*TT* 4.I.807). But these brief moments are not enough to prevent Sam's final cruelty towards Sméagol and Gollum, one that is born out of Sam's wish to protect Frodo rather than a desire to hurt the Other, but which inevitably brings Gollum back to betray them. Whilst in Cirith Ungol, Gollum finds Sam and Frodo resting, and he is caught between his love for Frodo and his desire for the Ring:

A spasm of pain seemed to twist him, and he turned away, peering back up towards the pass, shaking his head, as if engaged in some interior debate. Then he came back, and slowly putting out a trembling hand, very cautiously he touched Frodo's knee – but almost the touch was a caress. For a fleeting moment, could one of the sleepers have seen him, they would have thought they beheld an old weary hobbit, shrunken by the years that had carried him far beyond his time, beyond friends and kin, and the fields and streams of youth, an old starved pitiable thing. (*TT* 4.IX.935)

But the point is precisely that Sam cannot see: he does not really see Sméagol. He does not see Sméagol "trying to reproduce the touch that Sam bestows on Frodo" (Smol, "Male" 964). With the same hand with which Sméagol murdered his beloved Déagol and kept the Ring, Sméagol is reaching out towards the Other "where it is not possible to sketch out any known caress nor invent any new caress" (Levinas, *Totality* 34). Sam does not see Sméagol in his "metaphysical desire" that "has another intention; it desires beyond everything that can simply complete it" (Levinas, *Totality* 34). Sam only sees Gollum or the Gollum in Sméagol. He sees the abject Other, but not the Other still capable and worthy of love, the Other burdened by desire, time, and loneliness. Frodo stirs in his sleep because of Gollum's touch, which makes Sam wake up and immediately try to protect his master. Without reflecting, Sam questions Gollum, the "old villain", asking him if he has been "sneaking off and sneaking back" (*TT* 4.IX.935). The implied accusation, this moment of othering is the tipping point, which Tolkien describes as Sam's "clumsiness in fidelity" (*Letters* 234). No matter how much Sam may apologise and feel remorseful, no matter how much he may try to justify his actions, there is no turning back. The "tragedy of Gollum" is complete (*Letters* 110). The

“green glint” will not leave Gollum’s eyes (*TT* 4.IX.936). Sméagol is lost. The Other has once more taken his place.

After Gollum’s betrayal and Shelob’s attack, Sam is left to trace a course of action and make ethical choices in the aptly-titled chapter “The Choices of Master Samwise”, which concludes *The Two Towers*. Sam’s response to Frodo’s perilous situation is practically instinctual: “Sam did not wait to wonder what was to be done, or whether he was brave, or loyal, or filled with rage” (*TT* 4.X.952). To know that his master and friend is in danger overrides in Sam any consideration about the harm he may suffer if he faces Shelob or his odds in defeating her. Sam’s priority is his ethical responsibility towards Frodo, the fulfilment of his service as an ethical imperative. To lose Frodo would be the worst outcome imaginable. It would mean the failure of Sam’s service towards his master, and to be sundered from someone so deeply beloved: “Don’t leave me here alone! It’s your Sam calling. Don’t go where I can’t follow!” (*TT* 4.X.955). It would also mean that Sam is compelled to assume responsibility for the Ring. It would now be *his* ethical responsibility to prevent the suffering of the Other should Sauron regain the One Ring. The text illustrates how his bond of service to Frodo and his role as the only member of the Fellowship left with access to the Ring in the service of the Other create an almost irresolvable tension within Sam, for at this moment they represent diverging paths. Even as Sam manages to leave Frodo’s side, he reemphasizes their differences in both hierarchical terms and their role in the Fellowship while signalling his unwavering loyalty towards Frodo: “And your star glass, Mr. Frodo, you did lend it to me, and I’ll need it, for I’ll be always in the dark now. It’s too good for me, and the Lady gave it to you, but maybe she’d understand. Do *you* understand, Mr. Frodo?” (*TT* 4.X.957). The darkness that Sam speaks of is literal and metaphorical: he must indeed find his way out of the shadows of Cirith Ungol, but losing Frodo means losing his sense of purpose, a sense of his self.

As Sam stands in the shadows of Cirith Ungol, his recital of the elvish hymn to Elbereth reveals an encounter between himself and a form of Otherness during a crucial moment of need. After hearing elven “voices far off but clear” – like the voices of the elves he met outside the Shire or in Rivendell – “his tongue was loosed and his voice cried in a language which he did not know ... And with that he staggered to his feet and *was Samwise the hobbit, Hamfast’s son, again*” (*TT* 4.X.954, emphasis added).³² It is as if an external force, completely alien to Sam, takes over not only to rekindle his courage, but to recall him to who he is. The irruption of this song within this context is significant, for Sam heard it for the first time when meeting Gildor. Gildor and his troop are High Elves, who, according to

³² See *FR*.1.III.104 and 2.I.309.

the *legendarium*, witnessed the light of the Two Trees in Valinor before the coming of Morgoth's darkness and his alliance with Shelob's ancestor, Ungoliant. Sam's singing is an un-rational action that brings to his subjectivity the light necessary to continue his act of service.³³ Sam's encounters with different embodiments of Otherness, both good and evil, ineffable and abject, have led to a further understanding of himself and his task: the heroism he embodies is "to enable Frodo to complete his quest and not to gain personal glory for himself" (Smol, "Male" 965). For Sam, heroism is service to the Other, and in this service he has learned about the wider world, the depth of his ethical responsibility, as well as the reaches and limitations of his self in the engagement with the Other. For Sam, heroism is service to the Other, and in this service he has learned about the wider world, the depth of his ethical responsibility, as well as the reaches and limitations of his self in the engagement with the Other. This understanding is crucial for the completion of Sam's part in the destruction of the One Ring, prior to his role in healing the Shire from Saruman, and his final grasp of his ethical responsibility towards the Other.

After rescuing Frodo from the orcs of Mordor and assisting him in the final trek up to Mount Doom, Sam bears witness to a scene that changes his perception of Gollum. The fight over the Ring between Gollum and Frodo on the road to Sammath Naur allows Sam to encounter Gollum and Frodo side by side and face-to-face in a decisive moment of their quest. After beholding the "sudden fury" that galvanises Frodo and empowers him to subdue Gollum, Sam finally *sees* Gollum (*RK.III.1234*). Sam can now see that, in addition to his responsibility towards Frodo and the task at hand, Sam is indeed capable of holding an ethical relationship with Gollum. He sees what Bilbo and Frodo had seen before him: that beyond the monstrous, abject Other, lies a creature "in the dust, forlorn, ruinous, utterly wretched" (*RK.III.1235*). Sam's journey – his acts of love, his encounters with different iterations of Otherness, his knowledge of the devastation caused by the Ring – have led him here. He has also experienced first-hand the deceits of the Ring, feeling how such "burden" can create a "huge distorted shadow" of the self (*RK.III.1178*). It is now Sam's turn to make a crucial decision in the supreme hour of doom. He cannot undo his final cruelty, but he can, in the end, let the Other persist in their Otherness. He spares Gollum, thus contributing to the fate of Middle-earth.

³³ This idea is reinforced by Tolkien's translation of the third stanza chanted by Sam as follows: "to thee [Elbereth] I cry now in the shadow of (the fear of) death" (*Letters* 278).

Lobelia Sackville-Baggins: From the Self to the Other

The final section of this chapter is dedicated to analysing the character arc of Lobelia Sackville-Baggins, as she is the only female hobbit in *LotR* who undergoes a narrative journey. Although Lobelia does not experience the same journey as Frodo and Sam by leaving the Shire and encountering multiple forms of alterity, she evidences a transition from the preoccupation with the self to being of service to the Other. As indicated in the previous chapter, no female hobbits take part in the events narrated in *The Hobbit*. The scarcity of female hobbits is only slightly lessened in *LotR*, for the only female hobbits mentioned are relatives of the male protagonists, or hold a close connection to the main characters, such as Rosie Cotton, who becomes Samwise Gamgee's wife. These include attendees at Bilbo's birthday party Melilot and Esmeralda Brandybuck, and relatives to whom Bilbo has left gifts, Dora and Angelica Baggins. There is also mention of Primula Brandybuck (Frodo's mother and Bilbo's cousin), along with the brief appearances of Mrs. Maggot and her three daughters, and Mrs. Cotton, Rosie's mother. These mentions and appearances seem to confirm Craig's argument that hobbit women occupy "traditional roles. Mrs. Maggot and Mrs. Cotton are defined by their domestic and familial status. They are hearty homemakers who serve beer and prepare supper for their guests but rarely participate in the narrative" (11). Lobelia also occupies traditional gender roles, but her actions in the text spark a change in her ethical relationship with the Other.

Lobelia Sackville-Baggins actively participates in the plot at the beginning and the end of *LotR*, and is characterised as being "proud, stubborn, unwilling to accept less than her due, and eager to display her status to society" (Amendt Raduege 77). She first appears as part of the Sackville-Baggins family branch, with whom Bilbo is not on good terms (*FR* 1.I.28). The hostility between Bilbo and his cousins Otto and Lobelia dates back to Bilbo's return from Erebor sixty years before, when they attempted to take over Bag End after Bilbo was wrongly presumed dead. Their animosity is reinforced when Bilbo names Frodo as his heir. Despite being blood relations and their similar social standing, the fraught relationship between Bilbo and his cousins turns them into enemies – demonstrating that non-idyllic familial relations exist within hobbit society.³⁴ This tension inspires Bilbo to reverse the guest-host dynamic at his 111th birthday party: by inviting the Sackville-Bagginses to the festivities and the "special family dinner party", an opportunity is created to temporarily suspend this mutual animosity. The text does not specify why Bilbo extends this invitation.

³⁴ In the aftermath of Bilbo's disappearance from the Shire, several hobbits try to steal different objects from Bag End: "others tried to make off with minor items not addressed to them, or with anything that seems unwanted or unwatched" (*FR* 1.I.50). As comical or petty as these actions are, they prove once more that the text does not idealise the hobbit community.

The Sackville-Bagginses accept Bilbo's invitation for two reasons: first, the event's social importance within the hobbit community. Second, they would enjoy a free meal from Bilbo, who "had been specializing in food for many years and his table had a high reputation", which highlights the importance of food as a supreme corporeal pleasure in hobbit culture (*FR* 1.I.37). Nevertheless, Bilbo's speech reminds his audience that Frodo "comes of age and into his inheritance today", and his subsequent disappearance points towards Bilbo's desire to leave behind hobbit social conventions (*FR* 1.I.39). He has queered himself even further, and this time around he wants to be considered dead. It could thus be conjectured that, beyond kindness or social pressure, Bilbo plays host for the Sackville-Baggins relatives to spite them: to reiterate that, even as his guests, they will never achieve a mutual understanding. The Sackville-Bagginses will never inherit Bag End, having to settle with a case of silver spoons given to Lobelia (*FR* 1.I.49).

Frodo's relationship and post-birthday party meeting with the Sackville-Bagginses illustrate a different aspect of this family feud. The Sackville-Bagginses detest Frodo, envy him, and they express their hatred by othering him. By intruding in Bag End and questioning Bilbo's will, they impose themselves as Frodo's guests. This imposition is taken even further when they offer Frodo "bad bargain-prices (*as between friends*) for various valuable and unlabelled things" (*FR* 1.I.50, emphasis added). When Frodo forces them to leave after finding Lobelia prying and stealing, she remarks: "Why didn't you go too? You don't belong here; you're no Baggins ... you're a Brandybuck!" (*FR* 1.I.51).³⁵ Lobelia thus voices both the Shire's prejudices and her own personal misgivings, according to which Frodo is bound to be othered due to his family connections outside of the extended Baggins family and his continuation of Bilbo's queerness. Frodo terminates the host-guest dynamic by shutting the door in Lobelia's face.

Seventeen years after Bilbo's disappearance, Frodo and Lobelia meet once again. He sells Bag End to the Sackville-Bagginses, the now widowed Lobelia and her son Lotho, as a front for his departure from the Shire. This interaction is once more hostile, as the text describes the Sackville-Bagginses as predators "getting their claws on" the contents of Bag End (*FR* 1.III.89), whilst Frodo refuses to be hospitable by not offering tea, and leaving dirty dishes specifically for her to wash as a parting gift, the later denoting a gendered dimension of the animosity between Frodo and Lobelia. Despite the successful closure of a commercial transaction, Frodo and Lobelia remain estranged and are no closer to an understanding. The text briefly offers a sympathetic portrayal of Lobelia given her age and situation – "but Lobelia can perhaps be forgiven: she had been obliged to wait about seventy-seven years

³⁵ To Lobelia's further annoyance, Frodo cuts her off in front of Merry, who is a Brandybuck.

longer for Bag End than she once hoped, and she was now a hundred years old” (*FR* 1.III.90) – but this depiction is undermined by Lobelia’s rudeness, classism, and hypocrisy in her presumption that the Gamgees might be prone to “plundering the hole during the night” (*FR* 1.III.90). For Lobelia, the Gamgees are inferior, Other, a threat to the desires which have been characteristic of her self during these long years.

Amy Amendt-Raduege points out that “Lobelia’s character is not often examined by Tolkien scholars, even those of us interested in Tolkien’s women”, because she is presented as a “thoroughly unlikeable character” that antagonises Bilbo and Frodo (77). The arrival of the Sackville-Bagginses to Bag End is thought of by those allied to the Bagginses – like the Gaffer – as “changes for the worst” (*FR* 2.II.342). Although Lotho and his family are guilty of othering Bilbo and Frodo, they are so disliked in the Shire that they simultaneously experience a form of othering.³⁶ Amendt-Raduege also signals the impact of gender in the rendering of Lobelia’s character traits as “greed, pride, and stubbornness”, arguing that these traits are seen more positively in male characters of *LotR*: for example, whereas the greed behind the dwarves’ failed attempt to reclaim Khazad-dûm acquires epic or heroic proportions – and is criticised by characters like Gandalf (*FR* 2.IV.413) – greed in the hobbits’ domesticity is rendered as petty and mundane (78). To the former reading I argue that despite being the most active Sackville-Baggins within the plot, Lobelia is mostly portrayed in the company of her male relatives, her husband and her son, standing independently only later on in the story. Moreover, although the text does not offer physical descriptions of Lobelia, the timespan during which the events narrated occur offers a glimpse into Lobelia’s aging.³⁷ Of the mature or elderly female hobbits mentioned by the text, she is the only one to participate significantly, and offers a contrast to Rosie Cotton, Goldberry, Arwen, Galadriel, and Éowyn – who are presented as young or ageless. Lobelia thus stands closer to Ioreth, but without any quality of physical beauty or character that would make her more “amenable”. Her selfhood, presence, and actions, especially at the end of *LotR*, broaden the range of female representation in the text: who women are, what they can do, and how they contribute to the text’s storyline from a different perspective.

Ironically, “the traits that made her so repellent in the beginning”, and that were part of her antagonism towards the Bagginses, come into play during Sharkey’s attempt to gain control of the Shire (Amendt-Raduege 87). Lobelia is one of the few hobbits who actively resists Saruman’s influence, even against her son Lotho’s allegiance to the wizard. Although the source of her courage – the defence what she sees as her possession and home, Bag End

³⁶ See also Chapter Six of this thesis.

³⁷ There are only descriptions of her countenance: “her face looked as if she was in the throes of thinking out a really crushing parting remark” (*FR* 1.I.51)

– is portrayed in a negative light at the beginning of the text, it is this insistence that creates common ground between her and the Travellers after their return to the Shire. It is the defence of the idea of home and domesticity so important to hobbits.

In the penultimate chapter of *LotR*, “The Scouring of the Shire”, the hobbit Travellers discover that Lotho, who has “dropped the Baggins” from his name, has become the Chief at Bag End (*RK* 6.VIII.1307). Having lost his sense of self in the desire for self-aggrandisement, Lotho has implemented measures to the detriment of the larger hobbit population. The conflict between those partial to the Bagginses and the S.-B.s is revived, an issue that now coincides with the conflict between hobbits who have accepted the order imposed – even if they hate it – and those willing to challenge it. In trying to prevent Sharkey’s ruffians from putting up sheds at Bag End, Lobelia takes “her umbrella and goes for the leader, near twice her size”, which results in her being placed in the Lockholes (*RK* 6.VIII.1326). Her love for Bag End, which originated from a selfish desire, motivates Lobelia to face Saruman’s henchmen, an act in which “she showed more spirit than most” hobbits (*RK* 6.VIII.1326). Here begins the shift in her perspective and her reconciliation with Frodo. When Lobelia is released from prison,

she looked very old and thin... She insisted on hobbling out on her own feet; and she had such a welcome, and there was such clapping and cheering when she appeared, leaning on Frodo’s arm but still clutching her umbrella, that she was quite touched, and drove away in tears. She had never in her life been popular before. (*RK* 6.IX.1336)

This new encounter between Frodo and Lobelia is marked by a physical contact that dismisses their past enmity, for the enemy becomes a saviour and support, as well as one to serve. The gap is bridged. Lobelia cannot undo Saruman’s wickedness nor the consequences of her son’s foolishness, but she can return Bag End to Frodo, and her will demonstrates an ethical engagement with the Other who has suffered in the Scouring of the Shire. From being uniquely concerned with her self and her desires, Lobelia leaves “all that remained of her money and of Lotho’s for him [Frodo] to use in helping hobbits made homeless by the troubles” (*RK* 6.IX.1336). Money can no longer be of use of her in death, but it gives her the means to serve the Other. Lobelia hears the Other’s plea and provides them with a need she feels deeply: a home.

Lobelia, along with Frodo, Sam, and Gollum, depict the paramount importance the encounters between the self and the Other have in Tolkien’s *LotR*. Through these characters’ perspectives, the text delves into how ideas of self and Other are constructed as well as the profound impact the encounter with the Other may have both on individual choices and on

the storyline as a whole. These characters accompany the reader in the discovery of the transformative potential of the ethical and the rich tapestry created by the text and its spectrum of possibilities. Furthermore, the narrative journeys studied in this chapter exemplify the different meanings the service to the Other may acquire in this Middle-earth narrative.

Chapter Five

A Phenomenology of Evil in *The Lord of the Rings*

This chapter reflects on the portrayal of evil in *LotR*. I contend that, in addition to beings who are presented as essentially evil, the text depicts evil as a refusal to ethically engage with the Other. This unwillingness can further lead to a path of impossibility where the self can no longer hold an ethical relationship with the Other. From Rings of Power and the desire they produce, to the wraiths, the orcs, and Shelob, *LotR* does not provide a single answer as to how evil manifests itself in Middle-earth. I therefore speak of a phenomenology of evil. Moreover, essential evil, as an antagonistic form of Otherness, may be understood as unresolvable and unapproachable in the narrative; but whether or not this is also the experience of the reader is one of the discussion points of this chapter.

Evil as Essence or Choice

As Luke Shelton reports, “the theme of good and evil within *The Lord of the Rings* has been so variously and extensively covered throughout Tolkien scholarship that to mention it is almost anathema to certain readers of his work” (116). Robert Eaglestone has declared that “*The Lord of the Rings* is a book about evil”, an evil that “is inalienably characteristic of the twentieth century, precisely because it takes its most radical form in modernity” (“Invisibility” 73). Eaglestone rightly indicates that the interaction with and response to evil – evil as an external Other and the evil that the self is capable of enacting – is central to the narrative’s main plot. Tom Shippey, who has dedicated multiple articles and book chapters to elaborating theories on the nature of evil in *LotR*, has most influentially argued that there are two main conceptions of evil present in Tolkien’s text.¹ The first is a Boethian concept of evil, according to which “there is no such thing as evil”, but rather “evil is only the absence of good”; an individual may identify certain things as evil “which are in fact in the long run, or in the divine plan, to their advantage” (Shippey, *Author* 130). Shippey lists as a corollary of this belief Frodo’s statement in “The Tower of Cirith Ungol”: “that evil cannot create, ‘not real new things of its own’, and furthermore it was not created; it arose” (*Author* 131). Shippey’s second conception of evil is as a power that

does exist, and is not merely an absence; and what is more, it has to be resisted and fought, not by all means available, but by all means virtuous; and what is even more, *not* doing so, in the belief that one day Omnipotence will cure all ills, is a dereliction

¹ See, for example, chapters “*The Lord of the Rings* (2): Concepts of Evil” in *J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century* (2000) and ‘Chapter 5: Interlacements and the Ring’ in *The Road to Middle-earth* (2005), as well as “Orcs, Wraiths, Wights: Tolkien’s Images of Evil” (2007).

of duty. The danger of this opinion is that it swerves towards being a heresy, Manichaeism, or Dualism: the belief that the world is a battlefield, between the powers of Good and Evil, equal and opposite – so that, one might say, there is no real difference between them and it is a matter of chance which side one happens to choose. (Shippey, *Author* 134)

Shippey locates the presence of these types of evil in the contradiction between “the Shadow” (absence) and “the Dark Power” (force), which “is expressed not only through the paradoxes of wraiths and shadows, but also through the Ring” (*Author* 135). Nuancing Shippey’s proposal regarding different views on the nature of evil in Middle-earth, I argue that *LotR* offers a wide spectrum of representations that problematise evil in terms of the relationship between the self and the Other. There are shadows of nothingness endowed with agency and evil creatures and objects who exhibit an independent volition and a sovereign sense of self. The oppositional force to the Dark Power is embodied by multiple beings who inhabit grey areas of goodness. Therefore, my focus lies on the array of possibilities of evil that the narrative offers, rather than elaborating a distinct concept or view of evil. Hence, I speak of a phenomenology of evil.

As I have pointed out in previous chapters, Tolkien presents evil both as an inherent quality found in specific sets of beings and as part of individuals’ narrative journeys and actions. Frodo and Boromir are not inherently evil, but are presented as figures who, despite their intentions, succumb momentarily to evil powers. Saruman falls completely. At the same time, there are certain creatures who in different texts and at different stages in Tolkien’s worldbuilding project are depicted as *essentially* evil or aligned to evil, and therefore are considered as hostile or antagonistic Others.² This can be observed in *LotR* in humanoid beings like orcs and in creatures like Shelob. *LotR* also presents Sauron’s Master Ring as an object that “contains Power” of such order and magnitude that it corrupts both by contact and suggestion (Flieger, “Jewels” 67). The Ring and its significance add further nuance to the text’s framing of evil as a question of acting or being. Can evil be an external force, a type of Otherness that makes its way into the self, potentially altering and perverting an individual until they are made into an abject Other – like Gollum – with the help of their own choices? Or is it possible for evil to exist in the self *a priori*, and surface only by the influence of an object like the Ring, revealing a monstrous Other who already exists within? Verlyn Flieger indicates that “the function of the Ring is shown through the characters’ response to the idea of it far more than by its own action”, for the narrative rarely portrays a character using the Ring to affect or dominate the Other (“Jewels” 74). The emphasis placed on the effects that the Rings of Power and, more specifically, Sauron’s Master Ring have on

² See also Chapter Two of this thesis.

the subject that bears or desires them demonstrates how, first, evil forces may directly affect the self, and, second, how evil as essence or choice affects the relationship between the self and everything outside of them, the Other. The following sections discuss these possibilities, beginning with the Rings of Power, paying special attention to the Nine, the Seven, and Sauron's Master Ring. This is followed by an analysis of beings considered evil, such as the Ringwraiths, orcs, and Shelob.

Rings and Wraiths

Whereas in *The Hobbit* glimpses of Sauron's Ring are given via its ability to make the wearer invisible and Gollum's obsession with his "precious", "the power of the Ring and the corrupting effect of that power" is what *LotR* is about (Flieger, "Jewels" 74). The narrative provides information on the origin and nature of the Rings of Power via different sources and accounts, such as the knowledge characters like Elrond and Gandalf possess of the Ring's origin and history, and the material provided by the appendices. The Ring is understood as being "altogether evil" not only because its creator, Sauron, has long chosen the path of evil, but because it was made for an evil purpose: domination and power over the Other. Of special interest for this chapter, however, is the portrayal of the embodied experience of those who bear and wear Rings of Power, as well as the reaction of those that come into close contact with them – physically or intellectually.

LotR brings the One Ring's properties to the forefront by beginning the storyline with the impact the Ring has had on Bilbo's behaviour and person over the years: an unchanged physical appearance over a great span of time – which briefly but radically shifts in the presence of the Ring into a physical likeness to Gollum in Rivendell. Bilbo starts using the same words as Gollum – and Isildur before him – referring to the Ring as "precious" and lies about how he obtained it. Extradiegetically, Tolkien used the differences between the first and second editions of *The Hobbit* as "the original and alternative version as the story which Bilbo had told Gandalf and the others, a story in which his claim to the ring was significantly stronger: the fact that Bilbo lied about this is, in *The Lord of the Rings*, an ominous sign that the Ring is gaining power over him" (Shippey, *Author* 113). By the time of his 111th birthday, Bilbo suffers a state of psychological distress tantamount to feeling like "butter that has been scraped over too much bread", paranoia, a rising obsession with the Ring and, consequently, a reluctance to part with it (*FR* 1.I.42). These are all symptoms of the Ring possessing Bilbo's sense of self, turning him into an abject Other.

In the chapter "The Shadow of the Past", Gandalf indicates the implicit difference between Sauron and any mortal who may attempt to claim the One: the Master Ring is "so powerful that in the end it would utterly overcome anyone of mortal race who possessed it.

It would possess him” (*FR* 1.II.61). The word “possession” points to Sauron’s mastery over the Ring and, accordingly, over the will of those who wear it. Not only did Sauron craft this object but “he let a great part of his own former power pass into it” (*FR* 1.II.68). The Ring thus “belongs to Sauron and was made by him alone”: it is simultaneously an extension of himself and a manifestation of his self (*FR* 2.II.348). As the Ring is a part of Sauron’s self, no other creature can ever truly own or possess it, because no one can lay claim to Sauron’s self. Bilbo, Frodo, and Gollum can only be the Ring’s bearers.³ Few can claim to match or rival Sauron’s power, “only those who have already a great power of their own” may attempt to overthrow Sauron or take his place by using the Ring (*FR* 2.II.348). But as a repository of Sauron’s power, the Ring cannot be used to vanquish him. To use the Ring against Sauron would mean wielding an extension of Sauron’s self against him, perpetuating his essence in the process. As long as the Ring’s existence is prolonged, a fragment of Sauron’s self remains intact, and anything achieved through the Ring will echo Sauron’s desire for dominion and control. It is therefore evident that the only option to keep Sauron or a Sauron-like figure from taking over Middle-earth would be to unmake the Ring. The decision to unmake the One Ring is an ethical choice on multiple fronts (Shippey, *Author* 114). It is, first, a refusal to give into the temptation of using an evil power even if it is done with good intentions. Second, by refusing to conceal or dispose of the Ring without destroying it – such as tossing it into the Sea – the One Ring and the threat it poses is not addressed “only for a season, or for a few lives of Men, or for a passing age of the world. We should seek a final end of this menace, even if we do not hope to make one” (*FR* 2.II.347). The responsibility of those dealing with the Ring – such as the members of the Fellowship of the Ring and the delegates attending the Council of Elrond – towards all others who may be affected by Sauron’s power demands a full commitment to the destruction of this hostile form of Otherness with whom there cannot be peace or compromise.

And yet, as much as the Ring is Sauron’s and responds to his will, the text portrays the Ring as a magical object that may have a volition or mind of its own that is, at the same time, subservient to Sauron’s will. In his reading of Levinas’ philosophical theory, John Wild points out that when it comes to objects that co-exist in the same world as the self, it is the self or the I which takes precedence over them, “and in so far as my experience is normal, I learn to manipulate and control them to my advantage ... In general, these objects are at my disposal, and I am free to play with them, live on them, and to enjoy them at my pleasure” (12). But *LotR* presents an exception to this notion by playing with the possibility that an

³ Although Gandalf does describe Bilbo’s keeping of the Ring as “ownership” (*FR* 1.II.78). In turn, Frodo says to Faramir “it [the Ring] does not belong to me. It does not belong to any mortal, great or small; though if any could claim it, it would be Aragorn son of Arathorn” (*TT* 4.V.867).

object like a ring can be more than a piece of jewellery to be worn and enjoyed as a thing of beauty. The One Ring is an object that generates desire for itself in the Other, whilst also manipulating the Other's own desires, thus problematising the idea that the self is always free to take precedence over the objects around them. It creates a perverse version of "the other metaphysically desired", for as an object, it resembles "the bread I eat, the land in which I dwell, the landscape I contemplate ... I can 'feed' on these realities and to a very great extent satisfy myself, as though I had simply been lacking them. Their *alterity* is thereby reabsorbed into my own identity as a thinker or a possessor" (Levinas, *Totality* 33). However, the Ring is something "*absolutely other*" insofar that the desire it generates can never be satisfied even when it is "possessed" and it subsumes the identity of those who bear it.

Simultaneously, the Ring not only acts like a "psychic amplifier, magnifying the conscious fears or selfishness of its owners", but at times also seems "a sentient creature with urges and powers of its own" (Shippey, *Author* 136). When relating Isildur's fate, Elrond declares that Isildur "*was betrayed by it* [the Ring] to his death" (*FR* 2.II.317, emphasis added). Elrond's words seem to hint at a form of consciousness and volition possessed by the Ring. This suggestion seems to be confirmed by Bilbo's own experience, for he warns Frodo that the Ring "did not seem always of the same size or weight; it shrank or expanded in an odd way, and might suddenly slip off a finger where it has been tight" (*FR* 1.II.62). Frodo himself feels a change in the Ring, which seems to grow "thicker and heavier than ever" after being exposed to the small chimney fire in Bag End (*FR* 1.II.65) – and sees before his very eyes how the Ring "seems to grow larger as it lay for a moment" on Tom Bombadil's hand (*FR* 1.VII.174). Shippey posits that the Ring's changing weight cannot clearly be attributed to either Frodo's reluctance to be parted from the Ring or to its reluctance to be held by someone other than Sauron. The latter instance would make a case for evil as "a force from outside which has in some way been able to make the non-sentient Ring itself evil; so it is indeed the Ring, obeying the will of its master, which does not want to be identified" (*Author* 135). I argue that, although tied to Sauron's will, these instances also depict the Ring as having its own agency and independent existence: it is not only that Sauron does not want the Ring to be identified and therefore the Ring obeys him. The Ring itself does not want to be identified. It displays a form of awareness in its interactions with the world despite being physically separated from Sauron, and without Sauron knowing its exact location or being able to manipulate it from afar in real time. This is evident in the Ring's reaction to different situations and holders: its choosing to fit specific hands, the moments in which it attempts to abandon wielders, and the ways in which it seeks to generate desires specific to individuals. The Ring's actions and reactions position it as an unrivalled

instance of Otherness, for it is simultaneously a container, a manifestation of Sauron's self and will, and a sentient object that in itself is evil and unfathomable, with whom direct communication or dialogue is impossible.

Flieger observes that "only three times in the story do we see it [the One Ring] do what it's advertised as doing", that is, being used to steer the will of the Other. These instances are Frodo overpowering Gollum in the Eryn Mui, in the Forbidden Pool, and finally in the Cracks of Mount Doom ("Jewels" 74). The Ring's effects on others by direct or indirect contact and the desire it generates are much more prominent. An example of the Ring's effects is Boromir's desire for the Ring, which may be initially deemed as positive, for it stems from the desire to serve the Other, i.e. the people of Minas Tirith and Gondor.⁴ But the Ring's malevolence warps this desire until it becomes an obsession with the object itself, the power it may grant, and the self. Through the Ring, desire corrupts Boromir until the desires of his self are perversely amplified. Boromir's initial actions in *LotR* correspond to the fulfilment of his duty towards the Other as captain of Gondor and son of the Steward Denethor: finding ways to protect his people against Mordor and sparing his brother a dangerous journey to Rivendell. Aragorn's role as the heir to the House of Elendil and the Ring both challenge his understanding of his duty and himself. Boromir's first reaction to Aragorn's true identity is marked by pride and doubt: "I was not sent to beg any boon ... yet we are hard pressed, and the Sword of Elendil would be a help beyond our hope – if such a thing could indeed return out of the shadows of the past" (*FR* 2.II.322). Further on, Boromir focuses on how, regardless of the warnings surrounding the Ring, it could be used by Gondor as a weapon to vanquish Mordor. As a warrior and captain of Gondor, Boromir understands the Ring as an instrument and its power as a path through which he and his kind can finally destroy those who he views as antagonistic forms of Otherness, especially Sauron:

Wielding it the Free Lords may surely defeat the Enemy. That is what he most fears, I deem ... The Men of Gondor are valiant, and they will never submit ... Valour needs first strength and then a weapon. Let the Ring be your weapon, if it has such power as you say. Take it and go forth to victory! (*FR* 2.II.348)

Boromir's reading of Sauron's expectations is not completely erroneous. Nevertheless, he is incapable of grasping that whoever wields the Ring cannot be free. As Steven Brett Carter indicates, Boromir is a representative of "the ancient heroic tradition of warriors that pursued glory and honor to their death", which may explain why "he would selfishly be drawn to the

⁴ For Flieger, only Faramir remains immune to the One Ring's influence ("Jewels" 66). However, in addition to Frodo, only three members of the Fellowship – Gandalf, Boromir, and Sam – are portrayed as being tempted by it.

Ring”, for in the long run Boromir “is driven by his pride and longing for glory to take the Ring” (98). Boromir’s actions on the battlefield are heroic, not only in terms of the service he provides his nation, but also in the glory of martial prowess. But Boromir’s fixation on the latter is a by-product of his desire for the Ring. The Ring thus obscures the ethical primacy of the Other by shifting the focus onto aggrandizing the power and importance of the self. This becomes apparent in how Boromir envisions himself through the influence of the Ring:

‘...The Ring would give *me* power of Command. How *I* would drive the hosts of Mordor, and *all men would flock to my banner!*’

Boromir strode up and down, speaking ever more loudly. *Almost he seemed to have forgotten Frodo*, while his talk dwelt on walls and weapons and the mustering of men; and he drew plans for great alliances and glorious victories to be; and he cast down Mordor, and became himself a mighty king, benevolent and wise. (*FR 2.X.519*, emphasis added)

Although Boromir imagines himself as a “benevolent and wise” ruler, the Other is no longer at the forefront of his actions. Nancy Enright interprets Boromir as representing “a stereotypical and purely masculine type of power ... that is weaker morally and spiritually than its non-traditional counterparts” such as Aragorn and the text’s female characters (57). I would argue that what Enright interprets as stereotypically masculine is the inability to fully recognise the Other whom the self is supposed to defend – in Boromir’s case it is quite literally the Other who is Frodo, suffering under the burden of the Ring. If Boromir can no longer see the Other, how can he guarantee that his hypothetical rulership will not result in an imposition of his power upon the Other like the tyrannous domination Sauron wishes to establish?

Boromir’s imaginings also foreshadow the fantasies Sam experiences as the Ring hangs on his neck during Frodo’s captivity in the tower of Cirith Ungol:

he felt himself enlarged, as if he were robed in *a huge distorted shadow of himself*, a vast and ominous threat halted upon the walls of Mordor ... Already the Ring tempted him, gnawing at his will and reason. Wild fantasies arose in his mind; and he saw Samwise the Strong, Hero of the Age, striding with a flaming sword across the darkened land, and *armies flocking to his call* as he marched to the overthrow of Barad-dûr. (*RK 6.I.1178*, emphasis added)

In both cases, the Ring distorts the perception of those in contact with it. It wants to be perceived as a means through which Boromir or Sam, who are marked by their duty to serve the Other, may achieve their purpose. But unlike Boromir, Sam’s responsibility towards the Other is not marked by the enemies he overpowers or the soldiers he commands, and his

“plain hobbit-sense” allows him to regain his ethical perspective (*RK* 6.I.1178). What ultimately saves Boromir from being utterly destroyed by the Ring is his service to the Other. Boromir redeems himself from trying to take the Ring from Frodo, from following the perverted desire of the self, by trying to protect Merry and Pippin. Gandalf thus says that “Galadriel told me that he [Boromir] was in peril. But he escaped in the end. I am glad. It was not in vain that the young hobbits came with us, if only for Boromir’s sake” (*TT* 3.V.647). It is through his service, not the Ring, that Boromir actualises his self before his death.

Boromir demonstrates the devastating consequences of the Ring’s noxious influence, even though he never actually touches it. His experience is part of the different effects the Rings of Power may have on mortals. As Gandalf explains,

A mortal, Frodo, who keeps one of the Great Rings, does not die, but he does not grow or obtain more life, he merely continues, until at last every minute is a weariness. And if he often uses the Ring to make himself invisible, he fades: he becomes in the end invisible permanently, and walks in the twilight under the eye of the Dark Power that rules the Rings... sooner or later the Dark Power *will devour him*. (*FR* 1.II.61, emphasis added)

Gandalf here describes the effects the Rings of Power may have on mortals *in general*, with both Gandalf and Galadriel declaring at different points in the narrative that the Ring gives beings power according to their “stature” (*FR* 1.II.70) or “measure” (*FR* 2.VII.477). What the text further reveals is that the Rings of Power have different degrees of influence over different beings whilst producing different desires. In the dwarves who held the Seven,

The only power over them that the Rings wielded was to inflame their hearts with a greed of gold and precious things, so that if they lacked them all other good things seemed profitless, and they were filled with wrath and desire for vengeance on all who deprived them. But they were made from their beginning of a kind to resist most steadfastly any domination. Though they could be slain or broken, they could not be reduced to shadows enslaved to another will; and for the same reason their lives were not affected by any Ring, to live either longer or shorter because of it. (*RK* Appendix A.III.1414).⁵

Although the narrative does not state it explicitly, the “kind” referred to in the quote evokes the creation of the dwarves by Aulë. Unlike the Children of Ilúvatar, the dwarves are made out of stone (*S* 43-46). Their constitution might explain why they react differently to the Rings – much to Sauron’s disappointment – and why their reaction is reminiscent of the “dragon sickness” Thorin experiences in *The Hobbit*. Ultimately, the Seven take the desire

⁵ See also *S* 288.

“of the hearts of dwarves”, their “fierce and jealous love” for beautiful treasures and the idea of wealth engrained in their culture and selfhood, to the extreme (*H* 19).⁶ It is their enslavement to this extreme form of desire produced by the Rings that sunders their self from others. The effects of the Rings of Power consequently respond to Middle-earth’s complex set of beings, thereby demonstrating that evil manifests itself in this world in different ways.

As for the mortal men, “proud and great”, to whom Sauron gave the Nine, “and so ensnared them”, their response to the Rings of Power speaks of a desire to transcend the limits of their self, not only in terms of their wealth and status, but also their mortality (*FR* 1.II.67).⁷ According to *The Silmarillion*, those under the power of the Nine “had, as it seemed, unending life, yet life became unendurable to them” (*S* 289). The wraiths stand as one of the most recognizable images of evil to be found in *LotR*, kings and leaders who “fell under the dominion of the One, and [...] became Ringwraiths, shadows under the great Shadow, his most terrible servants” (*FR* 1.II.68). These beings are animated by Sauron’s power, for “they stand or fall by him” (*FR* 2.III.355). However, beyond the fear they provoke and the master they serve, I contend that their fundamental quality is their inability to hold an ethical relationship with the Other.

The wraiths’ specific (lack of) selfhood, constitution and the effect they produce on others bear a special significance in terms of the relationship between the self and the Other. Conscious of the limitations originating in their mortality, in Arda humanity is characterised by its wish for power and fear of death – hence the line in Elven lore: “Nine [Rings] for Mortal Men doomed to die” (*FR* 1.II.66). But by seeking immortality, the desire for the Other is (re)directed towards the self. Faramir tells Frodo that in Gondor

Death was ever present, because the Númenóreans still, as they had in their old kingdom, and so lost it, hungered after endless life unchanging. Kings made tombs more splendid than houses of the living, and counted old names in the rolls of their descent dearer than the names of sons. Childless lords sat in aged halls musing on heraldry; in secret chambers withered men compounded strong elixirs, or in high cold towers asked questions of the stars. (*TT* 4.V.886)

With the Nine Rings, Sauron deliberately instrumentalises the fears and desires that arise from “ordinary human weakness and selfishness” (Shippey, *Author* 125). Almost nothing is said in the text about the wraiths’ pasts as humans or their individual motivations – personal or political – for accepting Sauron’s rings, but it can be argued that, at the very least, Sauron

⁶ See also Chapter Three of this thesis.

⁷ On death and mortality in the cosmogony of Middle-earth, see *S* 42.

weaponised their wishes of immortality, of “glory and great wealth” (*S* 289).⁸ Whatever their motivations may have been, any goodness or validity in their choice to take the Rings of Power would have been eventually trumped not only by the evil of the instrument, but by the evil of privileging the cause or desire as the final end in itself – as the only manifestation of the self, until the self becomes blind to how cause or desire affect the Other.

In order to explain what a wraith is, Shippey draws attention to two of the definitions contained in the *OED*: “an apparition or spectre of a dead person; a phantom or ghost” and “an immaterial or spectral appearance of a living being, frequently regarded as portending that person's death” (“Images” 253). As for the etymological origin of the word, Jason Fisher explains that “to be bent, twisted, turned, generally from good toward evil – or, if not *toward* evil, then bent or turned *because* of evil – was to be *writhen*, *wraithas*, or to become a wraith” (105). The wraiths of *LotR* inhabit a middle ground between the definitions provided by the *OED*, as the Ring has extended their lifespan unnaturally and yet they can hardly be considered as part of the living. From tangible beings of flesh and blood, these humans were turned both by their own perverse desires of power and wealth and by Sauron’s magic into evil shadows that “are not exactly ‘immaterial,’ rather something defined by their shape (a twist, a coil, a ring) more than by their substance” (Shippey, “Images” 254). Wraiths are those who, by accepting and wielding the Rings of Power, had their humanity devoured by Sauron’s power, twisted into an abject, monstrous Other.

Wraiths are thus not only shadows of their former self, but at the same time a hostile, monstrous form of Otherness, beings “whose bodies do not appear in the normal sense” – a quality they share with the Barrow-wights and the Dead of the Dwimorberg (Kisor, “Incorporeality” 20). Spirits of hatred on wings of shadow, their existence conjures Sauron’s temporary loss of physical form at the end of the Second Age: “Sauron was indeed caught in the wreck of Númenor, so that the bodily form in which he long had walked perished; but he fled back to Middle-earth, a spirit of hatred borne upon a dark wind” (*RK* Appendix A.I.i.1357). It is as if Sauron would condemn those subjected to his power to endure the same horrors he experienced. But although they cannot be easily harmed or vanquished, wraiths are not “entirely incorporeal” (Kisor, “Incorporeality” 20). Wraiths can affect the world physically, for they also “act physically, carrying steel swords, riding horses or winged reptiles” (Shippey, “Images” 255). Wraiths can also feel pain. This is shown in “Dernhelm’s and Merry’s attacks on the Witch-king”, which “are clearly attacks on a physical being – though perhaps not a being entirely like most bodies” (Kisor, “Incorporeality” 23). The depiction of the wraiths crying out in pain when they are wounded or harmed is practically

⁸ See also *S* 263-74.

the only notion given by the text of these beings experiencing a physical sensation, which contrasts strongly with the sensorial enjoyment other creatures experience in Middle-earth's physical world. Shippey associates them "with mist and smoke, also physical, even dangerous or choking, but at the same time effectively intangible" ("Images" 255). The image of "mist and smoke" can also be applied to the Wraiths' perception of the world and the Other:

They themselves do not see the world of light as we do, but our shapes cast shadows in their minds ... and in the dark they perceive many signs and forms that are hidden from us: then they are most to be feared. And all times they smell the blood of living things, desiring and hating it. (*FR* 1.XI.248)-

Wraiths can neither see the world nor experience joy. They cannot see the Other and every encounter they hold with an Other not ethical, for it is veiled by hate or pain. This means that wraiths are no longer in a position to hold an ethical relationship with the Other, for their ability to meet the world and encounter the Other is irrevocably marred. This incapacity to engage with the Other speaks of what lies at the heart of Sauron's domination of the Other. By bending the Other's will to his own until their original self is destroyed, Sauron shows that the Other may only exist for him as an object to manipulate, to change until it is of service to him: "the neutralization of the other who becomes a theme or an object ... is precisely his reduction to the same" (Levinas, *Totality* 43). The Lord of the Rings is consequently the Wraiths' sole point of departure; as slaves of Sauron and his desires, they have forfeited the possibility of engaging with the Other in any fashion that does not deal in terror and destruction. They are therefore incapable of (actually) seeing or acknowledging the Other, for they embody a desire for life that is in truth only hatred.

This hatred or hostility towards the Other is translated into a sensation of fear and dread for those in their presence – as if seeing a dark, ominous figure through the mist – for "though the Ringwraiths do have physical capacities, their real weapon is psychological: they disarm their victims by striking them with fear and despair" (Shippey, "Images" 256-7). Wraiths use their pernicious influence to entrap the Other: Merry describes his encounter with them while in Bree as making him feel "terrified ... I thought I had fallen into deep water ... I had an ugly dream, which I can't remember. I went to pieces. I don't know what came over me" (*FR* 1.X.213). Whilst debating how to enter Mordor, Sam spots their winged steeds. For Sam "the same fear was on him as he had felt in the presence of the Black Rider", whereas Frodo's "thought was broken" (*TT* 4.III.843). Even the orcs of Mordor, who as evil creatures in the service of Sauron are arguably allies of the Nazgûl, comment that the Ringwraiths give them "the creeps. And they skin the body off you as soon as they look at

you, and leave you cold in the dark on the other side” (*TT* 4.X.965). By creating a sense of fear in the Other, by “breaking” them, the wraiths inhibit the Other from meeting those who are around them, from answering any appeal made to them. The Other is isolated, and all that remains is despair and the Dark Lord’s will. The Ring-bearer consequently feels compelled to put on the Ring in the wraiths’ presence, which would reveal himself and the One to the Nazgûl. This occurs in the Woody End, where Frodo is lulled by a false sense of security – “he felt that he had only to slip it on, and then he would be safe” (*FR* 1.III.98) – and at Weathertop, where he wants to put on the Ring “not with the hope of escape, or of doing anything, either good or bad: he simply felt that he must take the Ring and put it on his finger” (*FR* 1.XI.255). All that is left is the Ring.

Flieger reads Frodo’s invisibility, one granted by the Rings of Power and which he momentarily shares with the wraiths, “as the outward and visible (or invisible) sign of an inward process, a progressive fading and loss of himself” (“Body” 14). The wraiths’ invisibility as a loss or nothingness is highlighted by the absence of their personal histories or identities within the narrative despite them being lords and kings, “for though the Ringwraiths appear some thirty or forty times during *The Lord of the Rings*, we are in fact told very little about them” (Shippey, “Images” 255). In *LotR*, only the Witch-king of Angmar rises to prominence as having some form of identifiable selfhood, as the Wraith who stabs Frodo at Weathertop and prominently reappears during the Battle of the Pelennor Fields.⁹ The disguise with which they cover their nothingness as the Black Riders makes them practically indistinguishable from one another. Their black robes point to their shadowy existence whilst giving the impression of being openings into the void the wraiths inhabit: “so black were they that they seemed like black holes in the deep shade behind them” (*FR* 1.XI.255).

The invisibility of wraiths and Ring-bearers also problematises the relationship between the self and the Other. For Eaglestone, the invisibility granted by rings signals the tension between “the illusion of separateness in which we deny ‘enrootedness’ in each other” and the tendency “towards a shared world that negotiates and respects otherness” (“Invisibility” 78). Rings “separate” the beings who don them from their surroundings and their communities by making them invisible and inaccessible until, with enough use, they are effectively cut off, othered from the world. Frodo experiences this when he puts on the Ring at Weathertop. Frodo can perceive his surroundings, but they seem dimmed, and Sam hears him cry, but Frodo’s voice “seemed to come from a great distance, or from under the

⁹ According to the Tale of Years, around 2251 of the Second Age “the Nazgûl or Ringwraiths, slaves of the Nine Rings, first appear” (*RK* Appendix B.1422). Khamûl (also known as the Black Easterling or the Shadow of the East) is mentioned as second in command after the Witch-king (*UT* 438-56, 2951).

earth” (*FR* 1.XII.257). Frodo is unreachable by his companions, isolated in witnessing the Black Riders’ hidden forms. They now appear as they once were before fading into Sauron’s dominion: “long grey robes; upon their grey hairs were helms of silver; in their haggard hands were swords of steel” (*FR* 1.XI.255). The Morgul-knife has a similar effect, for Frodo’s “perception of reality changes as he begins to fade out of the real world while at the same time the real world begins to fade before his eyes” (Flieger, “Body” 14). At the Ford of Rivendell, Frodo “perceives the Ringwraiths as they truly are” (Flieger, “Body” 15). They stand before Frodo “robed in white and grey. Swords were naked in their pale hands; helms were on their heads” (*FR* 1.XII.279). Once more, Frodo sees the echoes of the Riders’ original self – as opposed to only the garments with which they conceal their nothingness.

Shippey argues that the Ring gives Frodo a “glimpse of what the Riders are in the *other world*”: “something not skeletal but undying, the bitter and dangerous obverse of the long life enjoyed by Bilbo and endured by Gollum” (*Author* 67, emphasis added). What Shippey misses here is that Bilbo does in fact drink from that bitterness – for his long life was rapidly turning from joy to burden – but he gestures towards the importance of the “Other-world” inhabited by the Ringwraiths, a space Flieger names the “shadow world” or “underworld of human nature” (“Jewels” 75), which Gandalf calls “the wraith-world” (*FR* 2.I.289). This “underworld of human nature” is an other world within the Other-world that is Middle-earth, a liminal space or dimension in which the material reality of Middle-earth overlaps with a spiritual realm, accessible to mortals through the Rings of Power or the Morgul blade. At the same time, this “underworld”, as occupied by the wraiths and visited by Frodo, is also a state of abject or monstrous Otherness in which those who have faded dwell. No longer human and not yet dead, the wraiths are bereft both of their selves and of the Other, which now appears to them as having “faded to shadows of ghostly grey” (*FR* 1.XII.277). In this underworld they have been abandoned to their desire and their hatred, to the non-existence of their self.¹⁰

The Ringwraiths therefore illustrate how *wraithing* can be understood as a dissolution of the self until the self becomes overrun by “pure evil” (Shippey, *Author* 125). Such a dissolution devastates the ability of the self to ethically engage with the Other. It can

¹⁰ Although lying outside of the scope of this thesis, it is important to point out that this “other side” is also accessible to Glorfindel, who appears in it as if “a white light was shining through the form and raiment of the rider, as if through a thin veil” (*FR* 1.XII.273). Gandalf mentions that Eldar lords “do not fear the Ringwraiths, for those who have dwelt in the Blessed Realm live at once in both worlds, and against both the Seen and Unseen they have great power” (*FR* 2.I.290). The narrative does not explain what this “other side” is. Flieger contends that “the phrase may refer simply to the other side of the world, to Aman/Valinor, the Land in the West at the end of the Straight Road. But it may also refer to the far edge of the Ring world, and to the possibility that by going deeply into the dark and passing through it one can come out again into the light on the other side (“Body” 15). This would mean that light and shadow are more than simply opposites, because the suffering of evil may result in another pathway towards the light.

be the end result of a prolonged contact with and use of a Ring of Power or of “a blow from outside” such as the one suffered by Frodo at Weathertop, with the shard from the Morgul-knife initiating the wraithing process (Shippey, “Images” 257). The hobbits who bear the One Ring can be tempted by it in the same way as human beings were lured by the Nine – as seen above with Sam – but, as discussed in my previous chapter, they are much more likely to experience an ever-growing obsession with the One Ring itself. This, in turn, may lead to an eventual loss of their self. Although the initial acts of goodness – the consideration for the Other – with which Bilbo and Frodo begin their bearing of the Ring slows down the wraithing process in them, they nevertheless come too close to this loss. Bilbo and Frodo have come too close to experiencing the wraiths’ non-existence and incapacity to engage with the Other. For such hurt there is no cure in Middle-earth.

Orcs

In my second chapter, I discussed how orcs represent a type of alterity within Middle-earth that is understood as distinctly evil in origin and essence. In *LotR*, the first mention of orcs occurs in the “Prologue”, as it tells of the “last battle” fought by hobbits in the Shire before the finding of the One Ring, “the Battle of Greenfields, S.R. 1147, in which Bandobras Took routed an invasion of Orcs” (*FR* 7). From this moment onwards, orcs remain as threatening figures who mostly act as henchmen of the forces of evil, with scant explanation within the narrative of their origins, the reason for their alliance with Sauron and their hatred for other creatures. It is said that the “Orcs were first bred by the Dark Power of the North in the Elder days”, as a mockery of elves (*RK* Appendix F.I.1486). Such a statement implies that orcs are not only counterfeits of the First Born, but also historical enemies of the Children of Ilúvatar since the earliest ages of Arda.

That orcs are evil and incapable of being otherwise is an accepted fact for the text’s narrator and its main characters. Orcs are consequently destined “to be perpetual strangers”, but not the stranger to whom the self offers hospitality (Komornicka 89). They are to be shunned and destroyed, for orcs are Other “to all the major races” of Arda – so much so that special weapons were created to respond to their presence and kill them, like Bilbo’s Sting (Komornicka 89). This becomes evident in the first face-to-face encounter between the main characters of *LotR* and orcs, when the Fellowship is attacked by orcs in Moria, some “large and evil; black Uruks of Mordor” (*FR* 2.V.422). One of the orc chieftains is depicted as “almost man-high, clad in black mail from head to foot ... His broad flat face was swart, his eyes were like coals, and his tongue was red” (*FR* 2.V.423). This description, which emphasises the orc’s swarthy and ugliness, further underscores their Otherness in addition to their allegiance to Sauron.

The text does not offer detailed descriptions of the orcs' appearance, instead opting for fragmentary visions of claws, fangs, misshapen and yet powerful limbs, swart faces, slanted eyes, and above all ugliness. In other sections of text, orcs are portrayed as "a fleshy, dark host" (Komornicka 83), likened to a swarm of insects, a legion of ants or a marabunta: the landscape of Mordor "was bored into a hundred caves and maggot-holes; there a host of orcs lurked ready at a signal to issue forth like black ants going to war" (*TT* 4.III.832). This idea is repeated during the immediate aftermath of Sauron's defeat:

As when death smites the swollen brooding thing that inhabits their crawling hill and holds them all in sway, ants will wander witless and purposeless and then feebly die, so the creatures of Sauron, orc or troll or beast spell-enslaved, ran hither and thither mindless; some slew themselves, or cast themselves in pits, or fled wailing back to hide in holes and dark lightless places far from hope. (*RK* 6.IV.1243)

In these depictions, orcs are so Other and othered that they are deprived of anything that could be considered a selfhood: of a complete, distinct body and an individual mind. Whereas "the human soldiers who surrender when Sauron and Saruman are defeated are treated by their captors as fellow human beings, not as soulless creatures", the fate of the orcs does not even merit a distinct mention (Croft 48). They are not only Middle-earth's "stereotypical monsters" who kill and destroy for the sake of it (Flieger, "Orcs" 206-7). When orcs are portrayed as an anonymous evil force, composed of equally monstrous entities, such a depiction stunts the possibility of recognising them as ethical subjects. However, I argue that there are moments in *LotR* where it becomes possible to acknowledge orcs not only as a monstrous Other, but as ethical subjects. This can be shown by carefully examining orcs' interactions with their own kind and with other creatures who populate Middle-earth. In these interactions, orcs are presented as living, humanoid beings, with faculties of speech and reason, and with a potential for an ethical relationship with the Other.

While often presented as an extreme, evil Other, orcs undergo a process of partial familiarisation in *LotR* that renders their apparently irreconcilable Otherness intelligible – and at points even sympathetic. In contrast to the textual instances mentioned above, other passages reveal the complexities of orc-kind. In *The Two Towers*, Merry and Pippin discover that there are in fact different groups of orcs in Middle-earth, who are distinct in their appearance, language, geographic origin, and motivations (*TT* 3.III.580). They are as different amongst themselves as the different groups of humans and hobbits. The orcs that capture Merry and Pippin are divided into Northerners who have pursued the Fellowship, Isengarders and Uruk-hai under the orders of Saruman, and those from Mordor. While some orcs are driven by revenge and bloodthirst – "We have come all the way from the Mines to

kill, and to avenge our folk” (*TT* 3.III.581) – others desire plunder and consequently perceive the hobbits as means to advance their own interests – “Why don’t we [orcs] search them [Merry and Pippin] and find out? We might find something that we could use ourselves?” (*TT* 3.III.580). There are also orcs who have conflicting “orders”: Mordor demands that “the prisoners are NOT to be searched or plundered” and that they be delivered to one of the Nazgûl (*TT* 3.III.580). Isengard commands Uglúk and his “fighting Uruk-hai!” (*TT* 3.III.581) to “kill all but NOT the Halflings; they are to be brought back ALIVE as quickly as possible ... Alive and as captured, no spoiling” (*TT* 3.III.580). The friction derived from these different commands evidences the lack of congenial relationships amongst orcs, who mistrust and betray one another, and accuse those from different groups of what they consider to be atrocious acts. More importantly, their behaviour and their othering of each other, as monstrous as it may be, is nevertheless recognisably human, for humans are capable of exactly the same things.

When Uglúk proudly proclaims the Uruk-hai’s loyalty to Saruman, describing them as “the servants of Saruman the Wise, the White Hand: the Hand that gives us man’s-flesh to eat”, he reiterates a depiction of orcs as cannibalistic previously established by the goblins in *The Hobbit* (*TT* 3.III.581).¹¹ Orcs are monstrous because in spite of their closeness to humans, they are capable of devouring other humanoid creatures – including their own. Shagrat in *The Return of the King* threatens Snaga with devouring him – in what could also be considered a hyperbolic dismissal: “You must go, or I’ll eat you” (*RK* 6.I.1184). And yet, Grishnákh of Mordor insults the Uruk-hai and incites his fellow Mordor-orcs by asking the latter: “How do you like being called *swine* by the muck-rakers of a dirty little wizard [the Isengarders]? It’s orc-flesh they eat, I’ll warrant” (*TT* 3.III.581). These statements oscillate between the threat of consuming the Other and the fear of being eaten. They consequently reveal that despite their supposed radical Otherness, orcs act in a way that is logical to the reader and not too dissimilar from what may be expected from human beings at their worst. At the same time, these references to their eating habits underscore the fact that even as counterfeits or mockeries, if orcs “are to live at all, they have to live like other living creatures. Foul water and foul meats they’ll take, if they can get no better, but not poison” (*RK* 6.I.1195-6). Unlike the Ringwraiths – or what can be garnered from the scarce depictions of Sauron in the text – the orcs’ embodiment of evil is attached to the experience of emotions such as rage and greed, and to a bodily dimension that requires nourishment and healing. Their knowledge and willingness to heal their bodies, as exemplified by the fortifying “burning liquid” they feed to Merry and Pippin and the ointment used to treat

¹¹ See Chapter Three of this thesis.

Merry's head wound, implies a form of care (*TT* 3.III.584). The narrative thus exhibits a tension between how it "strengthens the revulsion, emphasizing the animality of the orc and denying identification" and how it "undermines the process by humanizing the creature[s]" in their physical and psychological attitudes (Komornicka 90). Orc loyalties, taboos, and behaviours exemplify how orcs possess a sense of service, of gratitude, and of what is right and wrong that may intersect with that of other humanoid creatures; that is, an orc-ethics. Their Otherness is, in this sense, not so distant from ourselves.

Jolanta N. Komornicka writes that "against the nuanced presentation of hobbit, elf, and man, the orc at first glance has little to recommend it. Often found in a band, swarming over the lands of Middle-earth, an orc is rarely glimpsed as an individual" (83). However, in the moments in which the text offers a closer look at the interactions between individual orcs, further examples of what I call orc-ethics, along with a possible ethical relationship between the Orc and the Other, come to light. *The Two Towers* presents a conversation between Gorbag and Shagrat, which, in the edition used for this thesis, lasts over nine pages. Gorbag criticises whoever left Frodo behind to be devoured by Shelob: "The big fellow with the sharper sword doesn't seem to have thought him [Frodo] worth much anyhow – just left him lying: *regular Elvish trick*" (*TT* 4.X.968, emphasis added). Shippey points out that "there is no mistaking the disapproval in Gorbag's last three words ... It is clear that he regards abandoning one's comrades as contemptible, and also characteristic of the other side. And yet only a page later it is exactly what characterises his own side" ("Images" 243). Shippey is here referring to Shagrat's account of losing his fellow Ufthak "for days. Then we found him in a corner; hanging up he was, but he was wide awake and glaring. How we laughed! She'd forgotten him, maybe, but we didn't touch him – no good interfering with Her" (*TT* 4.X.969). Shippey argues that this instance reveals that "orcs are moral beings, with an underlying morality much the same as ours", and yet "it seems that an underlying morality has no effect at all on actual behaviour" ("Images" 244). I would instead suggest that this example of an ethical contradiction is in fact very human: value (at least theoretically) is placed on the concepts of camaraderie and loyalty; those who seem to shun these ideals are criticized, and yet those who voice said critiques also fail to uphold them – in Shagrat's case, self-preservation and respect towards, if not fear of, a larger and more powerful being take precedence. Orcs thus not only reflect human moral standpoints, but also our moral inconsistencies. As a result, this mirroring begs the following question: if orcs are similar to humans at our most terrible extremes, then is their monstrosity also reflective of human monstrosity – and therefore not really Other?

Whereas orc-ethics points towards the similarities between human and orcish behaviours, a further element in the process of familiarising the reader with orcs lies in their

speech patterns. If the “relation between the same and the other ... is language”, the consideration of the discursive content of orc dialogue – as opposed to simply the phonetic or morphologic aspects of the Black Speech spoken by the orcs of Mordor – allows a further approach to the orc as Other through a Levinasian prism (Levinas, *Totality* 39). In *LotR*, orcs are overwhelmingly portrayed as speaking in the Common Speech. The Appendices state that orcs

had no language of their own, but took what they could of other tongues and perverted it to their own liking; yet they made only brutal jargons, scarcely sufficient even for their own needs, unless it were for curses and abuse. And these creatures, being filled with malice, hating even their own kind, quickly developed as many barbarous dialects as there were groups or settlements of their race, so that their Orkish speech was of little use to them in intercourse between different tribes. So it was that in the Third Age Orcs used for communication between breed and breed the Westron tongue[.] (*RK Appendix F.I.1486*)¹²

That orc-speech is “full of hate and anger” does not go unnoticed by non-orcs like Merry and Pippin (*TT 3.III 580*). Similar to the goblins in *The Hobbit*, orc discourse often involves or implies violence and abuse towards interlocutors, which ranges from intimidation and promises of bodily harm to name-calling and humiliation. This is especially directed towards those whom orcs consider inferior, including those of their own kind. Pippin is threatened by an unnamed orc who says “If I had my way, you’d wish you were dead now ... I’d make you squeak, you miserable rat” (*TT 3.III.579*). In the “Appendix F” of *LotR*, the translator notes that the term *uruk* “was applied as a rule only to the great soldier-orcs that at this time issued from Mordor and Isengard. The lesser kinds were called, especially by the *Uruk-hai*, *snaga* ‘slave’” (*RK Appendix F.I.1486*). Two orcs named *Snaga* appear in the text – one in *The Two Towers*, the other in *The Return to the King* – thus pointing to how the term for slave in the Black Speech is, in fact, “a contemptuous epithet turned into a proper name” (Flieger, “Orcs” 210). As for those superior in rank to the orcs, they are not referred to by their names, but by nicknames that allude to their hierarchy or to sections of the body: they are the Top Ones (*TT 4.X.964*) who are High Up (*TT 4.X.966*). Saruman is Sharkey or the White Hand, and Sauron is the (Great) Eye or simply “He” (*TT 4.X.965*). This “definition by omission and/or circumlocution” through which the orcs address their commanders is

¹² Black Speech “was devised by Sauron in the Dark Years” (*RK Appendix F.I.1487*). An example of Black Speech in *LotR* comes from one of the unnamed Mordor orcs that threaten Pippin, who says “*Uglúk u bagronk sha pushdug Saruman-glob búb-hosh skai*” (*TT 3.III.579*). This curse is “in the more debased form used by the soldiers of the Dark Tower” (*RK Appendix F I.1487*). In his paper, “The Curse of the Mordor-Orc” (2019), Marc Zender points out that Tolkien suggested three translations of this sentence throughout his lifetime, the most recent one dating to the late 1960s: “*Uglúk to torture (chamber) with stinking Saruman-filth. Dung-heap. Skai!*” (*PE 17, 78*).

reminiscent of the orcs' depiction at specific points in the narrative as fragmented bodies (Flieger, "Orcs" 210-1). Through their discourse, orcs subvert the fragmentation forced upon them and their submission to authority figures who, however powerful, are not infallible. Orcs mock them, and in that mockery they find strategies through which to apply to the higher ups the othering that the lowest of the low endure.¹³ Such a discursive subversion confirms that orcs have a mind of their own, for their obedience to their overlords is not blind.

The impression that, within the hierarchy of Middle-earth, orcs are seen as part of the inferior strata is bolstered by their "recognizable speech patterns and diction conventionally associated with familiar, even stereotypical character types (lower-class, uneducated)", such as Cockney slang (Flieger, "Orcs" 206-7).¹⁴ The dialogue between Gorbag and Shagrat is riddled with phrases like "Orders, you lubber" (*TT* 4.X.961), "But let the lads play!" (*TT* 4.X.964), "You may well put your thinking cap on, if you've got one" (*TT* 4.X.967), and interjections like "Garn!" and "Nar" (*TT* 4.X.969). In the hierarchy of evil, orcs belong to a lower class, whereas beings like Saruman and the Nazgûl have higher ontological and social positions, which can also be observed in their discourse. Furthermore, as Anna Vaninskaya observes, "the Orcs that Frodo and Sam encounter in Mordor use the most modern idiom in the book: theirs is distinctly the speech of twentieth-century soldiers, but also of government or party functionaries, minor officials in a murderous bureaucracy" (347-8). By comparison, the Black Captain's threat to Éowyn rings archaic: "Come not between the Nazgûl and his prey!" (*RK* 5.IV.1100). Thus, "in their jocularly, though vulgar and inclined toward the sadistic, they are humanized in their intellect just as their need for real food humanizes their bodies" (Komornicka 92). The manner in which the orcs are portrayed as speaking, especially in the Common Tongue, places them close enough to hobbits and contemporary readers that, even if for a moment, the gap that separates them as Other might be bridged.

Another moment that depicts orcs as more than "aliens among, and other than, the peoples of Middle-earth" is Gorbag and Shagrat's conversation in *The Two Towers* (Flieger, "Orcs" 205). Sam, and with him the reader, overhears both orcs speaking of their desire to go "with a few trusty lads somewhere where there's good loot nice and handy, and no big bosses" (*TT* 4.X.965). This intimate, domestic scene amongst orcs affords the reader the

¹³ Saruman suggests that the nickname Sharkey was given to him as "a sign of affection, possibly" (*RK* 6.VIII.1332). A footnote indicates that this name "was probably Orkish in origin: sharkû, 'old man' (*RK* 6.VIII.1332).

¹⁴ See Chapter Three of this thesis. Bill Ferny's threats towards Merry and Pippin during the Scouring of the Shire are very similar to the orc threats mentioned above: "You clear out, or I'll break your filthy little necks" (*RK* 6.VIII.1307). This threat of violence breaks the illusion of the Shire as a place of ideal serenity and peace.

opportunity to peer into orc-subjectivity, which seems to be more than rage and hate. This moment, even if for a few seconds, challenges what is common knowledge about orcs according to the other inhabitants of Tolkien's fictional world and the editor of *LotR*. Orcs, it would thus seem, are capable of dreaming: they may dream of riches, of getting away from the burden of authority, of living amongst fellows they can trust. These dreams, as orcish as they may be, are not so unfamiliar or unworthy of sympathy. Shippey notes that:

orcish behaviour, whether in orcs or in humans, has its root not in an inverted morality which sees bad as good and vice versa, but in a kind of self-centredness which sees indeed what is good – like standing by one's comrades or being loyal to one's mates – but is unable to see one's own behaviour in the right place on this accepted scale. ("Images" 251-2, emphasis added)

Rather than being unable to understand the position of the orcish self in "the right place", I argue that the key here is what Shippey terms "self-centredness", which runs parallel to the effects of the Ring that heighten the preoccupation with the self. The depiction of orcs in *LotR*, from their behaviour to their language, seems to indicate an extreme preoccupation with the self, with its needs and hatreds – a hatred not only for the world, but also amongst themselves, for their own kind. Such a preoccupation may hinder orcs from ethically engaging with those they consider Other. Instead of serving the Other as part of an ethical relationship, orcs serve a higher power like Sauron or Saruman, who seeks to dominate the Other. As servants of these figures or forces, orcs follow their unwillingness or replicate their inability to engage with the Other.

That orcs are thought by the characters and the editor of the narrative as only capable of evil is proof of their othering. But the text also offers, concurrent to their othering, instances in which orcs transcend their configuration as disjointed body parts or a hostile swarm made up of a myriad of monsters. In these brief moments, orcs appear not only of pursuing their own desires, but in creating cooperative relationships that hint at more than submission or uneasy alliances. The characters of *LotR* may not be able to perceive it, but the reader can perhaps transcend the viewing of the Orc as simply an antagonistic form of Otherness. I argue that the depiction of orcs and, potentially, the reader's interpretation of these beings, reveal the limits of the text's framing devices, the perspective of the narrator or the editor/translator figures, and the protagonists' view of this Secondary World. These devices and focalisers do not have the last word on the narrative's depth or impact, for the text affords the reader with more freedom to engage with the characters and situations presented as Other.

Shelob

To conclude this chapter, I will briefly address Shelob “the Great, last child of Ungoliant to trouble the unhappy world” as an embodiment of radical, hostile Otherness (*TT* 4.IX.947). Amidst the scarcity of female characters in the text, Shelob stands as a unique figure for multiple reasons: she is one of the few evil animals portrayed, along with the fell beasts of the Nazgûl, the wargs, and the Watcher in the Water. Shelob is also the only example of an evil female being whose actions intersect with the main plot, and she is the only creature who is characterised as a “wanton female” within the story (Reid, “Light” 101).

In the rendering of her monstrosity, of her extreme Otherness, the detailed depiction of Shelob’s constitution is an essential element, providing a stark contrast to the rather fragmentary images of orcish appearances. Through Sam’s eyes, the text describes her as

the most loathly shape that he had ever beheld, horrible beyond the horror of an evil dream. Most like a spider she was, but huger than the great hunting beasts, and more terrible than them because of the evil purpose in her remorseless eyes ... they were lit with a fell light again, clustering in her out-thrust head. Great horns she had, and behind her short stalk-like sack was her huge swollen body, a vast bloated bag, swaying and sagging between her legs; its great bulk was black, blotched with livid marks, but the belly underneath was pale and luminous and gave forth a stench. Her legs were bent, with great knobbed joints high above her back, and hairs that stuck out like steel spines, and at each leg’s end there was a claw. (*TT* 4.IX.949)

Shelob’s body is a site of nightmarish horror, the type of horror that Brian Attebery describes as “the Lovecraftian touches that Tolkien uses for contrast with his idylls and elvish reveries” (30). Shelob combines the idea of an arachnid exaggerated to unnatural, epic proportions with revolting visual and olfactory marks and dangerous features – spikes, claws, sting – which produces in the characters – and potentially the readers – repulsion and fear. Leslie Donovan argues that the intersection of these characteristics makes Shelob “the most substantial of the physical threats” that Frodo encounters: “foul and powerful” creatures like the orcs may ultimately be defeated, but Shelob is an apex predator that represents an “overwhelmingly visceral vision of evil” (105). I would argue that it is not only her sheer size and strength that make her so terrifying an opponent, but it is also the sense of a malevolent intelligence, the “evil purpose” illuminating her eyes that make her such a formidable embodiment of hostile Otherness. Unlike the uncanny spiders of Mirkwood, “her lesser broods”, Shelob is not depicted as having speech which may be understood by hobbits like Sam and Frodo (*TT* 4.IX.946). It is however evident that she found a way to communicate with Gollum, who “had promised to bring her food” (*TT* 4.IX.947). Her ability to understand and make herself understood makes her even more horrific and dangerous, for it gestures towards an intentionality that goes beyond instinct.

Shelob's wantonness lies in the transgressive excess that is her existence. Unlike "good female characters" who "are non-sexual and operate primarily in non-material realms (spiritual rather than material) with one exception (Éowyn)", Shelob "is constructed as greedy, malicious and perverse in her malice and much more embodied because of her appetites, in all meanings of the word" (Reid, "Light" 101). Her lust for blood is unquenchable, "drinking the blood of Elves and Men, bloated and grown fat with endless brooding on her feasts" (*TT* 4.IX.946). Her hatred is irrepressible, and it does not matter to her who her mates, her bastard offspring, and her prey are amongst her brood (*TT* 4.IX.946-7). These characteristics make her, like the orcs, an Other whose antagonism to the worldview represented by the narrator and the main characters of the text is irreconcilable. But unlike other antagonists in the story, her essential alignment to evil is presented as primordial, not political:

Little she knew of or cared for towers, or rings, or anything devised by mind or hand, who only desired death for all others, mind and body, and for herself a glut of life, alone, swollen till the mountains could no longer hold her up and the darkness could no longer contain her. (*TT* 4.IX.947)

Shelob does not simply fail to do or choose good. Her self, according to the framing devices of the narrative, is evil. If orcs demonstrate a self-centredness or preoccupation with the self that hampers them from ethically engaging with the Other, then Shelob takes this preoccupation and turns it into an obsession of monstrous proportions. She "served none but herself" (*TT* 4.IX.946). Hence when Sam says that Shelob is probably "one of the nasty friends the little wretch [Gollum] had made in his wanderings", he is mistaken (*TT* 4.II.828). Shelob has no friends, nor family, for she holds no concept of kinship or community. The Other only exists for her as an object for her consumption or to advance the fulfilment of her desires and her survival. By viewing every Other as an object, Shelob cannot hold an ethical relationship with an Other; but this does not mean that she is not capable of fostering certain types of relationships with other creatures. The closest the text comes to presenting a bond between her and another creature is her relationship with Gollum. She is part of his plan to get rid of Frodo and Sam in order to recover the Ring; and he delivers victims for her to devour. Similarly, the narrative depicts an understanding between Shelob and Sauron. Sauron "knew where she lurked. It pleased him that she should dwell there hungry but unabated in malice, a more sure watch upon that ancient path into his land than any other that his skill could have devised" (*TT* 4.IX.948). Shelob is useful to Sauron's "purposes by feasting on living things", but where the text suggests a point of commonality between himself and her is in malice (Smol, "Body" 52). Their malice is based on a desire of

dominating and effacing the Other, which Shelob does through her feasting. But Shelob retains her independence from Sauron insofar that she does not care for him, and his rise or fall is of little consequence to her. Even if Shelob's existence is advantageous to Sauron and his goals, she is not allied to him nor does she act based on his commands – she is not one of Sauron's servants like the orcs and wraiths.

What momentarily defeats Shelob is Galadriel's phial, which not only points towards the cosmic tension between light and darkness in Middle-earth, but also, I contend, to the different ways in which the self can relate to the Other. The text portrays Shelob as "weaving webs of shadow" (*TT* 4.IX.946), issuing forth "black vapour, wrought of veritable darkness itself that, as it was breathed, brought blindness not only to the eyes, but to the mind, so that even the memory of colours and of forms and of any light faded out of thought" (*TT* 4.IX.939). In addition to Shelob being incapable of ethically engaging with the Other, the essence which emanates from her – like the cries from the Nazgûl – captures and isolates the Other. Under Shelob's darkness, the Other is blinded and silenced, objectifying them even further. Pitted against Shelob are the phial's beams, which "entered into her wounded head and scored it with unbearable pain, and the dreadful infection of light spread from eye to eye" (*TT* 4.X.954). Even from afar, Galadriel acts as a counterweight to Shelob as an embodiment of radical, hostile Otherness: Galadriel "interacts extensively with her community of Lothlórien and serves as a responsible leader of her people", she is one who "cares for other beings and races outside her scope of direct influence" (Donovan 105). The gift of the phial represents an act of service to the Ring-bearer and the Fellowship, an answer to the plea of the Other amidst the growing darkness of the Ring; an act that is both ethically and literally anathema to Shelob. The evil Shelob represents is therefore countered by a symbol of that which she can neither be nor do, which is to be of service to the Other.

The narrative states that despite Sam's wounding of Shelob, the tale does not tell whether she "in slow years of darkness healed herself" (*TT* 10.IV.955). Neither does the narrative confirm the final fate of the orcs in Middle-earth once Sauron is vanquished, and when the Black Captain of the Nazgûl is defeated, it is written that his voice "was never heard in *that age* of this world" again (*RK* 5.VI.1102, emphasis added). From the examples addressed in this chapter and the question marks left by the text, I conclude that the depiction of evil in *LotR* is more than the story of its overcoming and more than the destruction of the Ring. By presenting evil as a spectrum of possibilities and incarnations of fictional and fantastical phenomena, this narrative poses a fundamental question: is evil a problem of essence or of choice. At the same time, the text exemplifies a very human problem, which is how the unwillingness to engage with the Other can lead to a final impossibility. As long as the Other is deemed as an object and efforts are made to subjugate or prey upon the Other,

as long as the self creates circumstances in which the Other cannot be heard or seen, evil will persist. Eaglestone asserts that in *LotR*, Tolkien demonstrates how the modern type of evil that the text addresses “cannot be avoided and can only be the subject of constant negotiation” (73). Ethical responsibility lies beyond defeating the foe or annihilating the monster. It is encountering evil face-to-face and reflecting on how it can manifest in the self through choices and actions rather than simply being embodied as an Other. Ethical responsibility is ensuring that the self is receptive enough to see the Other face-to-face, to hear its calling, to hold a relationship of service with them. Herein lies heroism.

Chapter Six

Heroism and Service in *The Lord of the Rings*

The present chapter complements the previous discussion about the phenomenology of evil by analysing the forms of heroism and service that oppose evil in the text. It begins by contrasting Frodo and Aragorn as central characters in the narrative. I then proceed to discuss the possibility of loving and serving the Other through disobedience, as exemplified by a constellation of characters: Merry, Pippin, Éowyn, and Faramir.

The Ring-bearer and the Ranger

When Bilbo volunteers to destroy the One Ring during the Council of Elrond, Gandalf responds that “only a small part is played in great deeds by any hero” (*FR* 2.II.352). *LotR* presents figures who function as “heroes” in the narrative. These include Frodo as the story’s protagonist, along with a range of different figures who exhibit heroic traits – such as courage, endurance, and strength – along with accomplishments both on and off the battlefield: from solitary deeds of combat, such as Aragorn fending off the Black Riders at Weathertop or Boromir’s last stand at Nen Hithoel; to acts of tactical warfare and military strategy such as those described in the battles of Helm’s Deep and the Pelennor Fields. Juxtaposed to this type of heroism is that in which noble qualities are individually or communally manifested without martial abilities, as I have outlined in the study of Frodo and Sam’s actions in the first chapter of this thesis dedicated to *LotR*. When Gildor Inglorion states that “courage is found in unlikely places”, this might be read as describing both untapped internal resources as well as atypical heroic individuals (*FR* 1.III.111). In contrast to Tolkien’s “theory of courage” about heroism without hope, as expressed in his lecture “Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics” (*MC* 20), and the work of scholars like Anne C. Petty, who applies the models created by Joseph Campbell and Vladimir Propp to explain heroism in *LotR*, I argue that what lies at the core of being a hero in *LotR* and unites these different representations of heroism in the text is the service that the self renders to the Other.

This chapter further elucidates the different faces heroism adopts when fulfilling the ethical responsibility towards the Other in *LotR*. In order to do so, I present a contrast between Frodo and Aragorn’s narrative journeys and ethical choices. This contrast focuses on their similarities and diverging paths, from their status as exiles, their vulnerability, to the intertwining of their stories with the theme of mortality. Shippey considers that Tolkien’s Middle-earth narratives present a “tension between two different heroic styles (archaic/heathen and modern/Christian)” (“Heroes” 278). Beren and Túrin from the

legendarium would represent the former, while Aragorn and Frodo personify the latter. Moreover, Verlyn Flieger describes Aragorn as “a traditional epic/romance hero, larger than life, a leader, fighter, lover, healer”, whereas Frodo “is a fairy-tale hero. His is both literally and figuratively a little man, and we recognize ourselves in him” (“Hero” 142). I agree with these assessments in terms of the different characteristics each of these characters possess, the roles they play in *LotR*, and how readers might potentially identify them or themselves in them. However, I argue that the most important characteristic of Aragorn and Frodo’s heroism is the service they provide to the Other.

A first similarity between Frodo and Aragorn is their use of pseudonyms and the acquisition or revelation of different names as the narrative unfolds. Names evidence a complex and evolving understanding of their self as well as their othering at different points in the narrative. Frodo meets Aragorn in *The Fellowship of the Ring* with a “travel name” suggested by Gandalf, Mr. Underhill (*FR* 1.II.82). Underhill both refers to hobbits as hill-dwellers and Bilbo’s words to Smaug, “I come from under the hill and under the hills and over the hills my paths have led”, which evidence a transformation in Bilbo’s understanding of himself in *The Hobbit* (*H* 248-9). Whereas Underhill gestures towards Baggins family history, the title of Ring-bearer indicates the change Frodo will undergo in the conception of himself as he tries to fulfil his task. After the One Ring’s destruction, Frodo is referred to as “Frodo of the Nine Fingers” in a song composed by a minstrel of Gondor (*RK* 6.IV.1249). His heroic actions have earned him a place in the pantheon of legendary figures, realising intradiegetically the metafictional potential envisioned by Sam on the stairs of Cirith Ungol to “be put into songs or tales” as characters (*TT* 4.VIII.932).

As for Aragorn, Frodo – and the reader – first meet him under the guise of Strider, an appellation given to him by the Breelanders. Aragorn uses this identity to refer to himself in the third person – “Strider can take you by paths that are seldom trodden” – which indicates that “Strider” is not his true name, but an important component of his self – that of the Ranger (*FR* 1.X.216). Aragorn’s avatars, as well as his true identity and the many names that go with it are revealed as the narrative progresses: his royal names in Quenya are Elessar (the Elfstone in Westron) and Envinyatar (the Renewer), for he renews the lines of the kings of Gondor; and the Quenya translation of Strider, Telcontar, becomes the name of his royal house. He also holds the nickname Estel (Hope, as he is such for the Dúnedain) and “the Dúnadan” (the “Man of the West”), as well as the alias Thorongil.

Frodo and Aragorn use alter egos at the time of their first encounter to protect their identities, their true self, and their tasks. To be a Ring-bearer or a Ranger means to serve the Other. But to be either of them also means to be exiled and othered. As Saxton notes, “Frodo is both aristocrat (a Fallohide)” and an orphan, “insider and outsider, hero and failure, master

(of Gollum) and slave (to the Ring)”, exiled from a home to which he can no longer return whilst being pursued (175).¹ Aragorn fits many of the same descriptors: he is a Ranger and one of the Dúnedain, both of royal lineage and an outcast; heir to the throne of Gondor, descendant of the kings of Númenor, he remains an exiled king until the sixth book of *LotR*. Aragorn is also an orphan whose father, Arathorn, died in an orc-raid when his son was two years old. His mother Gilraen perishes before Sauron’s defeat: she “gave Hope to the Dúnedain, I have kept no hope for myself” (*RK* Appendix A.I.v.1392).

This status of heroes and outsiders shared by Frodo and Aragorn is further underscored by their emotional responses to their responsibilities. Frodo is “no obscure hero awaiting his chance to be great. He is no warrior. And far from feeling destined for greatness”, he repeatedly expresses his reluctance to set out from the Shire (Flieger, “Hero” 150). Frodo’s resolution and hesitancy meet the resignation and despair of attempting the impossible:

And here he was a little halfling from the Shire, a simple hobbit of the quiet countryside, expected to find a way where the great ones could not go, or dared not go. It was an evil fate. But he had taken it on himself in his own sitting-room in the far-off spring of another year. (*TT* 4.III.842)

Aragorn mirrors Frodo, undergoing similar learning curves and experiencing similar feelings – of frustration, resignation, and longing – in his performance of an ethical responsibility towards the Other. In contending so, I problematise the notion that the text presents Aragorn as “a model of the perfected manhood that the Hobbits are seeking”, which thoroughly idealises him (Wrigley 60). Aragorn is certainly characterised by “his mildness, ability to put up with provocation, and self-effacement” (Shippey, “Heroes” 277). But he also openly expresses feelings of self-doubt and weariness. He admits the burden of living in the shadow of his famous forefathers: “little do I resemble the figures of Elendil and Isildur ... I am but the heir of Isildur, not Isildur himself” (*FR* 2.II.323). His responsibility as a Ranger is to protect the North from Sauron’s servants, but his duty is neither glorious nor without its disappointments:

Peace and freedom do you say? The North would have known them little but for us [the Rangers] ...
And yet less thanks have we than you [Boromir]. Travellers scowl at us, and countrymen give us scornful names. ‘Strider’ I am to one fat man who lives within a day’s march of foes that would freeze his heart, or lay his little town in ruin, if he were not guarded ceaselessly. Yet we would not have it otherwise. If simple folk are

¹ See also Chapter Four of this thesis.

free from care and fear, simple they will be, and we must be secret to keep them so. That has been the task of my kindred ... (*FR* 2.II.323-4)

Aragorn relates here the painful, unavoidable reality of being othered by the very communities he protects. To serve the Other is to do so without expecting or receiving gratitude in return.

Hobbits are not exempt from perceiving Strider as a queer Other – a Stranger in Levinas’ terms – a mysterious Ranger who comes “out of the Wild”, of whom Sam has “never heard no good”, and who makes the hobbits uneasy (*FR* 1.X.217). Revealed as Aragorn, he pledges his service to Frodo and his companions despite their uncertainty and rejection: “if by life or death I can save you, I will” (*FR* 1.X.224). This oath is an acknowledgement of the ethical responsibility Aragorn has towards this Other he has encountered, bound to him by a common foe, a common mission, and Isildur’s Bane. Aragorn fulfils his pledge by guiding the hobbits to Rivendell, attempting to heal Frodo, leading the Fellowship after Gandalf’s fall, and pursuing the orcs who captured Merry and Pippin. Moreover, he consistently honours Frodo’s voice and input as the Ring-bearer. But the keeping of his promise is imperfect: his choice to lead the Fellowship to the Redhorn Gate almost proves “a disaster in the snow” (*FR* 2.IV.387). This mischance is not too far from “the absurd things” Frodo does and allows after leaving Bag End, such as “the disastrous ‘short cut’ through the Old Forest, the ‘accident’ at the Prancing Pony, and his madness in putting on the Ring in the dell under Weathertop” (*FR* 2.I.285). These mistakes depict Frodo as a protagonist and hero who, like Aragorn, is liable to error, and whose mistakes may further endanger those who are already in peril by following him, putting the Ring at risk.

In light of Boromir’s attempt to take the Ring, Frodo makes the ethical decision to abandon the Fellowship and continue to Mordor alone. He knows that “the evil of the Ring is already at work even in the Company, and the Ring must leave them before it does more harm” (*FR* 2.X.524). Frodo seeks to spare the Fellowship further danger, either by asking them to continue the perilous journey to Mordor or exposing them to the Ring’s evil. Upon Frodo’s choice, Aragorn decides to let Frodo be – to let the Other persist in their Otherness – and pursue the orcs who have captured Merry and Pippin: “And now may I make a right choice, and change the evil fate of this unhappy day! ... I would have guided Frodo to Mordor and gone with him to the end; but if I seek him now in the wilderness, I must abandon the captives to torment and death” (*TT* 3.I.545). Even though Aragorn’s “heart yearns for Minas Anor” (*FR* 2.IX.513), his ethical responsibility towards Merry and Pippin takes precedence over his desires or “his right as the expedition’s leader, or as the king-in-waiting,

to impose his wishes” (Nikakis 87). Similarly, when Gandalf suggests that the only hope of defeating Sauron is to “make ourselves the bait”, Aragorn follows (*RK* 5.IX.1151). As Jennifer Neville asserts, in the main plot of *LotR* “great heroes merely serve as a diversion” (108). The highest purpose future kings and warriors like Aragorn, Éomer, and Prince Imrahil serve in this story is not the accomplishment of great deeds of war, but to serve as a distraction: to “walk open-eyed into that trap, with courage, but small hope for ourselves” (*RK* 5.IX.1152). The true strength of great heroes lies in their service to, in their ethical responsibility towards the small, the weak, the queer, and unlooked-for, who are chosen to perform the ultimate task. Aragorn accepts this calling but does “not yet claim to command any man” (*RK* 5.IX.1152). He allows others to choose freely if they wish to engage in this form of service and therefore take this calling as their own.

Aragorn simultaneously shows his vulnerability when he confesses that he had “hoped you [the hobbits] would take me for my own sake” for “a hunted man sometimes wearies of distrust and longs for friendship” (*FR* 1.X.223). Aragorn here speaks of a longing for the Other as a metaphysical desire: he does not need the Other to survive but desires their presence, to hold communion with them – similar to Tom Bombadil as discussed in Chapter Four of this thesis. For Tolkien, the desire to “hold communion with other living things” is one of the “primordial human desires” that the magic of Faërie satisfies (*OFS* 116).² Aragorn both enacts qualities and attitudes which may be readily associated with masculinity – such as power and swordsmanship – but he also expresses his desire and care for the Other in a way that resembles the love and affection shown between Frodo and Sam discussed in Chapter Four. His expression of love, physically and in words, towards male companions and friends, range from taking Boromir’s hand and kissing his brow as the son of Denethor lies dying, to plainly stating that “there go three that I love, and the smallest not the least” as he sees Théoden, Éomer, and Merry part (*RK* 5.II.1021) – just like Sam when he plainly states that he loves Frodo. This amalgam changes Frodo’s perception of human beings, men more specifically. Although Strider’s words seem cryptic and his appearance roguish – an impression bolstered by the local prejudices surrounding Rangers – Frodo perceives that Strider is “not really as you choose [he chooses] to look” (*FR* 1.X.217). Frodo’s encounter with Aragorn is part of learning curve Frodo undergoes regarding the encounter with the Other:

² Although Tolkien frames this as a human desire of communing with non-human beings, such as “the beasts and birds and other creatures [who] often talk like men in real fairy-stories”, Tolkien’s words aptly describe Aragorn precisely because of this character’s interest in establishing bonds with other beings throughout *LotR* (*OFS* 117).

he [Aragorn] is dear to me; though he is strange, and grim at times ... I didn't know that any of the Big People were like that. I thought, well, that they were just big and rather stupid: kind and stupid like Butterbur; or stupid and wicked like Bill Ferny. But then we don't know much about Men in the Shire. (*FR* 2.I.287)

In Aragorn's company, Frodo witnesses different facets of human nature. The text also progressively changes Aragorn's portrayal from "strange" and "grim" to the full realisation of his self as he comes closer to Gondor and his kingship:

He [Aragorn] seemed to have grown in stature while Éomer had shrunk; and in his living face they caught a brief vision of the power and majesty of the kings of stone. For a moment it seemed to the eyes of Legolas that a white flame flickered on the brows of Aragorn like a shining crown. (*TT* 3.I.564)

As the hour in which Aragorn reclaims the throne of Gondor draws closer, his nobility becomes manifest in his appearance. But neither Aragorn's appearance nor the material signs of his lineage – the Ring of Barahir and the sword Andúril – or his mastery over the *palantír* prove his kingship: serving the Other by healing is the unequivocal sign.

Aragorn refuses to proclaim his rule over Minas Tirith after the battle of the Pelennor Fields, for that would mean imposing himself on an Other unaware of his existence or the return of the king:

But this city and realm has rested in the charge of the Stewards for many long years, and I fear that if I enter it unbidden, then doubt and debate may arise, which should not be while this war is fought. I will not enter in, nor make any claim, until it be seen whether we or Mordor shall prevail. (*RK* 5.VIII.1127)

Instead, he enters the city as Captain of the Dúnedain of the North, while the malady known as the Black Shadow, produced by contact with the Nazgûl, lies heavy on the city. Ioreth, "the eldest of the women who served in" the Houses of Healing, and one of the few salient female characters within the narrative, is the first to remember the sayings of old lore: "The hands of the king are the hands of a healer. And so the rightful king could ever be known" (*RK* 5.VIII.1126). Despite the truth in Ioreth's words, the male herb-master of the Houses of Healing "patronises" her given her gender and social class (Shippey, "Noblesse" 290).³ Her

³ Shippey furthers the connection between class and wisdom by indicating "that both in Gondor and in the Shire, true tradition of ancient days lingers on longest at the two extremes of upper and lower class while the middle classes, like the herb-master or Bilbo Baggins before he forfeited his respectability, have turned their back on it" ("Noblesse" 291). He also underscores that the herb-master was "half-right" about Ioreth, because she betrays "a surprising lack of understanding" in her account of the hobbits' role in Sauron's destruction ("Noblesse" 290). Surprisingly, Shippey does not however mention how this "lack of understanding" applies to the people of Minas Tirith in general – who call Pippin the Prince of the Halflings – with the text explicitly mentioning how the city's men are "gravely courteous" to the hobbit, "saluting him after the manner of Gondor" (*RK* 5.I.1005).

knowledge is dismissed as “rhymes of old days which women such as our good Ioreth still repeat without understanding” (*RK* 5.VIII.1132).⁴ Such a description echoes Ted Sandyman’s account of Sam’s conversation as “fireside tales” and “children’s stories” (*FR* 1.II.58).⁵ Although healing is portrayed as a non-gendered ability across Tolkien’s Middle-earth narratives – Melian and her descendant Elrond are accounted as great healers – and *LotR* describes medicine as being practised in Gondor by both men and women in some capacity, Ioreth’s wisdom lends the healing associated with the kingship of Gondor a feminine aspect. Melanie Rawls argues that “in order to prove his fitness to reign, Aragorn must display characteristics feminine and masculine—the feminine power of healing, the masculine skill of wise and just rule” (49).⁶ If healing is to be associated in this instance with femininity, then the fulfilment of Aragorn’s ethical responsibility towards those afflicted by the Black Shadow is also endowed with a feminine quality.

With the aid of the athelas plant – which Aragorn had previously used to help Frodo and the Fellowship – Aragorn cures those afflicted by the Black Breath, with the narrative closely detailing the healing of Faramir, Éowyn, and Pippin. This disease is more spiritual than physical: “those who were stricken with it fell slowly into an ever deeper dream, and then passed to silence and a deadly cold, and so died” (*RK* 5.VIII.1126). Aragorn restores those afflicted by calling out their names, “as if Aragorn himself was removed from them, and walked afar in some dark vale, calling for one that was lost” (*RK* 5.VIII.1133). When Faramir awakens, “a light of knowledge and love was kindled in his eyes, and he spoke softly. ‘My lord, you called me. I come. What does the king command?’” (*RK* 5.VIII.1133). The heir to the House of Stewards acknowledges Aragorn as king, and tied to Faramir’s acknowledgement is Aragorn’s service, his caring for and nurturing of the Other. Aragorn achieves a heroic victory by facing the shadow of death in the service of the Other.⁷

This is not the first time Aragorn encounters an incarnation of death: he had done so before when taking the Paths of the Dead to summon the cursed spirits of the Men of the Mountains so they would fulfil their broken oaths to Isildur. Despite the horror attached to this path, Aragorn claims that only in taking this road can he “see any hope of doing my part in the war against Sauron” (*RK* 5.II.1026). His choice seems amiss to warring-inclined characters like Théoden, Éomer, and Éowyn, because of the Paths’ ill reputation and because such an image does not agree with the image of a glorious king-to-be riding fearlessly into

⁴ Una McCormack also observes that not only is Gondor’s herb-master condescending with Ioreth’s, but she is also portrayed as engaging in “diffuse chatter that strains Aragorn’s patience” (138).

⁵ And is reminiscent of Tolkien’s criticism of fairy-stories being “relegated to the ‘nursery’” (*OFS* 130).

⁶ Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that the association between these qualities and femininity or masculinity is cultural and social, not *essential*.

⁷ The return of the line of kings to Gondor is further confirmed by the finding of the sapling of the line of Nimloth (*RK* 6.V.1273).

battle, “where your sword may win renown and victory” (*RK* 5.II.1027). But to traverse these paths and to face fear and dread is a great deed of service to the Other. It means to face the unknown in the name of the Other. The Other comes before the self’s fear and safety. With the help of his ghostly partners, Aragorn and his companions capture Umbar’s main fleet and use it to bring allies to Gondor.

However, despite his healing powers and kingship, Aragorn is incapable of restoring Frodo after he is attacked by the Morgul-knife. Similar to those stricken by the Black Breath, the gravity of Frodo’s wound lies in its spiritual consequences, but unlike those healed by Aragorn – and despite the extraction of the final shard from Frodo’s body – there is no true healing for the hobbit. Whereas Aragorn’s exterior gradually reveals his identity and self as king, the change in Frodo’s physical appearance is a consequence of his task, his wounds, and their spiritual impact on his selfhood. The text stresses how the strain of bearing the Ring to Mordor – marked by periods of thirst, hunger, and physical exertion – the blows his body receives, the fear and sorrow bound to his burden, and the increasing proximity to evil, effect a singular transformation in Frodo. Whilst recovering from the wraiths’ attack, Gandalf notices in Frodo

a faint change, just a hint as it were of transparency, about him [Frodo], and especially about the left hand that lay outside the coverlet.

‘Still that must be expected,’ said Gandalf to himself. ‘He is not half through yet, and to what he will come in the end not even Elrond can foretell. Not to evil, I think. He may become like a glass filled with a clear light for eyes to see that can.’ (*FR* 2.I.291)

Frodo risked fading, wraithing into a shadow, but the aftermath of this experience “seems to be the opposite of the shadow-transformation of the Black Riders, a movement into translucency rather than darkness, while the reference to a glass filled with clear light is an unmistakable adumbration of the Phial of Galadriel that Frodo carries into Mordor” (Flieger, “Body” 15). As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Phial defeats Shelob’s self-centredness because it symbolises the answer to the Other’s plea for help. The idea of a “glass filled with a clear light” also anticipates Sam’s own perception of Frodo whilst in Ithilien:

He was reminded suddenly of Frodo as he had lain, asleep in the house of Elrond, after his deadly wound. Then as he had kept watch, Sam had noticed that at times a light seemed to be shining faintly within; but now the light was even clearer and stronger. Frodo’s face was peaceful, the marks of fear and care had left it; but it looked old, old and beautiful, as if the chiselling of the shaping years was now revealed in many fine lines that had before been hidden, though the identity of the face was not changed. (*TT* 4.IV.853)

What Sam sees emanating from Frodo is “the growth of Frodo’s shadow side coupled with an actual wearing-away of his physical substance”, which “has the paradoxical effect of illuminating his inner being” (Flieger “Body” 16). The illumination of Frodo’s self occurs both literally and metaphorically. Frodo’s self shining forth is in part the discovery of his courage as shadow and death surround him, as well as the strengthening of his heroism. This discovery begins at the Barrow-downs – an event that resembles Aragorn’s passage through the Paths of the Dead. In *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Frodo and his hobbit companions are made prisoners of a Barrow-wight, a spectre or undead creature who threatens to keep the hobbits’ spirits captive “till the dark lord lifts his hand over dead sea and withered land” (*FR* 1.VIII.184). The wight’s power lies not only in its “dreadful spells”, but also in provoking a “fear so great that it seemed to be part of the very darkness that was round” (*FR* 1.VIII.183). The text shows Aragorn and Frodo as heroes whose courage originates from placing their ethical responsibility to the Other above fear and darkness:

There is a seed of courage hidden (often deeply, it is true) in the heart of the fattest and most timid hobbit, waiting for some final and desperate danger to make it grow. Frodo was neither very fat nor very timid; indeed, though he did not know it, Bilbo (and Gandalf) had thought him the best hobbit in the Shire. He thought he had come to the end of his adventure, and a terrible end, but the thought hardened him. He found himself stiffening, as if for a final spring; he no longer felt limp like a helpless prey. (*FR* 1.VIII.183)

In a tomb, a most unlikely place, Frodo finds a courage that goes beyond his survival instinct. Frodo briefly considers wearing the Ring and escaping the Barrow, “grieving for Merry, and Sam, and Pippin, but free and alive himself” (*FR* 1.VIII.184). As Flieger points out, “Frodo’s temptation is not yielding to the Ring, it is abandoning his comrades”, in abdicating his responsibility towards the Other (“Jewels” 74-5). However, the courage Frodo finds as the hero and protagonist of the story, as the “best hobbit in the Shire”, lies in his response to the Other’s needs. It will resurface as he makes a stand at the Ford of Bruinen, in Moria, and as he moves forth to Mordor. As his body lies battered and emaciated in Ithilien, his mind burdened by the evil of the Ring – coming closer to the brink of death – Sam witnesses the depths of Frodo’s self shine through; like Glorfindel, a light shines through Frodo’s being “as if through a thin veil” (*FR* 1.XII.272). Whereas Aragorn’s self is bestowed with the light of a white flame that proclaims his fate, Frodo’s light indicates the spiritual lessons he has undergone in the progress of his unhappy task; the remnants of his self, still untarnished by evil, glowing as darkness seeks to engulf him.

The different endings to Aragorn and Frodo's narrative journeys form part of a larger reflection brought forth by the text on death and mortality.⁸ Marjorie Burns indicates that

Death and endings run throughout *The Lord of the Rings*. An age is dying; Elves are departing; Entwives are lost; battles are taking their toll, and virtual deaths occur all around – from the hobbits' entrapment in a burial mound, to Gandalf's 'death' in Moria, to Frodo's journey to Mordor, the land of shadow and death. (189)

The main plot of *LotR* does not portray the death of Aragorn and Frodo. Instead, it only alludes to Frodo's fate, and relegates the death of Aragorn to the appendixes (*RK* Appendix A.I.v.1387). Because of his noble Númenórean lineage, not only does Aragorn possess a greater lifespan than most humans, but he can also freely choose the moment of his death.⁹ Aragorn decides to die before old age would force him to abandon his life and kingship, when he would "wither and fall from my high seat unmanned and witless" (*RK* Appendix A.I.v.1393). His choice is therefore an ethical one, bound to the quality of his service as king. Unlike Aragorn, Frodo's story does not end in certain peace. Darkness will not leave him as long as he remains in Middle-earth. Whereas Aragorn's journey was "from darkness into light", "Frodo's is a journey from light into darkness – and (maybe) out again" (Flieger, "Hero" 143). For Frodo there is no conventional ending completed by romantic love, offspring, and the return home. Frodo cannot experience the milestones of the happy life lived by the hero Aragorn – and Sam, Merry, or Pippin – once Sauron is defeated. Having "sacrificed the most" in body and soul, Frodo is now "maimed and broken", scarred by the Morgul-blade, Shelob's sting, and Gollum's bite (Holtz Wodzak 111). Even though Frodo takes the Ring as far as the Cracks of Doom, he finally succumbs to the desire of the One Ring, a desire that does not end with its destruction: "It is gone for ever ... and now all is dark and empty" (*RK* 6.IX.1340). Frodo understands that "there is no real going back. Though I may come to the Shire, it will not seem the same; for I shall not be the same. I am wounded with knife, sting, and tooth, and a long burden" (*RK* 6.VII.1295). Frodo grows spiritually and experientially, but at the cost of his self returning as an Other.

In "The Scouring of the Shire", Frodo feels so deeply and painfully the Shire's transformation into Mordor that he is incapable of meeting the practical realities of fighting

⁸ See, for example, *Letters* 246.

⁹ Although the analysis of Arwen's role in *LotR* lies outwith the scope of this thesis, the sacrifice of her immortality – like her foremother Lúthien – constitutes the sacrifice of a constitutive part of her self in order to meet and accompany a mortal Other (*RK* Appendix A.I.v.1391). Arwen, however, cannot share Aragorn's peace or consolation when he dies (*RK* Appendix A.I.v.1393). Instead, she represents the understanding that "dying is agony because in dying a being does not come to an end while coming to an end": their time together is over and Aragorn goes "where one cannot go" (Levinas, *Totality* 56). Mortality was bound to her desire for the Other, which humans undergo alone. Bound with Arwen's sacrifice is also a "a gift" of hope to the mortal Other who is Frodo Baggins in the form of passage into the West.

against Saruman's treachery, even though his intentions are of the highest order. Although Frodo could not have foreseen Saruman's actions, the hobbit returns to the Shire to discover that his mission to keep this place a safe and peaceful abode has been sabotaged not by Mordor, but by an evil akin to it. But such is his spiritual growth that, in Nicolas Birns's words, "Frodo's stance makes retaliatory vengeance impossible ... The aim is not to settle accounts with the malefactors" (94). Frodo tries to prevent hobbits from killing each other and killing in general. Janet Brennan Croft associates Frodo's "pacifism" with "his sense of pity, his empathy", arguing that for him, by this point "imagining harming another being was too close to imagining harming himself, too close to giving in to the Ring" (131-2). To take another being's life, even justifiably, means exerting power over the Other and determining their end. But as Merry points out, "if there are many of these ruffians ... it will certainly mean fighting. You won't rescue Lotho, or the Shire, just by being shocked and sad, my dear Frodo" (*RK* 6.VIII.1317). Frodo has spent himself in his mission to destroy the Ring in order to protect the Shire. In this moment, the Shire is still in need of service and heroism, but Frodo is incapable of providing either, of being active in the way the Shire needs.

If at the start of the narrative Frodo is in some way othered by the hobbit community of the Shire due to his queerness, he experiences a different type of othering upon his return. He may be depicted and understood as the hero of *LotR*, but he is not seen as such by the hobbit community. Briefly acting as Deputy for the Mayor, Frodo had eventually

dropped quietly out of all the doings of the Shire, and Sam was pained to notice how little honour he had in his own country. Few people knew or wanted to know about his deeds and adventures; their admiration and respect were given mostly to Mr. Meriadoc and Mr. Peregrin and (if Sam had known it) to himself. (*RK* 6.XI.1342)

Though it may have been "Frodo's choice to withdraw from the life of the Shire, at least as far as his damaged state grants him choice, his community does not recognize what he has done or seek him out. They allow the withdrawal" (Holtz Wodzak 112). Unlike his hobbit companions, who remain whole and assume public positions, Frodo is no longer truly there. As Nicolas Birns puts it, even if Frodo's return bears certain similarities with that of Bilbo years before, for Frodo "it can never be 'There and Back Again'" (94). The end of Frodo's story thus creates a strong contrast to Aragorn, who finishes his exile in the form of kingship and is active in the shaping of Gondor up until his chosen departure from life. By showcasing these different paths, the text illustrates the variety of changes that service may effect on the self. To serve the Other means to embrace the Other, to be subjected to them. In Birns's words, "to preserve ordinary life is why Frodo and Sam made the sacrifices that they did"

(85). And sacrifices are made even if the Other may ignore them. Frodo says: “I tried to save the Shire, and it has been saved, but not for me. It must often be so, Sam, when things are in danger: some one has to give them up, lose them, so that others may keep them” (*RK* 6.IX.1346-7). To follow one’s own ethical path may also mean to break one’s self in the process. For Frodo, these changes have now made his Otherness unbridgeable.

Before Frodo sails to Valinor, Saruman mocks the idea of passing into the West: “And now, what ship will bear you back across so wide a sea? ... It will be a grey ship, and full of ghosts” (*RK* 6.VI.1288). He even says to Frodo: “do not expect me to wish you health and long life. You will have neither. But that is not my doing. I merely foretell” (*RK* 6.VIII.1334). Saruman is very likely using the only power he has left after his downfall, that of his voice, to unsettle those who have crushed his intentions. However, Saruman’s words also indicate that there is no certainty, no telling what Frodo’s passing into the West may bring. When Frodo asks Gandalf “Where shall I find rest?”, Gandalf does not answer because he most likely does not know (*RK* 6.VII.1295). Frodo may not have Aragorn’s confidence that “in sorrow we must go, but not in despair” when he sails from the Grey Havens (*RK* Appendix A.I.v.1394). But the end of *LotR* has “a swift sunrise” greeting Frodo at the end of his last journey (*RK* 6.IX.1348). Heroism, as Frodo and Aragorn have demonstrated, entails an ethical responsibility of the self to the Other that is not necessarily an idyllic task; that exposes the self to fear, grief, and pain. There is no telling if at the end of their service Frodo and Aragorn find rest and something “more than memory” (*RK* Appendix A.I.v.1394). But the text suggests that after everything, there is still hope.

Disobedience as an Ethics of Service

After being released from Wormtongue’s – and Saruman’s hold – Théoden comes to realise that a “faithful heart may have froward tongue” (*TT* 3.VI.681). This saying aptly describes situations in *LotR* in which disobedience is a necessary first step in order to fully and truly be of service to the Other. As Ring-bearer and Ranger, Frodo and Aragorn fulfil their ethical responsibilities in accordance with their narrative background and trajectories: despite being a hobbit othered by his community, Frodo was meant to find the Ring and must find a way to destroy it. Being a Ranger and serving the Other is part of Aragorn’s identity. Croft argues that “there is notably little mistrust of authority among the allies in *The Lord of the Rings*, and this may be because blind obedience to orders is not expected by leaders like Aragorn, Faramir, and Théoden ... Authority rightly held and fairly used is respected, not resented” (63). However, characters like Merry, Pippin, Éowyn, and Faramir represent an alternative route to the ethical, for some of their most important ethical choices stand in direct opposition to the status quo of the communities they are part of or encounter. Although

there are different examples of disobedience throughout the narrative – such as Merry and Pippin’s “disregard for Aragorn’s orders” in Parth Galen, which then leads to their captivity – my main focus is disobedience from the perspective of authority tied to a stately or institutional perspective, such as the authority Théoden and Denethor may have (Croft 97). In *LotR*, “disobedience quite frequently has an eucatastrophic effect in the end”, for it has direct consequences for both the novel’s plot and the narrative trajectories of other characters (Croft 95). Characters like Éowyn, Faramir, Merry, and Pippin, demonstrate that, in many cases, the ethical does not constitute a linear, straightforward path. Their actions expand the spectrum of ethical possibilities within the novel. Furthermore, as their ethical choices create bonds between them, these four figures create a constellation whose basis is the need to distinguish between established notions of ethical and moral conduct, whilst acknowledging the dimensions of the self in order to respond to the ethical calling of the Other.

The first part of this section consists of analysing Merry and Pippin’s first acts of disobedience and ethical relationships that compel their actions. These relationships include their established friendship with Frodo and Sam – a prime motivation throughout their entire narrative journeys – as well as the relationships they form along the way, especially with the ents and Treebeard. Such relationships are essential to the development of their future acts of disobedience. In the second chapter of *LotR*, Gandalf (*FR* 1.II.83) and Gildor bring up the importance of friends for Frodo’s mission: “do not go alone. Take such friends as are trusty and willing” (*FR* 1.III.110). Although reluctant to place his friends in danger, Frodo follows this advice. In addition to Samwise Gamgee, Frodo’s closest friends Meriadoc Brandybuck and Peregrin Took also join him. This journey develops Merry and Pippin’s understanding of the relationship between them and the Other. Their choice is, first, an act of service towards Frodo, born from the love they hold for him. Second, it is the acceptance of a wider ethical responsibility they hold towards the Other, an Other they learn to love as the narrative progresses and who may suffer at the hands of Sauron. From the beginning of the narrative, Merry and Pippin’s friendship with Frodo is shown through them caring for Frodo, protecting him from the Sackville-Bagginses, helping him move from Bag End, and taking on “domestic roles ... from running the baths to preparing supper” (Craig 15). Along with Sam and Fatty Bolger, they are aware of the true nature of Frodo’s move from Bag End and form a secret group determined to know as much as possible about Frodo’s task in order to aid him. The group is finally revealed in the chapter “A Conspiracy Unmasked”, when the conspirators confess they know Frodo “must go – and therefore we must, too. Merry and I are coming with you. Sam is an excellent fellow ... but you will need more than one companion in your dangerous adventure” (*FR* 1.V.136). Responding to Frodo’s initial concern, Merry says:

You can trust us to stick to you through thick and thin – to the bitter end. And you can trust us to keep any secret of yours – closer than you keep it yourself. But you cannot trust us to let you face trouble alone, and go off without a word. We are your friends, Frodo. Anyway: there it is. We know most of what Gandalf has told you. We know a good deal about the Ring. We are horribly afraid – but we are coming with you; or following you like hounds. (*FR* 1.V.138)

Trust is the key word here: whilst Merry and Pippin grasp it as their responsibility to accompany Frodo, Frodo must learn to trust them. They hear his plea, even if it seems inaudible. The thought of being left behind or not following Frodo is tantamount to a dereliction of duty, especially after Frodo is named the Ring-bearer: “if you have to go, then it will be a punishment for any of us to be left behind” (*FR* 2.III.354). This sentiment is shared by Sam, who eavesdrops on the Council of Elrond (*FR* 2.III.353) and chases after Frodo when the Ring-bearer abandons the Fellowship (*FR* 2.X.529-530). Gandalf foresees the importance friendship will play in the achievement of Frodo’s task, for he argues that “if these hobbits understood the danger, they would not dare to go. But they would still wish to go, or wish that they dared, and be shamed and unhappy. I think, Elrond, that in this matter it would be well to trust rather to their friendship than to great wisdom” (*FR* 2.III.359). For Frodo’s friends, trust means that regardless of fears and misgivings, and regardless of orders, the ethical responsibility of friendship should be relied upon.

Throughout *LotR*, the bonds of friendship and service between the hobbits as well as between hobbits and other creatures become important resources in the face of evil. Shippey calls these essential moments “recuperations”, which he underlines as a fundamental part of the first book of *The Fellowship of the Ring*. These moments include “feasting with the elves in the Shire, hot baths in Crickhollow, singing with Tom Bombadil, singing again in the common room of the *Prancing Pony*” (*Author* 65). Such a pattern of confrontation – with the Black Riders, Old Man Willow, the Barrow-wights – followed by recuperation speaks of the importance of the ties forged by friendship, which are framed by the nurturing of the physical body through enjoyment, rest, and pleasure. A continuation of the pattern mentioned by Shippey can be observed in what Croft terms “pastoral moments”, such as the stays at Rivendell and in Lothlórien, Merry and Pippin’s eating of lembas bread after escaping from the orcs, and the moments Frodo, Sam, and Gollum share in Ithilien (36). To these I would add their encounter with the ents in Fangorn and their reunion with Aragorn, Gimli, and Legolas after the battle of Helm’s Deep and Saruman’s defeat. These moments fulfil a double purpose, functioning as recuperations and instilling in Pippin and Merry a wider sense of the world they inhabit, which they serve through their ethical choices, and themselves as inhabitants of Middle-earth. This wider sense becomes a definite factor in the

choices they make during the War of the Ring, for it overrides the normativity and status quo of the situations that they find themselves in.

When Merry and Pippin are sequestered by the orcs, Pippin's frustration and self-doubt lead to a harsh judgement regarding his limitations: "What good have I been? Just a nuisance, a passenger, a piece of luggage" (*TT* 3.III.579, emphasis added). However, the hobbits' condition as passive captives changes through their transformative encounter with an Other, Treebeard, "the oldest living thing that still walks beneath the Sun upon this Middle-earth" and the ents of Fangorn forest (*TT* 3.V.651). For Gandalf, Merry and Pippin "were brought to Fangorn, and their coming was like the falling of small stones that starts an avalanche in the mountains" (*TT* 3.V.647). Treebeard begins communication with the hobbits by asking them to "turn round and *let me have a look at your faces*" (*TT* 3.IV.603, emphasis added). Deidre Dawson underlines that it is Treebeard "who, in Lévinasian terms, first showed his face by speaking to the Hobbits ... In peering into Merry and Pippin's faces, Treebeard is revealing his face too" (192). The initial wonder produced by the meeting between hobbits and ents gives way to the need to determine from both sides if the Other who stands before them means harm. Hobbits do not figure in the ancient lists memorised by the ents, creating the potential for Treebeard to mistake them for "little Orcs", but hearing their unexpected voices made him *interested* in them (*TT* 3.IV.604). Hobbits have never heard of ents, and although they have had a previous negative experience with lively trees like Old Man Willow, they are not afraid. They simply ask Treebeard: "who are you? And what are you?" (*TT* 3.IV.604). The hobbits also feel the desire to meet Treebeard and to know from the ent's own voice who he is. Both the hobbits and Treebeard thus feel what Tolkien names "the primordial human desire" of holding communion with other living beings (*OFS* 116-7).¹⁰

After discarding the Other as a potential threat, the hobbits' vulnerable position is brought to the forefront, not only because of their fragility, but also as they are objects of interest for Sauron and Saruman. Treebeard is inspired to consider a collaborative effort between them, an act that respects the hobbit's Otherness whilst bringing side by side what each consider the self and the Other: "I am not going to do anything with you: not if you mean by that 'do something to you' without your leave. We might do things together ... I go my own way; but your way may go along with mine for a while" (*TT* 3.IV.606-7). The ent is compelled by ethical impulses to act as a host for strangers, to shelter them in his own home and nourish them with the ent draught. Croft writes perceptively that Treebeard "treats Merry and Pippin like his own Entings" (70). Such a relationship of care is tied to

¹⁰ See also the discussion on Tom Bombadil in Chapter Four and the discussion on Aragorn in this chapter.

Treebeard's role as shepherd of the forest, whose task as guide and guardian of the trees already has an ethical dimension attached to it. In listening to Treebeard's sorrows about the past, present, and future of the ents, it becomes Merry and Pippin's ethical responsibility to acknowledge the plight of the ents and care for them as they would care for the nature of the Shire.

In Treebeard's admission that he is "not altogether on anybody's *side*, because nobody is altogether on my *side* ... nobody cares for the woods as I care for them" a parallel is created between Fangorn and the position of the Shire (*TT* 3.IV.615). Up until the discovery of the One Ring in Bag End, few had taken interest in hobbits and their doings; but the Shire, like Fangorn, can no longer remain indifferent to the greater happenings in the world. They are or will be directly affected by them, in danger of becoming reified, enslaved, and destroyed by Power. Treebeard sums up the realisation that his road and the road of the hobbits as Other – a stranger, and yet his guest, his confidant – "go together – to Isengard" (*TT* 3.IV.617). The encounter with Other inspires Treebeard to rise up and call the Entmoot, thus breaking away from tradition to actively shape Fangorn's future. Pippin and Merry tell Treebeard: "We will come with you ... We will do what we can" (*TT* 3.IV.617). This statement becomes a crucial promise that the hobbits make not only to Treebeard, but throughout their subsequent intervention during the War of the Ring: we will be of service to you because it is our ethical responsibility to do so. The fates of Rohan, Gondor, and the Shire may also lie on the road Treebeard speaks of, and by walking this path, ents and hobbits "may help the other peoples before we pass away" or even if they never return (*TT* 3.IV.634). The transformative character of the encounter between hobbits and ents is expressed in Treebeard's addition of the halflings into the Long List: "the Hobbit children, the laughing-folk, the little people" (*TT* 3.X.765). After the ents take control of Isengard, the next step in Merry and Pippin's narrative journey is set into motion. The encounters they have held and the ethical relationships they have formed will prove crucial in their future choice to actively serve the Other. It becomes part of an active framework that enables them to place the ethical service to the Other above formal pledges of service.

Shieldmaiden and Halfling

Knowing of the existence of hobbits and their part in the Fellowship, Théoden shows at their encounter in Isengard a friendly disposition towards Merry and Pippin that goes beyond marvelling at them as the legendary Holbytlan. Their first meeting prompts in the king the desire to know more about halflings and offer his hospitality: "May we meet again in my house! There you shall sit beside me and tell me all that your hearts desire: the deeds of your grandsires, as far as you can reckon them" (*TT* 3.VIII.729). This act will be of great

importance after Pippin and Gandalf's departure to Minas Tirith, and Aragorn's pursuit of the Paths of the Dead, for Merry fears being forgotten: "Don't leave me behind! ... I have not been of much use yet; but I don't want to be laid aside, like baggage to be called for when all is over" (*RK* 5.II.1012). This is the same fear and frustration Pippin had expressed as he and Merry were held captive by the orcs.

Théoden takes Merry in, seating the hobbit beside him, conversing with him, granting the hobbit a pony so they can ride together, and naming Merry his sword-thain as a sign of his sympathy, respect, and acknowledgement – even though Théoden does not *need* the services of a hobbit, for he is surrounded by trained warriors at his disposal (*RK* 5.II.1017). By conversing with the hobbit and spending time with him, Théoden is welcoming the Other's "expression". According to Levinas,

this also means: to be taught. The relation with the Other, or Conversation, is a non-allergic relation, an ethical relation; but inasmuch as it is welcomed this conversation is a teaching [*enseignement*]. Teaching ... comes from the exterior and brings me more than I contain. In its non-violent transitivity the very epiphany of the face is produced. (*Totality* 51)

Théoden and Merry engage in a Conversation whereby Merry teaches Théoden about himself as a hobbit and his world, and Théoden learns about the Other, thus expanding his insight into the world. In this face-to-face encounter, Merry expresses his willingness to do anything he can to help and feels compelled to pledge his services to Théoden: "May I lay the sword of Meriadoc of the Shire on your lap, Théoden King?" (*RK* 5.II.1018). Merry even states that "as a father you will be to me" (*RK* 5.II.1018). Merry is here not only acting "voluntarily out of a feeling of camaraderie", but also out of love for Théoden (Kleinman 139). In receiving such service, it is likely that Théoden perceives in Merry an indefatigable sense of loyalty and courage that is not limited by Merry's physique or warring abilities. This perception will later translate into a love between them that will shift Théoden's perception of Merry's transgressions.

Loyalty in Rohan does not mean blindly following the orders of authority figures. Prior to Merry and Éowyn's disobedience, the text offers examples of direct disobedience to Théoden's orders – albeit instructions effected under Gríma Wormtongue's twisted counsel. Éomer, Third Marshal of the Mark, pursues a group of orcs from Isengard "without the king's leave" (*TT* 3.II.568).¹¹ He also grants Aragorn, Gimli, and Legolas leave to travel through Rohan and gives them two horses. Éomer's trust in and hospitality towards these strange Others means placing his "very life in the keeping of your good faith" (*TT* 3.II.571).

¹¹ This is the group of orcs responsible for capturing Merry and Pippin.

Later on, the guards of Edoras allow Aragorn, Gandalf, Gimli, and Legolas into the city despite Théoden's apparent wishes to the contrary, and the porter Háma admits the travellers to appear before the king, including Gandalf with his wizard's staff. Háma knows that "the staff in the hand of a wizard may be more than a prop for age ... yet in doubt a man of worth will trust to his own wisdom. I believe you are friends and worthy of honour, who have no evil purpose" (*TT* 3.VI. 668). In his interpretation of Rohirrim culture, Shippey writes: "The Riders ... are not governed, as we are, by written codes. They are freer to make their own minds up, and regard this as a duty. They surrender less of their independence to their superiors than we do" (*Author* 96). The Riders have the space to follow their individual, ethical paths, even if their disobedience is branded as "betrayal" – an accusation that Gríma raises against Háma. Implicit in this freedom is the recognition that an individual leader may not always be capable of identifying the best interests of a people. This possibility holds paramount importance in Éowyn's personal trajectory and her interpretation of just service as one of the Rohirrim, for it explains a crucial aspect of her disobedience and collaboration with Merry.

Along with Ioreth, Éowyn is the only other (prominent) human female character in the narrative (Reid, "Light" 105). Éowyn first emerges as the sister-daughter and carer of Théoden. She "is beautiful, but not preternaturally so; she has no particular powers besides her above-average courage and strength of will" and her martial abilities as a shieldmaiden of Rohan (Benvenuto 41). Her service to a king burdened and aged by ill-meaning counsel troubles Éowyn, who looks down on her uncle with "cool pity" (*TT* 3.VI.672). As Théoden seeks someone to govern Rohan until his return, Éowyn is a clear choice, a royal woman beloved by the people. However, the assignment traps her in a traditional gender role. Éowyn's position as a temporary steward and its implications become the main subject of discussion in her interactions with Aragorn. Both characters are orphans, of noble birth, and know how to "ride and wield a blade" (*RK* 5.II.1027). It is even possible that, as Maria Benvenuto argues, she has grown up in "closer contact with men than with other women" (46). But although she is "of the House of Eorl, a shieldmaiden", the prevailing patriarchal paradigms of her nation and Théoden's commands mean that as a woman, Éowyn can only enjoy the retelling of battles and campaigns, and dream of the renown achieved in war (*RK* 5.II.1026).¹² As such, Éowyn's background, her personal conflicts and struggles "other than the Dark Lord's attacks on Middle-earth and all its inhabitants" add nuance and depth to her

¹² This seems to be the norm in the rest of Middle-earth during the War of the Ring, as suggested by a remark made by Imrahil, Prince of Dol Amroth, as he sees Éowyn: "Have even the women of the Rohirrim come to our need?" (*RK* 5.VI.1106).

as a female character in *LotR*, by offering the reader insight into her selfhood (Reid, “Light” 110).

Although Éowyn’s duty is, as Aragorn reminds her, to lead and protect the people of Rohan during the absence of the king, Éowyn feels this responsibility as a “cage” she fears “use and old age” will force her to accept (*RK* 5.II.1027). Aragorn speaks from a perspective aligned with patriarchal authority and normativity, arguing that Éowyn accepted this task; had a “marshal or captain been chosen” instead, then “he could not ride away from his charge, were he weary of it or no” (*RK* 5.II.1026).¹³ Aragorn praises the importance of “valour without renown ... in the last defence” of the homestead (*RK* 5.II.1027). Éowyn’s response underlines the fact that because she is a woman she is unable to spend her life as she wishes. She is required to uphold conventions by remaining “in the house. But when the men have died in battle and honour, you have leave to be burned in the house, for the men will need it no more” (*RK* 5.II.1027). Éowyn speaks here of being othered. Her capabilities and desire to form part of the *éored* as her true self have been negated because of the expectations tied to her gender and role within the royal house. She could not openly reject the type of service she has been asked to perform. Even if this form of serving the Other entails courage, for Éowyn it is an imposition rather than a responsibility freely accepted. Simultaneously affecting these issues is the unreciprocated love and admiration Éowyn feels for Aragorn, a warrior “high and excellent”, who can “ride to battle where your sword may win renown and victory” (*RK* 5.II.1027). Éowyn sees in him not only a romantic calling, but also an idealised realisation of her self, of what she desperately desires to experience and embody: glory and great deeds.

Despite Éowyn’s feelings, she does not neglect her appointed duty until Théoden departs towards Minas Tirith. It is here that Éowyn’s narrative trajectory becomes intertwined with Merry’s. The similarities between the lived experiences of both characters are striking: Aragorn refuses Éowyn’s request to follow him on the Paths of Dead, as he does not have the permission of Théoden and Éomer. Her free will is less valuable than the authority to which she is bound as a woman and a member of the House of Eorl. Likewise, Théoden releases Merry from his service and orders him to stay with Éowyn, for “none of my Riders can bear you as a burden”, thinking that the hobbit is “greater of heart than of stature” (*RK* 4.III.1052). Merry’s plea to be of service to Théoden and his fear of shamefully staying behind are of no avail.

¹³ The expectation that Éowyn should remain in Edoras also contrasts with the expectations placed on Gríma Wormtongue as a man, who is deemed a coward for wishing to stay in Rohan as the king’s steward rather than riding into battle.

Éowyn's meeting with Merry turns into an ethical encounter between two different beings in terms of cultural background, gender, and people they belong to. When Merry sees Éowyn for the first time, he sees her as she perceives her self, as one of the *éored*: "the rider was a woman with long braided hair gleaming in the twilight, yet she wore a helm and was clad to the waist like a warrior and girded with a sword" (*RK* 5.III.1041). But Merry also thinks she could have "been weeping, if that could be believed of one so stern of face" (*RK* 5.III.1041). Éowyn's face, the naked countenance, reveals her vulnerability, and Merry is sensitive to the pain and plea of this Other. In turn, Éowyn recognises in Merry someone who has also been denied their inner convictions with no consideration for their true capabilities and experience, being deemed unfit for battle because they do not conform to the traditional embodiment of a warrior. It is she who arms him, thus materialising her belief in the Other.

When Éowyn says to Merry "yet maybe we will meet again, you and I", she anticipates their joint participation in the War of the Ring (*RK* 5.III.1050). Refusal does not deter them from serving. They ride with the Rohirrim, Éowyn disguised as the male soldier Dernhelm and Merry riding with her under her cloak. These are acts both disobedient and deceitful. The narrative does not inform the reader that it is Éowyn in disguise who takes Merry into the battle, leaving the final revelation of her identity until her combat with the Witch-king of Angmar. Instead, it directs attention to a rider intently observing Merry, "a young man ... less in height and girth than most", whose face is that "of one without hope who goes in search of death" (*RK* 5.III.1050-1). Once more, it is the face that speaks. This rider offers the hobbit an opportunity to go with him, saying "*where will wants not, a way opens ... and so I have found myself*" (*RK* 5.III.1052). The way that Éowyn has found to set her desires and her self forth involves disguising herself as a man, therefore conforming in appearance to the traditional image of the "Riders of the Mark, the *sons* of Eorl" (*RK* 5.V.1094, emphasis added). Leslie Donovan argues that the root of Éowyn's disguise as the male warrior Dernhelm is not the character's identity as a woman, "for her training verifies that in the Rohirrim culture it is acceptable for women to engage in battle", but her position as the king's niece (107). However, other than Éowyn, the text does not depict any further female participation in the Rohirrim during the War of the Ring. It seems more plausible that noble women in Rohan were taught to fight and wield weapons as a last line of defence should the men fall in battle, rather than women being active participants in all military efforts. Robin Ann Reid considers that "while the word 'queer' is not applied to Éowyn in part because the diction would not be appropriate for the Rohirrim", such a "concept would have been applied by many of her people in reference to her choices during much of the time of the story" ("Light" 110). Éowyn indeed queers herself, and in doing so she shares the way

with Merry, in whom she recognises a will similar to hers: “great heart will not be denied” (*RK* 3.VI.1103). Their resolution to follow the desires of their great heart allows them to gain a deeper awareness of themselves and their relationship with the Other.

The text notes that despite its being disobedient and at least in some part deceitful, Merry’s presence is neither censured nor denounced by the group with whom Éowyn rides to war. In fact, “there seemed to be an understanding between Dernhelm and Elfhelm, the marshal who commanded the *éored* in which they were riding. He and all his men ignored Merry and pretended not to hear if he spoke” (*RK* 5.V.1086). However, the narrative does not disclose if Elfhelm knew of Dernhelm’s real identity – and therefore allows Éowyn to ride on due to her rank or sympathy for her position. In agreement with the observation of Rohirrim culture made before, I would argue that it is a combination of both, with the decision to sympathise with Éowyn and Merry one of ethical conscience. Elfhelm possibly recognises that the courage and service Éowyn and Merry can provide is not limited to their condition as woman and halfling, respectively. Such a willingness is desperately needed in a dark time like the War of the Ring.

As battle approaches, Éowyn leaves her place in Dernhelm’s *éored* until she catches up with the king’s guard. By making use of her disobedience to protect Théoden, Éowyn fulfils her oath as a rider of Rohan and her ethical relationship “to lord and land and league of friendship” (*RK* 5.V.1094). Only through disobedience is it possible for Éowyn’s true self to be of service, a service she heroically fulfils when she encounters the Lord of the Nazgûl. If once Éowyn seemed like *one without hope who goes in search of death*, despairing at the conditions of her own existence, she finds death embodied, the supreme Other, by the “Lord of the Nazgûl, a spear of terror in the hand of Sauron, shadow of despair” (*RK* 5.IV.1071). The “lord of carrion” (*RK* 5.VI.1100) names himself when at the Gate of Gondor he tells Gandalf “Do you not know Death when you see it?” (*RK* 5.IV.1085).¹⁴ In the decisive hour of the Black Captain’s apparent victory over the Rohirrim, only Éowyn remains to guard Théoden from further harm, thus risking her life. But instead of taunting Éowyn with death, the Nazgûl Lord reveals his and the Dark Lord’s malice as consumption, slavery, and the destruction of the self: “he will not slay thee in thy turn. He will bear thee away to the houses of lamentation, beyond all darkness, where thy flesh shall be devoured and thy shrivelled mind be left naked to the Lidless Eye” (*RK* 5.VI.1100). Dernhelm’s eucatastrophic revelation as Éowyn comes at this precise moment when the Witch-king proclaims that “no living man may hinder me” (*RK* 5.VI.1100). After all, she is not a man.

¹⁴ Éowyn later on confirms Merry’s impression, for she declares in the Houses of Healing, that “I looked for death in battle” (*RK* 6.V.1257).

But the helm of her secrecy had fallen from her, and her bright hair, released from their bonds, gleamed with pale gold upon her shoulders. Her eyes grey as the sea were hard and fell, and yet tears were on her cheek. A sword was in her hand, and she raised her shield against the horror of her enemy's eyes. (*RK* 5.VI.1101)

The concealment and ties that restrained Éowyn from fully being herself when serving the Other fall apart: her form of defending the fallen king, of engaging in that ethical relationship and facing evil, is through the voluntary revelation of her self and her body, of her sorrow and her martial prowess. Jennifer Neville considers that Éowyn “shares the essential identity of the traditional marginal female” (108). In facing an opponent as formidable as the Witch-king, Éowyn's deed as a mortal woman echoes Frodo's task: “someone even smaller and weaker than the average man, who must do the deed” (Neville 108). Éowyn, like Frodo, is not a hero of men like Aragorn. Rather, in being “marginalized and assumed to be powerless” she achieves what no man – not even the heir of Gondor or her brother Éomer – could have done in her stead (Neville 109). It is also this apparent smallness and weakness, veiling what lies underneath, that draws her to Merry.

Up until the battle of the Pelennor Fields, Merry feels “small, unwanted, and lonely” (*RK* 5.V.1086). The hobbit is caught between concern that Théoden might be angry at this disobedience, his self-doubt, and defending the king of Rohan as the Lord of the Nazgûl attacks. As Merry struggles with the terror brought on by the Wraith – who completely disregards the hobbit – he reminds himself of his duty as “King's man! ... You must stay by him. As a father you will be to me, you said” (*RK* 5.VI.1100). The bond of love tying Merry to Théoden is reemphasized, and resembles Dernhelm's to the king, who “had loved his lord as a father” (*RK* 5.VI.1100). When Merry looks up at Dernhelm, he encounters Éowyn in her full form: he is now face-to-face with the one who sought death. It is from this (re)encounter, from the “pity and great wonder” awoken by it, that the hobbit draws the courage necessary to fulfil his promise to Théoden and aid Éowyn so that “at least she should not die alone” (*RK* 5.VI.1101). Merry incapacitates the Witch-king by stabbing him behind the knee with one of the blades of Westensse retrieved from the Barrow-downs – in a stroke of chance, a sword designed precisely to fight against Angmar.¹⁵ Merry gives Éowyn the opportunity to pierce the invisible menace that is the Black Captain and banish him into a final nothingness. For Yvette Kisor, “this moment of sudden reversal is Tolkien's great moment of eucatastrophe writ small; it will be repeated at the Cracks of Doom and at the Black Gate of Mordor” (“Connection” 106). Such a eucatastrophe is achieved not only

¹⁵ See *RK* 5.VI.1105.

“because of great strength or skill” Éowyn possesses: “ultimately she triumphs because of the help she receives from another sub-heroic Hobbit” (Neville 109). Éowyn, as a woman who has been othered, needs a halfling Other to fulfil her greatest act of service in the War of the Ring. The account of their heroism, like that of Frodo and Sam, is one of collaboration and co-creation. The Other is an indispensable contributor in the creation of this joint story.

Éowyn falls into unconsciousness, shield and shield-arm broken. Merry’s right arm, which he used to stab the Witch-king, becomes lame and “icy to the touch”, an injury that evokes the wounds sustained by Frodo and Éowyn in their own encounters with the Black Captain (*RK* 5.VIII.1125). The similarity of this wound further establishes a connection between these characters, highlighting how the small and powerless in Middle-earth accomplish the greatest acts of service even at the expense of their own bodies and minds. Merry asks a dying Théoden for forgiveness – “I broke your command, and yet have done no more in your service than to weep at our parting” (*RK* 5.VI.1103). Théoden bids Merry farewell and forgives his disobedience, for “Great heart will not be denied. Live now in blessedness; and when you sit in peace with your pipe, think of me! For never now shall I sit with you in Meduseld, as I promised, or listen to your herb-lore” (*RK* 5.VI.1103). Théoden’s parting words reveal more than the willingness to forgive Merry: they reveal an understanding that true service and loyalty go beyond the rigid following of commands. They also show the promise he made to encounter the Other even in their mundane joys and offer them hospitality still remains in his heart. At death’s door, the pleasure of smoking and the sorrow felt at parting demonstrate that the ethical relationship with the Other is grounded not in an ideal configuration or the sum of actions and achievements. Merry’s expression of service is more than glorious acts: it is substantiated by the real, material dimension of the world, grounded in the body that has needs and feels pain, as well as the mind and heart, which deeply feel both joy and loss. Merry’s heroism thus combines active involvement – great deeds – with ethical complexity, for a great heart may be both disobedient and loyal.

The Halflings and the Stewards

Faramir, second son of Denethor, is another character who is compelled to follow his own ethical path of service by in part disregarding his obligations to Gondor – to its ruling class, orders, measures, and normative expectations. Beregon describes him as

more bold than many deem; for in this day men are slow to believe that a captain can be wise and learned in the scrolls of lore and song, as he is, and yet a man of hardihood and swift judgement in the field. But such is Faramir. Less reckless and eager than Boromir, but not less resolute. (*RK* 5.1.1003)

Underpinning Beregond's words is "a level of affection" between Faramir and his men, of "love between the rangers and their commander", which differentiates him from Boromir, a "more traditional hero" (Carter 95). Wisdom and love become a determining factor in Faramir's survival.

Faramir first appears in the story in *The Two Towers*, when he stumbles upon Frodo, Sam, and Gollum while he and his men are patrolling Ithilien. Faramir's commands are "to slay all whom I find in this land without the leave of the Lord of Gondor. But I do not slay man or beast needlessly, and not gladly when it is needed" (*TT* 4.V.869). Faramir *could have* killed Sam, Frodo, and Gollum, on the spot, and would have been justified to do so according to the law of the land, but something stays his hand. Nor does he feel compelled to coerce the truth out of Frodo and Sam, not even when it becomes clear that they did not part on friendly terms with Boromir. The Rangers may be "astonished" at the sight of hobbits, but do not perceive them as hostile Others like the Haradrim, enemies of Gondor, probably due to the hobbits' overall appearance, their size, and their use of the Common Speech (*TT* 4.IV.858). Steven Brett Carter argues that "Faramir is portrayed as a compassionate warrior who refuses to kill recklessly or without reason, even possessing the capacity to look at an orc with sympathy. This compassion strays from the heroic model established by Aragorn and Éomer, who kill indiscriminately during wartime" (98). However, the text does not provide evidence to this effect, only Faramir declaring himself as incapable of snaring "even an orc with falsehood" to Frodo (*TT* 4.V.868). In any case, the narrative shows Sam, not Faramir or his men, exercising compassion to those constructed as Other – in this case the racialised Southrons. Rather, the text shows Faramir elaborating on the implications of his duty. He does not derive pleasure from warring for warring's sake, or from the renown attached to military prowess:

War must be, while we defend our lives against a destroyer who would devour all; but I do not love the bright sword for its sharpness, nor the arrow for its swiftness, nor the warrior for his glory. *I love only that which they defend*: the city of the Men of Númenor; and I would have her loved for her memory, her ancience, her beauty, and her present wisdom. (*TT* 4.V.877-8, emphasis added).

Because of this, Croft reads in Faramir "a more modern and thoughtful attitude toward war", which simultaneously implies a more modern approach to heroism because it sees past the great deeds and glory and acknowledges war can be an unavoidable circumstance in a country's defence (101). Faramir's understanding of duty is similar to Frodo's, for the ultimate goal of their tasks is the protection of their people.

Being captain of Gondor is Faramir's path to serve the reality of Minas Tirith and its inhabitants, as well as the ideal of this city as part of Númenor's legacy. However, he interprets his service as demanding thoughtful choices. Having spared the hobbits, the law of the land demands that he bring the strangers to the Steward, where they would be compelled to elaborate both on their knowledge of Boromir and their objectives. According to this law, Faramir's "life will be justly forfeit, if I now choose a course that proves ill for my city" (*TT* 4.V.873). But once more, Faramir decides not to follow the letter of the law of the realm he serves, for he allows the travellers to rest with him and his men in Henneth Annûn. If by sparing the hobbits' lives and respecting their autonomy Faramir enters into an ethical relationship with Frodo, Sam, and Gollum, his bringing them into the refuge of the Dúnedain of the South also situates Faramir in the role of the host and the hobbits as guests. Faramir thus freely forges his own ethical response to this encounter with Otherness, a personal response that deviates from the normative order established by the realm he serves.

The manner in which Faramir enters into an ethical relationship with Frodo and Sam echoes the hobbits' first encounter with Aragorn as Strider. Up until meeting Frodo, Faramir had an inkling "that Isildur took somewhat from the hand of the Unnamed" (*TT* 4.V.877). Even though Faramir can only guess what this object is and what power it may have, he declares that

I would not take this thing, if it lay by the highway. Not were Minas Tirith falling in ruin and I alone could save her, so, using the weapon of the Dark Lord for her good and glory ... I would see ... Minas Tirith in peace: Minas Anor again as of old, full of light, high and fair, beautiful as a queen among other queens: not a mistress of many slaves, nay, not even a kind mistress of willing slaves. (TT 4.V.877-8, emphasis added)

Even before knowing that the object in question is Sauron's Master Ring, Faramir already rejects the idea of safeguarding that which he loves and to which he has pledged his service by using a power that would dominate the Other. The frankness and humility with which Faramir speaks of his love for Minas Tirith, as well as of his own feelings and limitations, leads Sam to throw caution to the wind and reveal the truth. Realising his blunder, Sam asks Faramir not to take advantage of his mistake, framing this as "a chance to show your quality" (*TT* 4.V.890). Faramir responds:

The One Ring that was thought to have perished from the world. And Boromir tried to take it by force? And you escaped? And ran all the way – to me! And here in the wild I have you, two halflings, and a host of men at my call, and the Ring of Rings ... A chance for Faramir, Captain of Gondor, to show his quality! Ha! (*TT* 4.V.890)

But Faramir reiterates his promise: “*Not if I found it on the highway would I take it, I said*” (TT 4.V.890). Faramir evidently has the physical strength and the numbers to overpower the Other, but he neither takes advantage of the situation nor, more crucially, does he desire the Ring. Faramir echoes Aragorn’s choice and words at *The Prancing Pony*, when Strider proves to the hobbits that he has no intention of taking the Ring: “If I was after the Ring, I could have it – NOW! ... But I am the real Strider, fortunately ... I am Aragorn son of Arathorn; and if by life or death I can save you, I will” (FR 1.X.224). Neither Faramir nor Aragorn desire power for power’s sake. They respect the Other in their form of service.

The clash between Faramir’s choices and Denethor’s wishes –as Steward and father – becomes apparent once the former returns to Minas Tirith. By following his “own way” – letting the hobbits go and refusing to take the Ring to his city – Faramir has proven himself disloyal (RK 5.IV.1062). In Denethor’s view, Faramir’s approach is foolish considering Gondor’s position in the war:

Ever is your desire to appear lordly and generous as a king of old, gracious, gentle. That may well befit one of high race, if he sits in power and peace. But in desperate hours gentleness may be repaid with death ... not with your death only, Lord Faramir: with the death also of your father, and of all your people, whom it is your part to protect now that Boromir is gone. (RK 5.IV.1063)

While he is to a certain extent right about Faramir, what Denethor does not perceive is his own self-centredness, his proud blindness to the peril of the Ring, no doubt influenced by grief and despair which have themselves been tainted by Sauron’s manipulation of the *palantír*. The Steward of Gondor thus falls into comparing his sons: “He [Boromir] would have remembered his father’s need, and would not have squandered what fortune gave. He would have brought me a mighty gift” (RK 5.IV.1063). Denethor cannot appreciate who they are in themselves, nor does he understand that the Ring is not a gift nor is Gondor the only nation in need. Faramir follows Denethor’s command to return to battle and “do his lord’s will”, proving his questioned loyalty and his sense of duty to the Steward’s authority and Gondor’s need (RK 5.IV.1068). When he returns to Minas Tirith on the verge of death, he survives thanks to the disobedience of Pippin and Beregond.

Pippin arrives to Minas Tirith after letting curiosity get the best of him and looking into the *palantír* – an act of disobedience to Gandalf’s warnings, which sets into motion his arrival to Gondor (TT 3.XI.772-3).¹⁶ By peering into the stone, Pippin unwittingly reveals himself to Sauron and Gandalf decides to take him to Minas Tirith, where Pippin then

¹⁶ Pippin had already displayed this type of behaviour when he dropped a stone in a well during the Fellowship’s journey through Moria (FR 2.IV.408).

pledges his services to Denethor. Prior to Pippin's face-to-face encounter with the Steward of Gondor, Gandalf warns him that Denethor is "proud and subtle", a grieving father who will use his love for his son as a way to gain information from Pippin about the Fellowship and Aragorn. When they meet, Denethor declares that he bears little love for the name "halfling", "since those accursed words came to trouble our counsels and drew away my son on the wild errand to his death" (*RK 5.I.987*). Denethor shows little interest in Pippin as an individual, instead focusing on what Pippin can reveal about Boromir's death. By questioning Pippin's survival – "And how did you escape and he did not, so mighty a man as he was, and only orcs to withstand him?" (*RK 5.I.988*) – Denethor compares the hobbit and Boromir, underlining the former's condition of Other in the eyes of the Steward: how is it that you, small and frail, still live? How is it that a halfling, and not a trained and disciplined warrior of noble birth, still stands? Pippin's love for and gratitude towards Boromir – who sacrificed himself for an Other – is compounded with Pippin's pride in the face of Denethor's "scorn and suspicion" (*RK 5.I.988*).

Pippin pledges to serve Denethor due to "feelings of pride and indebtedness, rather than affection for the recipient of his service" (Kleinman 142). The nature of Pippin's pledge is therefore different from Merry's, but Pippin's wish to be of service is even more important than Denethor's suspicion of a ploy meant to spy on him or Denethor's calculating use of Pippin's service for his own purposes. Beyond the pride and gratitude of this pledge lies also a "generous deed [that] should not be checked by cold counsel" (*RK 5.I.993*). Merry and Pippin choose to be of service in cultures and societies that are not their own, which adds nuance to their pledges to an Other in higher hierarchical positions and potentially allows more freedom for the exercise of their ethical choices via disobedience. Shippey writes that "the central action in each case is the same: the hobbit offers his sword to the man, who accepts it and returns it" (*Author 98*). When Denethor finally accepts Pippin's pledge, the oath the hobbit repeats clearly outlines the conditions of his service:

Here do I swear fealty and service to Gondor, and to the Lord and Steward of the realm, to speak and to be silent, to do and to let be, to come and to go, in need or plenty, in peace or war, in living or dying, from this hour henceforth, until my lord release me, or death take me, or the world end. (*RK 5.I.989*)

Pippin's manner of service is now determined by the Steward, neither to be shaped or ended by the oath-swearer. Denethor's answer to the oath "highlights the contractual nature of the exchange of duties" (Kleinman 142). Pippin is to expect "fealty [to be rewarded] with love, valour with honour, oath-breaking with vengeance" (*RK 5.I.989*). The text does not detail the composition of Gondor's law, but it is clear that "a system of martial justice is implied"

where disobedience has official consequences (Croft 96). As Shippey notes, Denethor's response "is not without an element of threat ... far removed from" the wishes of luck and fortune Théoden bestows upon Merry (*Author* 99). The different responses of the two rulers underscore how differently they perceive the Other and their service. Denethor's point of departure is the authority of the Steward, emanating from the State; service should therefore be subsumed to it. Théoden, on the other hand, welcomes Merry's pledge as a gift from a free individual. The promise of service given and accepted is an act of mutual acknowledgement and love, eliciting the spontaneous response of a blessing rather than the promise of reward or punishment.

Notwithstanding his sworn service, Pippin confesses that "I am no warrior at all and dislike any thought of battle", he is no *Ernil I Pheriannath* or "Prince of the Halflings" (*RK* 5.I.1003-4). Merry and Pippin provide a different point of view on war, because "their part is far from glorious: there is a tedious waiting, a sense of uselessness and futility, terror and pain and ugliness" (Croft 28). The hobbits feel increasingly lonely and desperate, out of place and weary. Denethor experiences very similar feelings, but his view is overwhelmed by despair and remorse. He decides to burn alive with his wounded son Faramir, who lies in a feverish stupor ever closer to death: "no tomb for Denethor and Faramir ... No long slow sleep of death embalmed. We will burn like the heathen kings before ever a ship sailed hither from the West" (*RK* 5.IV.1079). As one who is used to "requiring absolute obedience even from his own sons", Denethor has lost perspective: he knows much but can no longer see the whole picture (Kleinman 142). Denethor releases Pippin from service out of despair and because the hobbit can no longer serve the Steward's purposes. However, Pippin refuses: "But from my word and your service I do not wish to be released while you live. And if they come at last to the Citadel, I hope to be here and stand beside you and earn perhaps the arms that you have given me" (*RK* 5.IV.1080). As his refusal indicates, Pippin had sworn his service to Denethor and Minas Tirith. Nevertheless, once he becomes aware of Denethor's despair, Pippin's understanding of his ethical responsibility changes. Pippin's idea of service is now an ethical responsibility that transcends hierarchical orders and institutional practices.

The hobbit's rebuttal is his first act of disobedience. Pippin's second act of disobedience is trying to prevent Denethor's servants from building a funeral pyre. Faramir still lives and the city has not been completely taken. Pippin realises that despite the formal conditions of his service, especially Denethor's promise to avenge betrayal, his ethical responsibility to the Other supersedes this threat and lies in countering despair with hope, protecting Faramir "while his death is still in doubt" (*RK* 5.VII.1118). Pippin's service is still bound to the House of Stewards, but it is now focused on serving the vulnerable and helpless. Pippin's final act of disobedience is seeking out Gandalf to help him rescue

Faramir. As Gandalf states, regardless of the Steward's authority, "others may contest your will, when it is turned to madness and evil" (*RK* 5.VII.1116).¹⁷ That Other is, first and foremost, Pippin. The disobedience of this otherwise fragile and marginal being challenges the dictum of power.

Sharing Pippin's experience is Beregond, a soldier of the Third Company of the Citadel loyal to Faramir, tasked with guiding the hobbit through his new duties in Minas Tirith. Their relationship is also an encounter with the Other, between a human and a halfling, and together they face the same ethical dilemma: what happens if the order they are sworn to uphold negatively impacts the Other whom it should protect? Pippin summarises the situation quite clearly: "Well, you must choose between orders and the life of Faramir" (*RK* 5.IV.1083). Again, for Pippin, the law does not take precedence over the Other. Beregond also chooses to disobey by defending Faramir's life. But his disobedience places him in an impossible position: staying true to his responsibility places him at odds with his fellow guards and countrymen, who follow their own duties by upholding the law. They "[curse] him, calling him outlaw and traitor to his master", while Denethor demands of his followers "slay me this renegade" (*RK* 5.VII.1115). Beregond is forced to kill two of Denethor's loyal servants, becoming a traitor to the Guard, but faithful to whom he considers his true master. For his trespasses, Beregond is demoted from the city's guard and later appointed by King Aragorn to captain of "the White Company, Guard of Faramir", and any punishment is "remitted for your valour in battle, and still more because all that you did was for the love of the Lord Faramir" (*RK* 6.V.1269). Beregond's disobedience was born out of love to the Other and acknowledged as such.

Faramir, Pippin, and Beregond's disobedience exemplifies how the encounter with the Other is capable of challenging preconceived notions and models of service. Their choice to protect the vulnerable and defenceless, especially when vulnerable and humble themselves, has significant consequences for the plot of *LotR*. It saves the life of the future Steward of Gondor, allows Frodo to reach Mordor, and for the Ring to be destroyed. To hear the plea of the Other and to respond to it shows that ethics is "my affair". To say that the Other is "my responsibility" is the heroism of these characters.

¹⁷ Moreover, Gandalf appeals to an instance higher than Denethor: "Authority is not given to you, Steward of Gondor, to order the hour of your death ... And only the heathen kings, under the domination of the Dark Power, did thus, slaying themselves in pride and despair, murdering their kin to ease their own death" (*RK* 5.IV.1117).

Beyond the Houses of Healing: From Disobedience to Independence

After the Battle of the Pelennor Fields, Faramir, Éowyn, and Merry suffer under the influence of the so-called Black Shadow or Black Breath, produced by contact with the Nazgûl. It is in the Houses of Healing that Éowyn's and Faramir's paths intersect. In addition to the broken shield-arm and the lifeless sword-arm, which acted as a conduit for the Black Shadow's pernicious influence, Éowyn "was pitted against a foe beyond the strength of her mind and body": a mortal against an undead sorcerer (*RK* 5.VIII.1134). When Éowyn finally awakes, hopelessness still surrounds her, for she remains within the patriarchal structures of Rohan. As a woman, she is still an Other amongst the *éored*. Gandalf says: "who knows what she spoke to the darkness, alone, in the bitter watches of the night, when all of her life seemed shrinking, and the walls of her bower closing in on her, a hutch to trammel *some wild thing in?*" (*RK* 5.VIII.1135, emphasis added). Although Gandalf expresses sympathy for her position, likening Éowyn to a caged "wild thing" perpetuates her othering. It implies that her feelings and behaviour are that of an animal that requires taming, without a more in-depth consideration of what a free life for a woman in this fictional world could mean. The text later on suggests – at least indirectly – that a form of appeasing or taming Éowyn's wildness is through love and marriage, which would also place her in the traditional female role of lover and wife.

During their stay in the Houses of Healing, it becomes clear that Faramir shares "Éowyn's frustrations and their causes", for neither are able to continue serving in the war or seek out their own fate (Holtz Wodzack 103). Faramir clearly perceives Éowyn's unhappiness and his first reaction is to pity her – an impression that changes as he gets to know her. In turn, Éowyn sees "grave tenderness" in Faramir's eyes "and yet she knew, for she was bred among men of war, that here was one whom no Rider of the Mark would outmatch in battle" (*RK* 6.V.1257). This encounter represents the meeting of two individuals who, despite their courage and skills as warriors, have been underestimated and othered, "wounded by a culture that has devalued them" (Enright 62). However, their encounter also places their differences side by side: whereas Faramir has had the opportunity to serve in the war as a captain of Gondor, because Éowyn is a woman, she could not truly ride as one of the Rohirrim. Faramir has been judged as ineffectual – especially in comparison to his brother Boromir – due to the gentleness of his nature. Éowyn perceives herself as a shieldmaiden with "ungentle" hand (*RK* 6.V.1259). And yet the contrast of these differences reveals aspects in their lived experience, in their assertion of themselves by challenging the expectations placed on them, and in the singularities of their character through which Faramir and Éowyn can learn from one another and bridge the gap between their self and

Other. The end result of this process is their independence and the continuation of their self-determination.

The text describes Faramir's presence as softening something within Éowyn "as though a bitter frost were yielding at the first faint presage of spring" (*RK* 6.V.1258). This portrayal echoes Aragorn's impression of Éowyn's fairness as "cold, like a morning of pale spring that is not yet come to womanhood" (*TT* 3.VI.672). The narrative does not explicitly indicate what it means by "womanhood", but this is strongly implied by the outcome of the love story between Faramir and Éowyn. In addition to their similar experiences, Faramir also grasps that Éowyn's love for Aragorn was not only directed at him romantically, but also as a soldier might admire their captain – like Beregon'd's love for Faramir (Croft 52). Moreover, Faramir recognises that Éowyn's "desire" for Aragorn "was a reflection of her desire for glory" (Kleinman 146). She wished "to be lifted far above the mean things that crawl on the earth" (*RK* 6.V.1263). Faramir's initial sentiments of pity towards Éowyn then begin to change, especially in light of the fact that she desires "no man's pity" (*RK* 6.V.1263). Parallel to Frodo's pity for Gollum – explored in Chapter Four of this thesis – it is worth considering to which extent pity and a pity-based relationship can impede the self from seeing the face of the Other and the complexities of their Otherness. It is worth asking whether pity superimposes values and judgements alien to the Other, which in truth only belong to the self. From pitying Éowyn, thinking he knows her and her desires, Faramir shifts his perspective. His encounter and time with Éowyn leads him to a fuller sense of her selfhood, to truly seeing Éowyn face-to-face and acknowledging who she is in herself, as an independent Other, courageous and capable. When Faramir comes to love Éowyn, it is not through a wish to change her – "he does not ask her to give up being a shieldmaiden" (Croft 133). He loves Éowyn for who she is and may be: "were you sorrowless, without fear or any lack, were you the blissful Queen of Gondor, still I would love you" (*RK* 6.V.1264). Faramir meets Éowyn in her Otherness.

The importance of Éowyn's acceptance of Faramir's love is, I argue, that of a choice that originates from her free will. Her path to independence, which had begun through an initial disobedience to assert herself, now continues with the liberty of choices freely made. She says:

I stand in Minas Anor, the Tower of the Sun ... and behold! the Shadow has departed!
I will be a shieldmaiden no longer, nor vie with the great Riders, nor take joy only in
the songs of slaying. I will be a healer, and love all things that grow and are not
barren. (*RK* 6.V.1264)

The narrative portrays Éowyn as freely choosing to depart from her conception of herself as a warrior and giving space to healing over slaying, caring for the Other rather than exerting “violence, aggression and power” (Benvenuto 50-1). Her choice is reminiscent of both Aragorn’s role as a king and healer and Faramir’s sense that a soldier’s worth lies not in killing but in serving the Other. Through her disobedience, Éowyn experiences this aspect of serving as she defends Théoden, an act that leads her to conceptualise being a warrior as something more than an activity leading to self-actualisation through probable death. Simultaneously, however, Éowyn’s choice also embodies a traditional idea of “womanhood”, for she transitions from being a shieldmaiden to becoming a wife – and potentially a mother. As Neville reminds the reader, Tolkien “did not destroy, invert or even question the patriarchal system that relegated women to a marginal position in his fiction”, and yet his “fiction proclaims that male power is not the only way to achieve victory, and, in fact, is incapable of winning the most important contests” (109-10). While Éowyn’s choice conforms to traditional gender roles, it is also a free response within the context of the new possibilities opened up both by the encounter with Faramir and the peace achieved in Middle-earth. It is not that Éowyn has finally become who she was meant to be according to the expectations around her. She is now who she chooses to be, without having to fight against expectations or norms: for her self and from her self. Éowyn’s heroism thus shows another transition: through her meaningful understanding of being othered, she acquires an agency crucial for her service to the Other. It is through her service and disobedience that she reconfigures her self as one willing and capable to ethically engage with the Other.

As for Merry and Pippin, once the Ring is destroyed and Merry is nursed back to health, the hobbits return to the Shire. Pippin was part of the army of the West that marched to the Black Gate of Mordor, where he saves Beregon’s life by killing a troll chief. This act, the taking of a life in combat in order to save an Other, along with the overall experience of the realities of war, is one of the final steps in Pippin’s experiential growth in the novel – now equal to Merry’s given the latter’s presence at the battle of the Pelennor Fields. From the formation of their conspiracy, their presence in the Fellowship of the Ring, their captivity and encounter with ents, to their service to Gondor and Rohan: their experiences have led them to discovering their own courage and resolve in protecting the Other. More importantly, their practice in disobedience will be fundamental when facing the last challenge narrated in the text, the damage done by Saruman upon their return home as depicted in “The Scouring of the Shire”.

On their journey back North, the hobbits have a chance meeting with Saruman and Gríma, now turned beggars. The wizard speaks ominously to the halflings about the Shire: “it will serve you right when you come home, if you found things less good in the

Southfarthing than you would like” (*RK* 6.VII.1289). This presage is first confirmed by Butterbur, and then by themselves. The Shire’s reality surpasses Sam’s vision in the Mirror of Galadriel:

Many of the houses that they had known were missing. Some seemed to have been burned down. The pleasant row of old hobbit-holes in the bank on the north side of the Pool were deserted, and their little gardens that used to run down bright to the water’s edge were rank with weeds. Worse, there was a whole line of the ugly new houses all along Pool Side, where the Hobbiton Road ran close to the bank. An avenue of trees had stood there. They were all gone. And looking with dismay up the road towards Bag End they saw a tall chimney of brick in the distance. It was pouring out black smoke into the evening. (*RK* 6.VIII.1314).

The evil assailing the Shire has razed what hobbits call home, in a manner that encompasses their dwellings, the natural world dear to them, and their worldview. Their holes have been replaced with prisons and their environment polluted. Taking advantage of the hobbits’ defencelessness, Saruman – now Sharkey – has sought to avenge his downfall and destitution by turning “the Shire into desert” and hurting the Other who he believes should have served him in his quest for power (*RK* 6.VIII.1326). Saruman’s attack is an erasure of hobbit reference points for their reality and culture, as well as a lack of concern for other living beings. Co-responsible in this change of circumstances is Lotho Sackville-Baggins, who has gone from being “Pimple” to becoming Bag End’s “Chief Shirrif” and holding an uneasy alliance with Saruman.¹⁸ The new authorities constituted by Lotho and his men, a squadron of ruffians loyal to Saruman, override the local authorities and power structures, which, due to their symbolic rather than active nature, are not designed to fend off this takeover.¹⁹ The orders and laws created and enforced by these new authorities are, evidently, not made to benefit the hobbit population. Rather, they act to maintain the power, comfort, and impunity of those who have colonised the Shire by dominating and weakening the hobbits. In essence, Saruman “has virtually reduced the Hobbits to slaves” (Kleinman 144). This occurs, for example, by forbidding hobbits from enjoying themselves and the world around them: “no welcome, no beer, no smoke”, no food (*RK* 6.VIII.1309). This severance is taken even further by a series of codified misdemeanours that are as unfair as they are increasingly

¹⁸ Like Ted Sandyman, Lotho proves that in their own way, hobbits are also capable of causing harm, of executing or being evil. In Lotho’s case, he becomes evil because of his greed, his wanting “to own everything himself, and then order other folk about” (*RK* 6.VIII.1324). His pursuit of self-aggrandisement and profit is done at the cost of denying his ethical responsibilities towards the Other and playing “on vulnerabilities that already existed” in the hobbit community (Birns 93). But his efforts backfire when he becomes prisoner of the very forces to which he allied himself. Lotho’s case point towards one of the discussion points from Chapter Five of this thesis: evil is not only a question of essence, but also of choice that negates the relationship between the self and the Other. Simultaneously, Lotho demonstrates that in Middle-earth, evil not only ruins the evil-doer, but also ruins its own purposes.

¹⁹ See *FR* 12-14.

absurd: “Gate-breaking, and Tearing up the Rules, and Assaulting Gate-keepers, and Trespassing, and Sleeping in Shire-buildings without Leave, and Bribing Guards with Food” (*RK* 6.VIII.1310). Sharkey’s arrival intensifies the Shire’s ruin, for the ruffians turn from wreaking havoc to killing. The final step is the extermination of the Other.

Although some hobbits resist the rule of the Chief and his Men, like the Took (*RK* 6.VIII.1321), the hobbits are unsuccessful in their overall attempt to fend off the Shire’s colonisation, especially because most hobbits fail to actively disobey and oppose these new authorities. Their submission is the product of a series of factors, such as the unofficial, symbolic authority that the occupant of Bag End – a Baggins – traditionally holds, which has now passed on to Lotho. At the same time, this situation is unprecedented: hobbits “don’t at all understand what is really going on. But Shire-folk have been so comfortable so long they don’t know what to do” (*RK* 6.VIII.1317). Their self-centredness has made them ignorant of the larger forces at play in Middle-earth and at a loss as to how to respond to this challenge to their way of life and worldview. When Sam asks Robin Smallburrow why he has continued working as a Shirrif “if it has stopped being a respectable job”, the latter simply answers that “we’re not allowed to” (*RK* 6.VIII.1311). Most of the hobbits in the Shire have never experienced civil disobedience or conflict with authority. The return of the Travellers marks a revolution in their consciousness, an expansion in how they perceive themselves and hobbit relations with the wider world. As the Travellers come closer to the troubled Shire, Gandalf reminds them that:

You must settle its affairs yourselves; that is what you have been trained for. Do you not yet understand? ... you will need no help. You are grown up now. Grown indeed very high; among the great you are, and I have no longer any fear at all for any of you. (*RK* 6.VII.1305)

They have garnered experience in war and the world, as well as developed their courage, sense of ethical responsibility, and service to the Other. This allows them to raise a galvanising rebellion against the Chief, his Men, and the Big Boss, whilst instilling in others the idea that disobedience is a legitimate path towards independence.

Because Merry and Pippin have already questioned their role as subjects to unfair authorities and laws, as well as acted upon this questioning, they are capable of scrutinising the Shire’s new bosses and disobeying them – not to mention that they hold a special “friendship with Saruman’s enemies, Treebeard and Théoden” in addition to their own personal history with the wizard, who was responsible for their kidnapping (Birns 90). These friendships, their experience as Frodo’s companions, and their participation in the War of the Ring both through their pledges and their autonomy has allowed them to reflect on their

purpose and the service they can provide to the Other. Such a reflection is crucial when needing to distinguish between principled behaviour stemming from an external code of conduct and their own ethical relationship with the Other. Thus, beyond recovering or preserving the Shire as they had known it, their motivation is to practice what they have learned in serving the Other: “the very people such as Rosie and the Gaffer, who do not understand the scope of the War of the Ring, are those who must be protected against the remnants of evil it was fought to combat” (Birns 93). Their actions have a domino effect, leading ordinary hobbits to feel encouraged and empowered in the face of such evil. While Pippin recruits a group of Tookes to face the Chief’s and Sharkey’s men, Merry devises the battle strategy to trap and drive them out of the Shire. The total toll of fatalities is seventy dead ruffians, twelve prisoners, nineteen dead hobbits, and thirty wounded, with the incident known as the Battle of Bywater, and the names of “Captain Meriadoc and Peregrin” rising to fame in the history of the Shire (*RK* 6.VIII.1329). But as *LotR* proves, the prominence of these seemingly marginal and frail hobbits has surpassed the borders of their own small land.

Amongst the outcomes of this event is Merry, Pippin, and Sam assuming important political and social roles: Pippin succeeds his father in becoming Thain of the Shire, Merry becomes Master of Buckland, and Sam serves several terms as Mayor of the Shire and changes his name to Gardner after his efforts to restore and heal the Shire. Unlike Frodo, they once more form part of the Shire’s everyday life, marry and have a family. Merry and Pippin in particular have transitioned from feeling like “passengers and luggage” to actively shaping the fate of hobbits. They are instrumental in the restoration and change brought about by the Scouring of the Shire, for “one of the principal outcomes of the Scouring, and of the oppression that prompted it, is to lessen the hobbits’ sometimes protective but sometimes stultifying provincialism, to open up the Shire to the outside world just enough so it can preserve its own distinctiveness” (Birns 83-4). Merry and Pippin’s heroism has been prominently marked by challenging commands and hierarchies in order to serve the Other, but it also challenged what they believed of themselves. Through their narrative journeys, the text shows the alternative routes the self can take when ethically engaging with the Other.

CODA

Desire, Surrender, and Renunciation

As a conclusion to my thesis, I would like to reflect on the question of desire: the surrender to and renunciation of desire – of the One Ring, of possession. I argue that desire as possession is solely concerned with the self, thus constituting a point of disconnection between the self and the Other. These reflections represent the quintessence of my interpretation of *The Hobbit* and *LotR*, because the desire of possession is antithetical to the desire of and ethical relationship with the Other that is at the heart of these narratives and Levinas's philosophy. I begin by illustrating how Saruman and Sauron may be considered the utmost representation of desire as possession in order to then contrast them with Tom Bombadil and Galadriel, who not only display the Levinasian desire of the Other but, in Galadriel's case, also actively renounce desire as possession in order to maintain an ethical relationship with the Other. Finally, I consider what these reflections mean, first, in the context of a text like *LotR* with its depiction of "failure"; and, second, in the context of Tolkien's scholarship present and future.

After the Battle of Bywater and Saruman's unmasking as Sharkey, the wizard makes one final attempt to avenge his losses: he tries – and fails – to kill Frodo. Nicholas Birns points out that "when he first heard of hobbits via Gandalf, Saruman had contempt for them", but after his hopes and designs are broken, Saruman seeks to avenge his overthrow by wreaking havoc amongst the Others he perceived with such disdain (88). But Frodo forgives him: "He was great once, of a noble kind that we should not dare to raise our hands against. He is fallen, and his cure is beyond us; but I would still spare him in the hope that he may find it" (*RK* 6.VIII.1334). Saruman is the most powerful being who falls to the desire of the One Ring in *LotR*. His surrender is especially perverse, for not only does it demonstrate the power of the One working at a distance, but also a betrayal of Saruman's original purpose in his service to the Other. He originally was sent from the West as a messenger "to contest the power of Sauron, and to unite all those who had the will to resist him" (*RK* Appendix B.1423). Saruman becomes the head of the White Council, dedicated to serve those whom the Dark Lord would seek to enslave and destroy, but makes "the lore of the Elven-rings, great and small, ... his province ... seeking the lost secrets of their making" (*FR* 1.II.63). He thus fails to take action against the Necromancer in Dol Guldur, because he had already "begun to desire to possess the One Ring himself, and he hoped that it might reveal itself, seeking its master, if Sauron were let be for a time" (*RK* Appendix B.1429). For Saruman, the benefits he might personally reap by leaving Sauron to his own devices take precedence

over the evils that the Dark Lord may inflict upon the world. Thereafter, Saruman's actions are concentrated on controlling and forestalling for his own benefit any actions related to the Ring and its Master, thus leading Saruman to lie about the Ring's potential whereabouts by claiming that "the One would never be found again in Middle-earth" because "it has passed down Anduin to the sea" (*RK* Appendix B.1431). His acts and choices in pursuit of his selfish goals are a negation of his ethical responsibilities towards the Other.

As Saruman's desire for the Ring increases, it reveals both a preoccupation with and a warping or breaking of his idea of self – a metaphor Gandalf uses in his encounter with Saruman at Isengard. Saruman wears "a ring on his finger" (*FR* 2.II.326) – even though he is not the keeper of a Ring of Power – and calls himself "Saruman the Wise, Saruman Ring-Maker, Saruman of Many-Colours" (*FR* 2.II.327). Saruman's willingness to manipulate fellow wizard Radagast and forcing "a choice" upon Gandalf are symptomatic of his self-centredness, for in his eyes they are no longer equals, but pawns (*FR* 2.II.337). Saruman claims that "*our* [the wizards'] time is at hand: the world of Men, which *we* must rule. But *we* must have power, power to order all things as *we* will, for that good which only the Wise can see" (*FR* 2.II.337, emphasis added). While the use of "we" could be read as inclusive, Saruman's use of the first-person plural might better be read as a form of the royal "we". He is blinded by his selfhood, which he considers to be above all others: Saruman says "we", but means *his* time, *his* power, *his* will. He is no longer a messenger, a beacon against the darkness, but a subject who sees in the Other – the world of Men – an object to control and dominate.

Saruman's idea of bringing "Knowledge, Rule, and Order" to Middle-earth signifies the remaking of the world according to his own understanding, rather than allowing it to follow its own course (*FR* 2.II.338). This remaking is equivalent to possession, and "possession is pre-eminently the form in which the other becomes the same, by becoming mine" (Levinas, *Totality* 46). In order to achieve this purpose, "Saruman is prepared to cooperate with forces he knows perfectly well are evil, but which he thinks he can use for his own much more admirable purposes, and later suppress or discard" (Shippey, *Author* 126). But the story shows that Saruman's purposes are only nominally admirable because they are intrinsically unsound. Their starting point is a specific idea that originates from the self. Saruman becomes one of those "creatures endowed with reason" who "are bound to participate in a fundamentally violent interpretation of reality" and "thus are prone to instrumentalize reason as a self-justifying force" (Tadie 221). He begins to exert this "violent interpretation of reality" without the Ring when he refuses to encounter the Other. No longer willing to be of service, but only to command via enchantment or force, Saruman denies the Other the right and possibility to exist on their own terms – to persist in their Otherness. This

can be observed in his literal use of the orcs (with whom he has no relationship as they are expendable means to execute his vision), his intervention in Rohan, his lack of concern for and destruction of Fangorn forest, and his remodelling of Isengard into “a little copy, a child’s model or a slave’s flattery, of that vast fortress, armoury, prison, furnace of great power, Barad-dûr, the Dark Tower” (*TT* 3.VIII.725). Saruman may not be Sauron, but he attempts to fashion himself as “a Power” over Middle-earth (*TT* 3.IV.616). And like Sauron’s, his efforts are thwarted by the very Other he seeks to dominate: the ents, Rohan, and the hobbits.

Sauron and Saruman suffer from the same self-centred blindness, which brings about their downfall. In Saruman’s case, his desires bring about “a process of diminishment, of truncation” (Birns 88). Unlike the hobbits, who grow spiritually and even physically, Saruman, head of the White Council, is “reduced to Sharkey” (Flieger, “Orcs” 218). No more a wizard, he is “merely a nasty ruffian” (Birns 88). And from being a ruffian bent on wanton destruction, his end reveals him as a wraith, for he had “been effectively dead for many years, but without realising it” (Shippey “Images” 259). When Saruman dies, a mist gathers over Saruman’s dead body “but out of the West came a cold wind, and it bent away, and with a sigh dissolved into nothing” (*RK* 6.VIII.1335). His demise parallels Sauron’s end, which is described as “a huge shape of shadow” taken away by “a great wind” (*RK* 6.IV.1242). Surrendering to their self-centred desire leads both tyrants to nothingness. Sauron and Saruman consequently demonstrate that renouncing a relationship with the Other reveals an empty solipsism in which the self tries to subsist solely on its self. Instead of ethically engaging with the Other in an act of co-creation that generates joint stories and new possibilities, this solipsism leads to, echoing Levinas, an empty totality.

Throughout the chapters of this thesis, I have referred to Sauron’s objectives, past history, and configuration in *LotR*. What interests me in this conclusion is to further reflect on how Sauron epitomises the disruption that desire as possession causes between the self and the Other. The text emphasises Sauron’s desire without really showing him actively participating in the story’s main plot – except, perhaps, when he probes Pippin through the *palantír*, but this event is voiced by the hobbit rather than the narrative directly depicting their interaction and the probing is done from afar. That Sauron is not depicted as personally interacting with any of the characters in the narrative, that he does not engage in a face-to-face encounter with the Other, gestures towards his inability to sustain an ethical relationship with the Other. Whereas he was capable to meet other beings face-to-face at other points in the *legendarium* – as a Maia of Aulë, Morgoth’s lieutenant, or as councillor to Ar-Pharazôn

– he had long forfeited the ethical implications of these encounters.¹ Now he now may see the Other’s face, but he never reveals his own. In fact, there is no full depiction of Sauron’s appearance. Whilst looming as an ever-growing shadow, fragments of his self creep into the narrative: “he has only four [fingers] on the Black Hand” (*TT* 4.III.838), he is the Eye “rimmed with fire” (*FR* 2.VII.474). Sauron sends a Mouth to speak his biddings, but this is a part of the face that does not perceive, that hears no plea. It is not even Sauron’s own face. Should Sauron regain the One, he will “eat us all, if He gets it, eat all the world” (*TT* 4.III.833). If Sauron recovers the Ring, he will consume the world with *his* desire.

But what is Sauron’s desire? Sauron’s attitude towards the hobbits is revelatory in this respect. Gandalf believes that Sauron had

entirely overlooked the existence of hobbits ... But your safety has passed. He does not need you – he has many more useful servants – but he won’t forget you again. And hobbits as miserable slaves would please him far more than hobbits happy and free. There is such a thing as malice and revenge. (*FR* 1.II.64-5)

At his core, what Sauron sees in the Other are the means to actualise his desire of subjugation. For Sauron, the Other is neither a practical purpose nor a potential to serve him, but an object. Different from the ethical responsibility to Other that entails the subjection to the Other as seen in Chapter Two, Sauron’s desire is to be *the sole subject* of existence by forcing his self upon the Other and denying the fulfilment of their Otherness. This is his idea of power, “by essence murderous of the other”, his malice and revenge upon a world that had already denied him his desire of moulding it according to his self (Levinas, *Totality* 47). The refusal to use the One, especially by the protagonists of the story and the leaders of the Free Peoples of Middle-earth, which I have argued is an ethical choice, reveals a deeper understanding of Sauron’s desire: “the only measure that he knows is desire, desire for power; and so he judges all hearts. Into his heart the thought will not enter that any will refuse it, that having the Ring we may seek to destroy it. If we seek this, we shall put him out of reckoning” (*FR* 2.II.351). As Sauron’s vision and understanding of the world originates exclusively from his self – rather than encountering the world as it is, with its wide spectrum of motives, appeals, desires, and embodiments – he can no longer comprehend anything outside of his self or his mode of being. Benjamin Saxton explains this in terms of Sauron’s discourse of power and objectification in the text: “dialogic and monologic discourse ... reinforce the tension in Tolkien’s mythology between shared storytelling, an act that preserves freedom and creativity, and the impulse of Sauron (among others) to reduce

¹ As narrated, for example, throughout *The Silmarillion* as “Part Two: The Second Age” of *UT* 181-286.

people to self-enclosed objects, appropriately symbolized by the One Ring” (169). Hence Sauron cannot conceive a resistance that would not seek power and objectification in the same way he has: “indeed he is in great fear, not knowing what mighty one may suddenly appear, wielding the Ring, and assailing him with war, seeking to cast him down and take his place. That we should wish to cast him down and have no one take his place is not a thought that occurs to his mind” (*TT* 3.V.648). The Free Peoples of Middle-earth, imperfect as they may be, display a willingness to engage with and serve the Other that Sauron does not.

In contrast to Sauron and his self-centred desire stands Tom Bombadil, “eldest”, immortal, unknowable Other (*FR* 1.VI.172). He is the only other creature besides the Ring-bearers to put on the Ring in the text. When doing so, he neither disappears nor shows any desire for the Ring despite knowing of its powers, for “the Ring has no power over him” (*FR* 2.II.346). Flieger explains Bombadil’s lack of reaction due to the fact that “the Ring works on humanity’s desire to dominate ... Tom is a personified force of nature, not a conventional human being, and thus has no such desire” (“Jewels” 74). As discussed in Chapter Four, Tom Bombadil is a powerful being in his own right, whose most salient characteristic is being “Master” of himself. Impervious to the “desire of possession or domination”, Tom Bombadil uses his voice to mediate in the name of the Other, so that the Other can persist in their Otherness – as he does when he rescues the hobbits from Old Man Willow and the Barrow-wight (*Letters* 192). Levinas states that “we are the same and the other. The conjunction *and* here designates neither addition nor power of one term over the other”, but that both (co)exist simultaneously (Levinas, *Totality* 39). In Middle-earth, Tom Bombadil truly embodies what it means to be oneself and the Other; to desire the Other, “their history and nature, *because they are ‘other’* and wholly independent” of the self (*Letters* 192). But being Master does not mean that Bombadil “can alter the Ring itself, nor break its power over others” (*FR* 2.II.346). As an object that originates from and whose essence is the desire to dominate the Other, it cannot hear Bombadil’s pleas.

If Tom Bombadil cannot go against the power of the One, then neither can the Three Elven Rings. They “were not made as weapons of war or conquest: that is not their power. Those who made them did not desire strength or domination or hoarded wealth, but understanding, making, and healing, to preserve all things unstained” (*FR* 2.II.350). The Three are tools in the service of the Other, not tools designed to serve the self; and yet the service the Elven Rings embody is, at its heart, flawed, because the elvish desire to prevent “decay” as performed by the Rings of Power “enhanced the natural powers of a possessor” (*Letters* 152). Tolkien thus described the elves as “embalmers”:

they wish to live in the mortal historical Middle-earth because they have become fond of it ... and so tried to stop its change and history, stop its growth, keep it as a pleasaunce, even largely a desert, where they could be 'artists' – and they were overburdened with sadness and nostalgic regret. (*Letters* 197)

The elvish desire of preservation runs parallel to the “long slow sleep of death embalmed” of Númenor and Gondor. Such a desire means to ultimately impose an immortal vision upon a world in which time and change are part of its constitutive elements. This preservation means to impose an idea of self upon what is ultimately Other. To renounce the power of the Three and aid in the destruction of the Master Ring is therefore an ethical act of the highest order because it is an acknowledgement of the limitations of the self, accepting its eventual loss in the name of the Other:

Do you not see now wherefore your coming is to us as the footstep of Doom? For if you fail, then we are laid bare to the Enemy. Yet if you succeed, then our power is diminished, and Lothlórien will fade, and the tides of Time will sweep it away. We must depart into the West, or dwindle to a rustic folk of dell and cave, slowly to forget and to be forgotten. (*FR* 2.VII.475)

Immortal Galadriel, ruler of Lothlórien, keeper of the Ring of Adamant, embodies the tension between an ethical path that means fading and the desire for power that posits preservation as a form of love. When she offers each of the members of the Fellowship “a choice between a shadow full of fear that lay ahead, and something that he greatly desired”, she demonstrates an acute awareness of this conflict (*FR* 2.VII.465). And later on, when Galadriel confesses to Frodo how “her heart has greatly desired” his offer of the One Ring, she does so knowing the consequences of surrendering to that desire: “all shall love me and despair” (*FR* 2.VII.476). Like preservation, such love would not be ethical, for it would be the product of imposing her self, beautiful and terrible, on the Other, rather than originating from meeting the Other. According to William Gray, “for Tolkien love also has a broader sense of ... an unpossessive love” for the Other “as ‘other’” (102). This is the crucial lesson Galadriel learns in her face-to-face encounter with Frodo, which constitutes the final step in her renunciation of desire. She becomes willing to “diminish” (*FR* 2.VII.476). But Galadriel’s diminishment is not the totalising nothingness of Saruman and Sauron, nor is it the fading of a wraith: it is a form of recovery. Taylor Driggers contends via Tolkien’s concept of *recovery*, as formulated by the author in “On Fairy-stories”, that Tolkien implies “that fantasy is not so much a restoration of an ideal status quo as it is a disruption of familiar habits and assumptions” (15-6).² The highest service Galadriel can do for the Other is to

² See Chapter Three of this thesis.

renounce to the idea of preservation as possession. By letting the Other persist in its Otherness, in its change, she recovers a sense of herself, disrupting the notion that Galadriel is only a ruler and a preserver. Galadriel's task is to go beyond the shadow of loss and desire because on the other side there is still light and she remains Galadriel.

To allow the Other to be: this is a foundational part of Frodo's task when he takes on the burden of the Ring. But Frodo has served the Other at the expense of his self. Bombadil's question to Frodo, "who are you, alone, yourself, and nameless?", underscores his solitude and the increasing weight of his burden (*FR* 1.VI.172). With every step he takes further into Mordor, Frodo is invaded by the desire of possession that severs his connection with world, impeding his ability to encounter the Other and hold an ethical relationship with them:

No taste of food, no feel of water, no sound of wind, no memory of tree or grass or flower, no image of moon or stars are left to me. I am naked in the dark, Sam, and there is no veil between me and the wheel of fire. I begin to see it even with my waking eyes, and all else fades. (*RK* 6.1226)

All of Frodo's reference points – his memories, his joy, his encounters, and relationships – have faded. All that remains is the desire to possess the One Ring. In the supreme moments leading up to the quest's end, Frodo faces the shadow depths of himself and finds that he, too, has become an abject Other like Gollum. He too has surrendered to the desire of possession: "I have come," he said. "But I do not choose now to do what I came to do. I will not do this deed. The Ring is mine!" (*RK* 6.III.1237). In the service of the Other, Frodo has been taken over the edge and shattered.

Robert Eaglestone claims that Frodo's refusal to destroy the Ring

marks the failure of the quest, not because the Ring is not destroyed, but because a quest is not simply an attempt to achieve something: a quest is both an internal and external journey ending in an achievement that will set the world aright. Not only does this not happen, but it is frequently made clear that even destroying the Ring will not accomplish this: the world of Middle-earth will always be damaged, reduced and broken. ("Invisibility" 82)

But I would have the emphasis on this notion of failure and the meaning of a "world set aright" questioned. Indeed, Frodo was "in a sense doomed to failure, doomed to fall to temptation or be broken by pressure against his 'will'" (*Letters* 233). But although Frodo does not personally destroy the Ring, "the 'salvation' of the world and Frodo's own 'salvation' is achieved by his previous pity and forgiveness of injury" (*Letters* 234). As a product of their narrative and ethical journeys, of their encounters with the Other, and the discovery of their self, Bilbo, Frodo, and Sam decide to spare Gollum – to let him persist in

his Otherness. This is an integral part of the story narrated in *The Hobbit* and *LotR*. Their face-to-face encounter with the Other was conducive not only to Sauron's downfall, but also to their own salvation. Tolkien's idea of the eucatastrophe, the joyous turn, can only be achieved by engaging with the Other. On this point, Flieger contends "that Frodo and Gollum both freely participate in the Ring's destiny to arrive at the Cracks of Doom shows *their* free will collaborating with its fate" ("Task" 34). Frodo and Gollum, although marred beyond healing, alone, victims of a unquenchable desire as possession, and no longer able to engage with each other, nevertheless render *together* the greatest service to Middle-earth and the Other they could possibly afford. Furthermore, to concentrate as a reader on an image of Middle-earth in the Fourth Age as simply "damaged, reduced and broken", as if its preservation would have been more desirable, is also a form of possession, because it dims how fundamental change and time, decay and death, are to Middle-earth. It also reduces the significance it has that it is precisely the damaged, reduced, and broken, along with the small, powerless, and othered, who go forth and accomplish astonishing feats of service to the Other, including the destruction of the One Ring. By this I am not denying that much is lost at the end of these stories, in the same way that much becomes lost in our Primary World, but although our world may not possess the same level of ontological certainty as Tolkien's Secondary World, both still stand, and blossom, and hope.

As this thesis has demonstrated, the Other-world created by Tolkien's *The Hobbit* and *LotR* acts like a realm of possibility where our ethical responsibilities and relationships can be explored. It is an Other-world that brings to light how the change achieved by engaging with the Other, rather than remaining frozen in the self and the past, can be a *good* thing. This is proven intradiegetically by the characters' narrative journeys, in which they encounter and engage with the rich and complex spectrum of possibilities Otherness can entail – from the abject to the evil, feminine, monstrous, queer, and uncanny. The different paths characters like Bilbo, Frodo, Sam, Merry, Pippin, Aragorn, Éowyn, Faramir take to engage with different and even radical embodiments of Otherness; to honour their responsibility to serve the Other enables them to embrace further possibilities of their being and/or the world that surrounds them. The encounters enacted by the texts' characters suggest that the Other and the desire for them is not only a fundamental part of the world, but also that the Other is "a formative part of one's own personality" (Saxton 175).

Extradiegetically, *The Hobbit* and *LotR* have proved throughout the years inexhaustible in the interpretations and insights they can afford. The meanings of these texts are not one. They cannot be preserved as a possession by specific readers, scholars, and critics. Rather, these narratives call for infinite acts of recovery and a scholarship willing to engage with the Other inside and outside the text. The readings contained in this thesis are a

contribution to these wider acts of recovery. Infinity, Emmanuel Levinas declares, “is produced in the relationship of the same with the other”, a relationship marked by desire for the Other (Levinas, *Totality* 26). Levinas says that this is “not a Desire that the possession of the Desirable slakes, but the Desire for the Infinite which the desirable arouses rather than satisfies. A Desire perfectly disinterested – goodness” (50). Encountering ourselves face-to-face in the desire for each other, in the infinite stories we may write together, is also hope: it is an ethics as first Fantasy.

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