'Small Hands Do Them Because They Must': Examining the Reception of *The Lord of the Rings* Among Young Readers

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MA

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the

Degree of PhD

School of Critical Studies

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Month/year of deposition to the library

Abstract

This project explores how the reception of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* by younger readers differs from the understanding of the novel preponed by scholarship. A questionnaire and two activities were used to assess the reception of thirty young readers. The data set created from these responses was then compared to the current understanding of Tolkien's work among scholars, as determined by a lengthy literature review. While several of the traditional aspects of a thesis for an English PhD are maintained, the study also employs methods and analysis from other fields. In this way, the study is unique and, perhaps, groundbreaking in its approach to reception studies.

The specific areas of investigation are young readers' understanding of the genre, characters, and setting of *The Lord of the Rings*. By examining the ideas that young readers have about genre, this project provides commentary on the impulse critics have to confine texts to easily-defined categories. By analyzing young readers' response to characterization, this project confronts the assumption that children have a simplistic reading of characters. Finally, by discussing young readers' interpretation of setting, this project validates the environmental and ecological concerns of this young readership.

The narrow aim of the project is to fill a gap in Tolkien reception studies by examining the response of readers younger than eighteen, and thereby improve understanding of J.R.R. Tolkien's readership. The larger goal of the study is to confront and reexamine the assumptions of literary scholars and critics. This study demonstrates the disconnect between much of the scholarly conversations about fantasy literature and the lived experiences of young readers. It gives voice to a population that is underrepresented in scholarly conversations, and it supports the idea of more inclusive and diverse critical discussions.

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Abbreviations

Letters *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien: A Selection* (1981)

LOTR *The Lord of the Rings* (originally published in 1954-55)

OFS *Tolkien: On Fairy Stories: Extended Edition* (2008)

Chapter One
Introduction and Literature Review

1.1   Introduction

1.1.1   Background

J.R.R. Tolkien has always been one of my favourite writers, and his work was very influential in my early life. When I read *The Lord of the Rings* as a young reader, I was completely unaware of the wealth of scholarship and insight that existed around the text. This meant that many of the perceptions and assumptions that I had about the text at a young age were based on my own experience and were not necessarily in agreement with mainstream critical views on Tolkien. As I grew and became more aware of other fans and eventually read scholars who wrote about Tolkien, I revised some of my earlier responses to be more in line with the critical culture I found.

When I began the process of applying for my PhD, I knew that I wanted to write about J.R.R. Tolkien, but I was unsure which text or what approach I wanted to take. Thinking back on my experience, however, I became curious about whether or not the revisionist tendency I saw in myself was also present in the experience of other young readers. This curiosity helped to focus my project on a specific population and a specific approach. I now knew that I wanted to study the reception of J.R.R. Tolkien's work by young readers. As a starting point, I generated a short questionnaire that I circulated among friends and in some Tolkien fan/scholar communities to get their thoughts and impressions on the text, as well as a brief description of their reading history. This pilot survey helped me decide on which population I wanted to focus my PhD, as well as a couple of aspects that may be important to them (see next section).

In order to engage with this study effectively, I needed to first understand my own assumptions and biases when it came to my current reading of *The Lord of the Rings*, but also of my earlier reading of the story. One of the first steps in this process was to reconstruct my own first reading of *The Lord of the Rings* by rereading the text, while actively trying to recall my first thoughts and reactions, at times aided by notes I had taken at the time of my first reading. This process resulted in a series of blog posts, one for each chapter for a total of sixty, in which I tried to piece together my early interpretation of the text. For the sake of space, these posts are not included here, but may be found at Luke-Shelton.com in the "First Impressions" category. I found that exploring my own early interpretation made me all the

more eager to interact with young readers in order to understand their views and opinions of *The Lord of the Rings*.

1.1.2   Project Overview

In this project, I explore how the reception of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* by younger readers differs from the understanding of the novel preponed by scholarly consensus. I conducted a survey and two activities to assess the reception of thirty young readers (aged under eighteen), and from these responses I created a data set which I analysed for the thesis. To facilitate the analysis of this data set, I conducted a literature review which helps to contextualize the project by giving an overview of the current scholarly understandings of young readers, their response to fantasy literature, as well as the major studies of reception that have been done in Tolkien studies. I present much of the pertinent information from this literature review in the current chapter.

This project blends literary criticism and research methods used in the social sciences. While several of the traditional aspects of a dissertation for an English PhD are maintained, the study also employs methods and analysis from other content areas. In addition to literary research, it also makes use of field work, in this case interviews with young readers. The motivation to undertake field work came from the desire to acknowledge current trends in the study of young readers, in that it is preferable to base analysis on data from actual readers than constructed, assumed, or implied readers. This choice will be justified later in this chapter (p. 51). Because this study adopts methods unused in Tolkien studies up to this point, it is unique in the field. Further, as a study dedicated to trying to understand the critical debate that exists between young readers' interpretations and scholarly consensus, it has the potential to be ground-breaking in its approach to reception studies.

My narrow aim is to improve understanding of J.R.R. Tolkien's readership by focusing on an underrepresented population in critical studies of his work. The project will ultimately fill a gap in Tolkien reception theory by examining the response of readers younger than eighteen. To achieve this narrow goal, I decided it would be essential to interview young readers about their lived experience of reading *The Lord of the Rings*. In order to facilitate meaningful interactions with these participants, I researched numerous techniques for interviewing young participants. Much more detail about these interview techniques and the reasons for choosing them are given in chapter two (p. 71).

All thirty participants were recruited and interviewed within just a few months, and I will give some basic demographic information and commentary about the group as a whole below. Chapters three (p. 101), four (p. 149), and five (p. 195) of this thesis each discusses data from an activity that the participants undertook while contributing to the project. Please note that these analyses are not intended to be all-inclusive. Instead, they are initial forays into data analysis which focus on trends that form across the responses of these participants.

After I give several of the most notable conclusions in the following chapters, the final chapter of the thesis sums up the findings of the study, notes the limitations of the results, and indicates areas where further research is warranted. The larger goals of the study are to complicate facile definitions of genre and to confront false narratives about how young readers respond to a text. This project addresses many concerns and contentions argued by scholars in the literary field more generally. It confronts and re-examines the assumptions of literary scholars and critics by demonstrating how theories about young readers are often inaccurate when compared with the lived experience of actual young readers.

1.1.3   Meet the Participants

In this section, I present basic demographics for the sample that participated in the study.[1] The goal at the outset was to recruit participants under the age of eighteen, with no regard paid to gender, specific age under the cut-off, nationality, or education level. The participants who ultimately progressed through the study presented a large range across most of these categories. In gender: nineteen participants were male, ten participants were female, and one participant preferred not to disclose their gender.[2] In age: one participant was under the age of eight years old, nine participants were between the ages of eight and twelve years old, seven participants were between the ages of thirteen and fifteen years old, and thirteen participants were between the ages of sixteen and eighteen years old. The study did not recruit participants older than eighteen. In education: six participants were at an education level of sixth grade or lower, seven participants were at an education level of seventh or eighth grade, five participants were at an education level of ninth or tenth grade, nine participants were at an

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[1] I have also included a table in Appendix F, that gives participant age, gender, reading, and adaptation experience.

[2] Throughout the study, I use the pronoun(s) that corresponds to each participant's identification in this gender question, employing the singular 'they/them/their' to refer to the participant who indicated that they preferred not to disclose their gender. No major trends formed along lines of gender, and if minor trends arose, I address them as needed.

education level of eleventh or twelfth grade, and three participants were high school graduates.[3] As far as nationality, the study did not ask participants what nationality they identified with, instead it asked them to indicate where they currently live. While this is not an accurate representation of the cultural identity of the participants, it is helpful in determining if certain geographical locations had an influence on their reception of the story. Participants indicated living in six different countries. A predominant number of participants (22) indicated living in the United States of America, while other participants disclosed their location to be in the British Isles, Europe, Australia, and South America.

The basic qualifications necessary to participate in the study were that participants: were under the age of eighteen, had read *The Lord of the Rings* in English (minimum requirement the completion of *The Fellowship of the Ring*), had appropriate consent forms signed and sent in prior to the interview or survey, and had the ability either to use an online meeting program or to meet the researcher face-to-face. Several of these qualifications were necessary to ensure that the project would focus on the interpretations of young readers and that the study could incorporate the activities designed by the researcher. Perhaps more justification is warranted to explain the qualification of having read *The Fellowship of the Ring* in English. Initially, the choice of the English language was made because it is the native language of the researcher and the interview would be conducted in English. A further consideration, however, is that translations can introduce differences to the text that could influence interpretation and opinion. I wanted to minimize as many influences as possible. This being said, participants were not excluded from the study if they had read the text in other languages in addition to having read the text in English. This was the case for at least three participants. Additionally, I determined that having completed the first volume of *The Lord of the Rings* was sufficient exposure to the text for the young readers to develop opinions about characters and settings. This determination limited the characters and settings chosen for the activities, as will be seen in chapter two (p. 71). Furthermore, allowing young readers who had not read the entirety of *The Lord of the Rings* to participate broadened the potential recruitment pool for the study.

When I initially set out to conduct interviews with young readers, I strongly suspected that these interviews would illustrate how their perceptions differed from scholarly consensus. I did not anticipate just how much the experiences of young readers would confront even my

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[3] The education system in mind when developing the survey was the American education system. This proved useful as most of the participants were educated in this system (see the discussion of nationality below).

own assumptions. In analysing the portions of the questionnaire involving participant reading history, the engagement of these young readers with Tolkien's work far exceeded what I had anticipated. I knew all of them would have read *The Fellowship of the Ring*, because this was a requirement to participate in the research. Based on the pilot survey, I imagined that most of them would have read *The Hobbit* already, and most would have read the other two volumes of *The Lord of the Rings*. In the event, all of the participants had already read *The Hobbit*, all but two had read *The Two Towers* and all but three had read *The Return of the King*. Perhaps even more surprising, more than half of the participants indicated having already read *The Silmarillion*. Half of the participants also indicated that they had read 'other books by Tolkien not listed here', which would include his non-legendarium works (works typically not associated with Middle-earth) or the *History of Middle-earth* series.

Not only had these participants read more Tolkien than I anticipated, but they read *The Lord of the Rings* with a regularity that astonished me. More than two thirds of participants (22) indicated that they had read all three volumes of the story more than once. Furthermore, when asked to indicate their enjoyment level of *The Lord of the Rings*, more than a third of the participants (12) claimed that they like the story 'more than any other book' and more than half of the participants (16) indicated that they enjoyed the text 'more than most books'. Additionally, the study participants engaged with adaptations of the work frequently. More than two thirds of participants (23) indicated that they had watched the Peter Jackson films more than once. Perhaps even more surprising is that almost two thirds of participants (19) also indicated that they had played a *Lord of the Rings* video game at least once, with three participants stating that they play often.

This basic overview of the sample which participated in the study is not meant to be a snapshot of the general population of young readers who engage with *The Lord of the Rings*. Instead it is a helpful context to understand how engaged this sample is with Tolkien's text and adaptations thereof. In order to understand what to make of this data, it is important to acknowledge the biases and limitations of the study.

1.1.4   *Acknowledging Bias*

Since the recruitment for the study occurred mostly through social media and by the efforts of the researcher alone, this introduces some bias in the populations that were likely to respond. For instance, since the researcher posted on social media in English (and the

interviews were to be conducted in English), then it was unlikely that individuals who live in countries that use less social media, or use social media platforms in languages other than English would elect to participate in the study.

Additionally, as with any study that recruits participants, there is inevitably self-selection bias in the population that responds. A researcher can assume that those who elect to participate in a study about a given text are already highly motivated to engage with others about that text. Therefore, while the numbers about reading history, reading frequency, and engagement with adaptations in this sample are important, they are not a viable snapshot of the population of young readers as a whole.

1.1.5   *Thesis Outline*

I devote the remainder of this chapter to presenting significant information from my literature review which has implications for the present study. These involve three fields of essential background knowledge as a foundation, followed by a discussion of a few particular articles with which the current study meaningfully converses. The three fields that I must briefly summarize in order to establish a foundation are: reception studies of *The Lord of the Rings* (section 1.2, p. 15), considerations of Tolkien and child readers (section 1.3, p. 26), and discussions of children's literature more generally (section 1.4, p. 51). Only by understanding some overarching conclusions drawn in each of these fields can we then move on to highlight some significant articles which provide food for thought as we continue our investigation into the following chapters.

In chapter two, I give a brief narrative overview of the development of the project, and then proceed to describe my methods used during the interviews and analysis and my rationale behind each of these decisions.

Chapter three focuses on three questions from the questionnaire that all participants completed as part of the study. These questions concerned the genre of *The Lord of the Rings*. In asking participants to choose from a list of genres and then having them justify their choice, the study is able to analyse some of the elements that young readers deem significant when trying to categorize the text. Furthermore, this analysis is able to draw the conclusion that young readers often use the same logic to arrive at different genre choices.

In chapter four, I have focused on the diamond ranking activity that participants completed. The discussions around this activity help to illuminate what these young readers gravitate toward when they read about characters, what they relate to, and also which actions and characters they see as heroic. These ideas have a lot of overlap with the way that Tolkien scholars have written about elements such as heroism and morality in *The Lord of the Rings*.

Chapter five is an analysis of the photo elicitation activity from the study. Having discussions with young readers about what images best depict their own ideas of settings throughout *The Fellowship of the Ring* helps to illuminate some of their ideas about nature as it relates to humanity and about the "realism" of fantasy literature.

Finally, in chapter six, I pull together strands from the preceding chapters that seem disparate in order to give some culminating conclusions about the project. I attempt to analyse how the response of young readers compares with scholarship on Tolkien, as well as on fantasy literature more generally.

1.2   *The Lord of the Rings* and Reception

1.2.1   Introduction

There are three fields of reader response criticism necessary to contextualize a study of young readers' responses to *The Lord of the Rings*. This section discusses the first such field, scholarship with a focus on the reception of Tolkien's work. Many of these works employ feminist and queer theory, cultural studies, or new historicism as a means of discussing their topic. These studies provide an important overview of the field of reader response as it currently stands in Tolkien scholarship. Ultimately, the picture that develops is that scholars almost universally assume that the audience of *The Lord of the Rings* is predominantly composed of mature readers.

1.2.2   Reflections on Reading Tolkien

I have decided to split the field of reader response into two categories for ease of discussion. The first I have called reader 'reflections' as a means of differentiating between this approach and reception studies proper, discussed later in the chapter. The approach of

these works is to have individuals reflect on their personal experience of reading a work or multiple works by J.R.R. Tolkien. Whether or not they are unsatisfying to the reader depends upon what she or he is seeking to find within the text. If one is hoping to find a systematic approach that can be used to extrapolate a general response to Tolkien or in some way lead to a broad critical theory of reader response, then certainly one will be left unsatisfied; however, if one is looking for the ability to identify with other readers or to find solidarity in knowing that there are like-minded individuals, then these texts can comfort and closure to the reader.

Meditations on Middle-earth edited by Karen Haber is a collection of reflections by readers of Tolkien who are also fantasy authors. It is certainly the case that if one were looking to find a codified approach to understanding the way that readers respond to Tolkien's text, then this book would not assist in that endeavour. The most general perspective that can be gleaned from a text like this is if one happens to observe a common thread throughout all the observations, it may be proposed that Tolkien was influential in a similar way to readers who were then inspired to go on to be fantasy authors (for instance, if most of them read him when they were young). Even so, this could not be presented as a conclusion, but rather a hypothesis that would need to be affirmed through a more rigorous data gathering process and analysis.

If, however, one is looking to understand Tolkien's influence on other writers, especially fantasy writers, then this book may provide some helpful insights, although those insights will necessarily be singular. For instance, George R. R. Martin provides this over-generalization about modern fantasy at the end of the introduction:

> Most contemporary fantasists happily admit their debt to the master (among that number I definitely include myself), but even those who disparage Tolkien most loudly cannot escape his influence. The road goes ever on and on, he said, and none of us will ever know what wondrous places lie ahead, beyond the next hill. But no matter how long and far we travel, we should never forget that the journey began at Bag End, and we are all still walking in Bilbo's footsteps. (2001: 4-5)

While this could certainly be characterized as rosy language targeted at an already sympathetic audience, the fact that the claim is made by such an influential modern fantasist speaks of how highly he regards Tolkien. The appeal of this book is unquestionable, as it includes authors like Ursula K. Le Guin, Orson Scott Card, George R.R. Martin, and many other influential authors in the fantasy genre. Having a single volume where one can access the reflections of all these significant authors is a helpful resource when trying to explain the influence of Tolkien's work on modern fantasy.

Catherine Kohman's collection *Lembas for the Soul: How The Lord of the Rings Enriches Everyday Life* (2005) is another work that falls within this category. This volume gathers together a plethora of personal responses from fans who were inspired by Tolkien's books or by Jackson's film adaptations. The work particularly focuses on the concept of a 'spiritual journey' that the readers experience (Kohman 2005: 8). Many of the reflections contained within this book do not lead to a systematic understanding but rather demonstrate how individuals personally relate to a text. Quotes which fall into in this vein are everywhere, here are just a few:

> I was born to be a hobbit. (Kohman 2005: 7)
>
> Peter Jackson must be a really amazing person to have been able not only to bring Tolkien's world to life so perfectly, but also to catalyze such things; in putting together the movie he was able to push people to go beyond themselves in a constant search for the true spirit of Tolkien. (Londez 2005: 34)
>
> These stories and movies are just so beautiful and pure they've *changed my life forever*. (Jobson 2005: 60, emphasis in original)
>
> Whenever I need solace, I retreated to Middle-earth and my future re-creation of it. I hope many others will find a safe haven in Middle-earth as I have. (McMahon 2005: 167)

Many of these personal reflections are not bolstered by research, nor do they offer many apparent avenues for further exploration. Instead, the book emphasizes the individuality and uniqueness of each reflection. There is no preference given to balanced reflections, hero worship is rampant, and the narrow focus of the text is to specifically share responses that have a spiritual understanding of the text. For those looking for a critical understanding of the reception of Tolkien's work, this is not the book for them. Rather, this is a text that could help fans find community around Tolkien's creation or Jackson's adaptation, and even feel less alone in their search to find meaning in the works. Most of the reflections in this collection are less than five pages, but there are many other reflective works that are an entire volume.

There have been several monograph-length studies which focus on an individual's response to *The Lord of the Rings*. Most of these works, though not all, have a predominantly religious focus . Anne Marie Gazzolo's *Moments of Grace and Spiritual Warfare in The Lord of the Rings* (2012) is an exemplar of this approach. Gazzolo's book largely constrains itself to textual summary and personal reflection with an attempt to illustrate how she found personal resonance with the text. In a sense, this book reads much like a devotional, as if it is saying 'here's what I found in the text, perhaps it could be useful for you too'. Although the book is labelled as literary criticism, one could easily see it in the spirituality section of a bookstore.

Once again, this book does not present a basis for establishing a critical theory of reception for Tolkien's work.

In an article co-authored by Michael Drout and Hilary Wynne, they indicate that writing of this variety is 'exceedingly unlikely to be persuasive to scholars, Christian or non-Christian, who would like to see arguments grounded on rigorous logic' (Drout and Wynne 2000: 109). The text's lack of systematic approach and its tendency to characterize Christianity in a way that primarily Christians in a non-academic setting would prioritize, make this work one that they would most likely discount.

John R. Holmes has responded to this critique by saying that 'a certain proportion of Christian interpretations of Tolkien will, and should, continue to do what Drout and Wynne inveigh against: preach to the choir' (2013: 140). He supports this injunction by noting that 'the choir in fact exists, has a long literary tradition, and to the choristers Christian theology *is* a received truth. There is a place for such parochial criticism, just as there is for Freudian readings of Shakespeare' (Holmes 2013: 140). While the intent behind the Drout and Wynne article is prescriptive, intending to indicate the best ways forward for Tolkien criticism, Holmes responds with a descriptive argument. Instead of saying where there should be growth, he observes where there is likely demand. By indicating the extent to which there is overlap between the readership of *The Lord of the Rings* and those whose self-identify as believers of the Christian faith, Holmes demonstrates how many of the readers who fall into this overlap enjoy criticism of the kind that Drout denigrates. Therefore, there is a place for written responses of this kind, even if it does not contribute to a larger critical reception theory.

One volume which includes personal reflections on the significance of Tolkien to the lives of writers, yet blurs the lines between non-academic reflection and important scholarly endeavour is *How We Became Middle-earth: A Collection of Essays on The Lord of the Rings* (2007) edited by Adam Lam and Nataliya Oryshchuk. While the majority of this collection is composed of rigorous scholarship focused on Tolkien's work and Peter Jackson's films, the editors have included a section in which the scholars reflect on their personal experiences with Middle-earth. The editors introduce the chapter focusing on these reflections by saying:

> Each contributor to this book was invited by the editors to write a short bibliographical journal regarding her/his personal and/or academic background, engagements with *The Lord of the Rings* (books and/or films) and with this project, and any opinions that they

were not able to include within the constraints of the 'formal' chapter text. (Lam and Oryshchuk 2007: 9)

While many readers would approach this text as two separate entities, with discrete visions and aims, the inclusion of both approaches within the same volume is significant and should be regarded as such. When researching a text, particularly when trying to examine the response to a text, it is essential that critics understand their own personal inclinations, bias, and history with the work. It is remarkable, then, that so often studies which focus on reception attempt to ignore these aspects of the researcher. By incorporating these bibliographical (and, to be honest, biographical) journals, the editors encourage researchers to confront their own bias. These entries also operate as a kind of confessional for the reader, so that they can understand how each researcher uses the primary text. In a sense, incorporating personal reflection creates a more honest scholarship.

The preceding volumes, with the exception of the last, all deal with what I call 'reflections' on Middle-earth. As indicated above, I have so categorized them to avoid confusion with the studies that follow. The next section will look at reception studies of *The Lord of the Rings*. This second group is characterized by a more mediated approach to understanding a response to the text, as well as a more critical eye when interpreting these responses. Where the former texts may offer the 'unfiltered' reaction of a reader, making allowances for personal filtering in the forms of cognition, reflection, and interpretation, the following texts tend to avoid the autobiographical and to apply systematic rigor. The former do not seek to establish a critical platform from which to interpret responses, the following do. Hopefully this distinction will help readers to identify the difference between these two sub-genres and also help them develop an appreciation for the intent behind each and the purpose that they serve for the Tolkien community.

1.2.3   *Reception Studies in Tolkien Criticism*

In the field of J.R.R. Tolkien scholarship, the number of critics who deal with the reception of *The Lord of the Rings* is remarkably small. The mainstay for most Tolkien scholars is textual analysis and/or theoretical exploration. While these two areas are rife with unexplored potential, the equally important focus on the ways in which readers have responded to Tolkien's work is also fertile ground for examination. To identify the best vantage point from which to examine the reception of Tolkien's work, and to contextualize the

gap in which the current study takes place, a brief review of previously published literature which addresses the reception of *The Lord of the Rings* is essential.

In feminist and queer theory, the field continues to expand with the publication of work like the 2015 collection *Perilous and Fair: Women in the Works and Life of J.R.R. Tolkien*. While the entirety of the book adds several voices to the much-needed conversation concerning the role and portrayal of women in Tolkien's works, the chapter which pertains the most to my current study is Una McCormack's 'Women's Reparative Readings of *The Lord of the Rings*'. In this chapter, McCormack discusses how many women and other 'absent readers' must 'conduct extra labour in order to find themselves in fantastic texts and gain the cultural capital to participate in the communities that surround them' (2015: 310). Her discussion focuses on fanfiction and how many such readers have used this avenue to write characters like themselves into the story so that they can find 'a specific point of insertion' when they 'do not find themselves present in many mainstream texts' (McCormack 2015: 322). This illuminates how readers from traditionally marginalized groups can try to either identify with the characters within the text or insert new story lines so that they can better experience fantasy literature.

A few articles have expanded a cultural studies approach to Tolkien's work by examining how an individual country historically responded to Tolkien's work. Olga Markova's 'When Philology Becomes Ideology: The Russian Perspective of J.R.R. Tolkien' is a prime example of this endeavour. The article details the series of interesting modifications that the first translator of Tolkien's text into Russian, Zinaide Bobyr, made to the text in order to 'make it resemble the literature that was acceptable in the USSR' (Markova 2004: 163). Though Bobyr finished her version of *The Lay of the Ring* in the 1960s, it was not published until 1990.

An important observation surrounding the interpretation of Tolkien's work in Russia is how, initially, some critics saw the story as an allegory for the downfall of eastern communism; however, Markova notes that 'modern Communists think differently about this. They view the anti-industrial ideas of Tolkien's work as a return to primordial Communism, and [discuss] the possibility of creating a type of "Red" Communist fantasy, whose father could be considered Tolkien' (2004: 165). This change in perspective demonstrates the crucial point that an individual's interpretation is often influenced by their cultural context.

Furthermore, she contends that the reading experience of *The Lord of the Rings* was novel for many Russians, and it led to a desire to live out parts of the text in reality. Markova explains that:

> the ideas contained in *The Lord of the Rings* became important and necessary in this unstable country that had long been held in intellectual slavery, because the values presented in Tolkien's books are not abstract categories and not utopian. He translated morality from the realm of words to the realm of action, which gave birth to the need to live Tolkien's world, and led to the creation of role-playing games. (2004: 167)

Markova demonstrates the unique impact that Tolkien's fantasy had on readers in Russia because they wanted to experience Middle-earth in the real world. With its heavy emphasis on the publication history of Tolkien's work, Markova brilliantly addresses how the translation of a text from one language to another is often tied to political, economic, and cultural concerns.

The investigation of the Russian response to Tolkien was also addressed by Mark T. Hooker in his monograph *Tolkien Through Russian Eyes* (2003). He details the intricate publication history of Tolkien's works in Russia but claims that Russia has yet to produce a 'canonical' Russian translation (2003: 45). He warns that 'the published Russian translations are not perfect. There are nine of them and each is interesting in its own way, but there is still room for more' (2003: 8). The kind of political motives which hampered the publication of an accurate translation of Tolkien's works, however, were not a unique occurrence in Russia.

Publishers in Italy also saw Tolkien's work as a gateway to political sentiment. Instead of seeing this as detrimental, and thus stalling the publication of the work, this attribute actually encouraged publication because it was seen as a method to bolster an ideology that was gaining momentum. Roger Griffin's essay 'Revolts Against the Modern World: The Blend of Literary and Historical Fantasy in the Italian New Right' (1985) follows this avenue of discourse. Griffin traces how the Italian neo-Right political movement of the 1980s adopted Tolkien as 'one of its official sources' (1985: 103). He claims that some of the most important indicators of this adoption arose from the way in which they were inspired to name several of their institutions after his works: 'the neo-fascist Movimento Sociale Italiane chose as the name for its youth training base in the Abruzzi "Camp Hobbit"', the book which celebrated the establishment of the New Right 'was called *Hobbit*' and their publishing group was called 'the Rock of Erec' (Griffin 1985: 103). Toward the end of the article, Griffin summarizes his argument by claiming:

> What is rather to be inferred from the ease with which Tolkien's work lends itself to being taken as runic prophecy by a 'sacred Right' is that a deep-rooted sense of

disaffection with the world in which one is condemned to live may be a fertile stimulus to the literary imagination, but can equally well nourish historical myth which…can be translated if believed intensely enough, into political ideology and thence into action. (1985: 116)

While his article mostly intends to describe the historical situation surrounding the publication of Tolkien's work in Italy, Griffin's work ultimately offers cautionary insight into how powerfully and readily fantasy literature can be co-opted for a cause that it was not originally intended to support. This caution is echoed in an article concerning a German response to Tolkien's work.

Niels Werber's article 'Geo- and Biopolitics of Middle-earth: A German Reading of Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*' also presents a nationally-situated interpretation of the text. Werber uses pre-existing frames which were established through national and political contexts in order to look at Tolkien's text. From this vantage point, Werber believes that:

> a reader of a German geopolitical author… or a scholar of the discourses of eugenics, breeding, social Darwinism, or racism, either of whom is reading Tolkien's bestsellers or viewing Jackson's blockbusters, would easily be convinced of the proposal that he is encountering a world of fiction that could be described best by pre-1945 discourses. (2005: 228-229)

He carefully demonstrates how pre-assumed narratives, particularly those prevalent in Germany before the end of World War II, can be overlaid onto Tolkien's work, and by extension Jackson's films, in a way that reinforces prejudice and factionalism. Werber demonstrates how a reader's prior experience and prejudice factor in to their interpretation of a text. Unlike previously discussed studies, Werber emphasizes the importance of when the book was read as well.

A few cultural studies scholars have paid special attention to the idea of *kairos*, and how the period in which a work is read influences reception. The most prominent studies in this regard among American-focused scholarship are Martin Barker's 'On Being a 1960s Tolkien Reader' (2006) and Joseph Ripp's 'Middle America Meets Middle-Earth: American Discussion and Readership of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, 1965-1969' (2005). Each of these articles explores the publication history of Tolkien's work in America and how this history influenced reception once his work was made widely available. They also do an excellent job of discussing how Tolkien's work was situated to take advantage of the cultural climate of the decade and how its adoption by anti-establishment groups has been stereotyped and variously applauded or derided since the 1960s.

Barker's article begins by recounting the author's personal response to *The Lord of the Rings* as a first-time reader and then as a member of early fandom. This context is significant when the author recounts his experiences of the films and how his negative feelings toward certain aspects of those adaptations helped him understand his own perspective more fully. He then explores the notion of 'interpretive communities' and describes how they function and influence individual readers in their approach to a text (Barker 2006: 85). The most relevant contribution from this article, however, is the section where Barker illustrates several aspects of Tolkien fandom which took place in America in the 1960s. This section is a good overview of several different attempts to describe the cultural milieu of this time and to incorporate Tolkien into it, especially by other literary scholars. He deftly observes that 'what is singularly missing from these accounts is any sense of how people read the books' (Barker 2006: 93). Barker then describes an attempt he made to reach out to fans from this period in an effort to have them recollect what those early reading experiences and fan communities were like, but to no avail. He is left, instead, to reconstruct what that reading must have been like based on gathered observations. What Barker concludes is bold and enlightening:

> Many 1960s readers, and especially those who would in different degrees and manners constitute the emergent fandom around the books in that period, read as part of a seeking for a *new mode of imagining*. This meant that the differences in interpretation mattered far less, if at all, than exploring the new possibilities for conceiving that the books offered. (2006: 94, emphasis in original)

Barker contends that this search for a new mode of imagination is the underlying impetus for much of early Tolkien fandom, and what allows Tolkien to have so much success during the 1960s without leading to widespread dissent or conflict about major ideas between interpretive communities. This, in turn, informs Barker's understanding of his own interpretation of Tolkien's work. He demonstrates this in his final section, where he gives the personal and political context for his first reading of Tolkien.

Like Barker's article, Ripp's article spends a lot of time discussing the American publication history of Tolkien's works. This should probably not come as a surprise, considering that the article was published in a journal entitled *Book History*; however, the piece goes much further than simply recounting the facts of publication and delves into observations surrounding how this intricate history influenced the cultural significance of Tolkien in America during the 1960s.

Ultimately, Ripp's article helps to establish a cultural understanding for the place that *The Lord of the Rings* occupied in the minds of many American readers who first discovered

the text in the 1960s. It contextualizes several of the debates surrounding whether it was meant to be an anti-establishment work, and demonstrates the significance of the controversial publication history in making it a mainstream work. Therefore, by diagnosing several of the elements that led to Tolkien's popularity, Ripp also exposes several of the factors that ensured his work would stay meaningful for readers.

An article which blends the fields of feminist theory and national trends is Margarita Carretero González's '*The Lord of the Rings*: A Myth for Modern English*men*' (1998). This article represents an abridged English translation of the conclusion of her thesis: *Fantasía, épica y utopia en* The Lord of the Rings: *Análisis temático y de la recepción* (1997). The summary presented here is based on a questionnaire that was distributed to societies dedicated to Tolkien and his work in the UK and Spain: the British Tolkien Society and Sociedad Tolkien Española. Her conclusions are that Tolkien's cultural influence is much more significant in Britain than in Spain, and that there are factors which motivate men to respond to Tolkien's text more than women.

Both of González's conclusions are not reached by speculation, but rather by the documentation of the respondents who take part in her survey. These conclusions are significant because they serve to validate several of the previous assumptions of scholarship. It has been assumed by some scholars, for a variety of reasons, that Tolkien's work resonates more with men than women. While one cannot support that claim with these findings, it is significant that the male readership in these two fan comunities is such that they felt more compelled to participate in a study about Tolkien readers than did their female counterparts. Notably, this could simply be a self-selection bias of those willing to be involved in a fan community, as that is where the questionnaires were distributed. Furthermore, these results do indicate that, with respect to the two fan communities surveyed, there was a higher level of engagement from the community in the UK. This corresponds to some of the assumptions made by scholars in previous years. Again, this does not support the idea that Tolkien has an exclusively or predominantly British appeal, but the difference in response levels to the survey between the two countries is significant.

The *J.R.R. Tolkien Encyclopedia* also offers several entries that summarize the reception of Tolkien's work in various countries. Fifteen countries have their own entry concerning reception. While many countries demonstrate a fairly typical publication history for *The Lord of the Rings*, there are a few countries where the publication history creates a

rather unique reception of Tolkien. This is especially true in the cases of Russia, Italy, and America. Perhaps it is the unique publication history in these countries that have led scholars to write entire articles about the publication history, as demonstrated by the Markova, Griffin, and Barker articles above. Other notable receptions which are not discussed above include those found in Denmark and the Netherlands.

Denmark is unique because Tolkien's works 'generally have been published as children's literature' (Skyggebjerg 2013: 121-122). This means that the popular reception in Denmark is attributed more to children than adults, so much so that *The Lord of the Rings* is 'one of the most popular books with Danish children and young adults (according to a survey of reading habits carried out in 2004)' (Skyggebjerg 2013: 121). While Tolkien's major work finds resonance with adults in most countries, the way that it has been marketed, advertised, and published in Denmark has ensured a following which is characterized as younger than that of the rest of the world. As I will discuss below, examples like the one from Denmark suggest that external factors are very influential in determining who ultimately reads the text.

The reception of Tolkien's work in the Netherlands is also quite unique for two key reasons: *The Hobbit* was published after *The Lord of the Rings* and reviewers had a hard time determining the genre of *The Lord of the Rings*. Initially, critics did not understand the genre of the book: 'it is clear that most reviewers were not sure in which category the book fit' (Rossenberg 2013: 456). In addition to this confusion, there was also confusion as to whether the intended audience was adults or children. This is evident in the first review of *The Lord of the Rings*, written by Guus Sötemann. In fact, he compares adults to children, claiming that 'in a majestic way, Tolkien has managed to write a divers [sic] story. He has succeeded in letting adults forget their prejudices and have them listen, like a child, to a story without any deliberate allegory or symbolism' (Rossenberg citing Sötemann 2013: 456). In many ways the reception of Tolkien in the Netherlands blurred several of the lines that publishers in other countries have been so adamant to establish. Compounding this example with the one from Denmark leads to certain conclusions.

The seemingly divergent reception of Tolkien's work in the Netherlands and Denmark demonstrates how choices made by publishers, translators, and bookstores all influence which readers gravitate toward a book. They illustrate that reviewers and critics also shape how the readership of a work is portrayed to the public. It is certainly logical that if Tolkien can find a strong readership with younger members of one culture, then he could potentially find a strong

readership with that same population in a different culture. Therefore, it is important to understand how all of the decisions which are external to a book often shape the reception of the book.

Many other works with a cultural studies emphasis focus on how the text and/or author interact with or are contextualized by larger societal concerns at the time of writing or publication. Dimitra Fimi's monograph *Tolkien, Race and Cultural History: From Fairies to Hobbits* (2010) traces the ways in which Tolkien's concepts changed as he developed his mythology over several years. Fimi particularly focuses on 'how Tolkien's own life story, as well as the historical times he lived in, shaped the transformation of his mythology' and showing 'Tolkien's fiction as integral to twentieth-century British literature rather than as an idiosyncratic "one-off"' (2010: 6). Fimi does a remarkable job of contextualizing Tolkien's work within the space of popular literature, as well as his personal, local, and the larger British culture.

1.3   *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien, and Children's Literature

1.3.1   Introduction

The second field of scholarship that we need to examine in order to contextualize the present study is scholarship which has addressed Tolkien's works as children's literature. This section will address this field in several subsections in order to present a full view of each area.

 To claim that no modern J.R.R. Tolkien scholarship focuses primarily on the young readership of *The Lord of the Rings* is not to say that this population has been wholly unacknowledged. One of the most notable Tolkien scholars, Verlyn Flieger, consistently recognises the young readers of Tolkien's most popular work. In her monograph *Splintered Light* (2002), Flieger acknowledges the existence of this segment of Tolkien's readership:

> *The Lord of the Rings* is not a children's book in the sense that *The Hobbit* is a children's book (though even *The Hobbit* deals with matters far beyond the scope of most children's books, such as war, the politics of national alliances, and the moral and psychological effects of greed). It is not primarily directed at children, nor is it designed primarily to interest them. But it is certainly literature for children in the sense that the Bible is literature for children, or Norse mythology, or Greek mythology, or the Silmarillion – if by that is meant simply-told stories of gods and heroes, of the

human community struggling to order existence amid the shifting ebbs and surges of forces beyond its control and understanding. (2002: 147-148)

This illuminates how, regardless of the intended audience of the work, *The Lord of the Rings* could find resonance with younger readers. The term 'crossreading' has been assigned to the act of an unintended audience reading a text, particularly with regard to age. We shall return to this concept later in this chapter (p. 61), although this term is often used to describe the inverse action, in which adults read fiction originally intended for children.

Flieger revisits this recognition of younger readers in her newest collection of essays *There Would Always Be a Fairy Tale: More Essays on Tolkien* (2017). Here she reaffirms that the authorial intent of the work was to write for adults, but goes on to indicate how young readers often find meaning in texts that were not written for them:

> Let us establish at the start that *The Lord of the Rings* is not a book aimed at or intended primarily for children. Its position as the sequel and continuance of *The Hobbit* has lead readers to assume the same audience for both, but although this was initially the case, the 'new Hobbit' very quickly outgrew its predecessor 'in the matter of atmosphere, tone, or audience addressed' (*Letters*: 138) to become what Tolkien also describes to his publisher as 'an immensely long, complex, rather bitter, and very terrifying romance, quite unfit for children' (*Letters*: 136). He was wrong only in the last four words, unless by 'children' he meant people under the age of eight or nine. *The Lord of the Rings* can be and has been read by many children of that age and older, just as fairy stories can be enjoyed by readers of any age. But as with any good story, the more mature the readers, the more they are likely to get out of the story. (Flieger 2017: 41)

Apart from disparaging views of Tolkien's work and critics who callously believe that all fantasy is of the same calibre, Flieger has maintained perhaps the most consistent recognition of young readers of *The Lord of the Rings*. Unfortunately, these passages represent her lengthiest published ruminations on this part of the audience. While it seems that several influential Tolkien scholars recognize that there is a young population within Tolkien readership, they do not often directly address this audience in their scholarship.

Furthermore, many critics other than Tolkien scholars have indicated their appreciation for this subsection of Tolkien's audience. Ursula K Le Guin, in fact, claims that she is jealous of readers who can approach *The Lord of the Rings* when they are still impressionable:

> I envy those who…read Tolkien as children – my own children among them. I certainly have had no scruples about exposing them to it at a tender age, when their resistance is minimal. To have known, at age ten or thirteen, of the existence of Ents, and of Lothlórien – what luck!' (Le Guin 1979: 172)

Not only does Le Guin support the notion of young readers, she enforces it with her own children. She encouraged her children to read it when they were younger and to read it multiple times. In her view, the unique structure of his work commends Tolkien to a younger reader: 'The peculiar rhythm of the book, its continual alternation of distress and relief, threat and reassurance, tension and relaxation: this rocking-horse gait (which is precisely what makes the huge book readable to a child of nine or ten) may well not suit a jet-age adult' (Le Guin 1979: 173). She sees something in the mode of composition that indicates how *The Lord of the Rings* is well-suited to a younger readership. This kind of observation, however, is not often made in critical studies of Tolkien's work.

Until now, no study of reception has placed its primary focus on the young readership of *The Lord of the Rings* to understand how this group responds to the text or how this audience differs from implied adult readers. Since relatively little scholarship has addressed the young readership of *The Lord of the Rings*, any literature review for such a project should include three different approaches to present a complete understanding of the applicable literature.

Initially, scholarship addressing the content of *The Lord of the Rings* as children's literature should be analysed for what it contributes to a scholarly understanding of the work and how it appeals to children. Since there is very little of this work, however, a broader perspective is necessary. Therefore, it is important to analyse texts which address young readers of Tolkien's other works for any insights they may provide when analysing the young readers of *The Lord of the Rings*. In the next section, a survey of scholarship on child readers of fantasy and child readers in general is presented in order to provide context for the current research and to develop a clearer preliminary theoretical understanding of the young audience in question.

Many Tolkien scholars are hesitant to address *The Lord of the Rings* directly when discussing children's literature because of Tolkien's own remarks disparaging fairy-stories written to such an audience. In his essay 'On Fairy-Stories', first delivered in 1938, just after the release of *The Hobbit* and several years before *The Lord of the Rings* appeared in print, Tolkien laments that fantastical tales have been confined to a young audience.

Scholars tend to treat 'On Fairy-Stories' as the key to understanding Tolkien's writing. In fact, Glenn Goodknight, the founder of the Mythopoeic Society, states 'I have always maintained that one cannot fully understand *The Lord of the Rings*, or any of his Middle-earth

writings, without grasping what he has to say in this pivotal essay. Here we can taste the flavour of his thinking at the prime of his life, written before most of *The Lord of the Rings* had been written out' (1993: 4). Verlyn Flieger and Douglas Anderson have also supported the notion that 'On Fairy-Stories' is Tolkien's manifesto.[4] This widely held perspective among Tolkien scholars leads some of them to apply the sentiments presented in this lecture as the only correct means of discussing or diagnosing elements within Tolkien's writing. Such scholars misconstrue the intent of this lecture as somehow an effort by Tolkien to solely illuminate the meaning in his own writing.

There are problems with the application of this sentiment to Tolkien's literature. First, it ignores a wealth of scholarship and criticism that was most notably put forward by Roland Barthes which disconnects the intent of the author from the effect of the text itself, especially his essay *La mort de l'auteur* (1967). This approach is frequently applied by scholars of children's literature because, as Sandra L. Beckett notes, 'in the majority of cases, there is no authorial intention when adult fiction crosses over to young readers' (2009: 28). The realization that authorial intent is not connected to who ultimately develops a reading preference for a text enables scholars to undertake more pointed reception studies. In such studies, the interpretation of the reader is independent from the will or intent of the author. It is also a recognition that what the author desires is not always achieved, and that certain passages may have a greater or lesser effect than their author intended. An additional complication to applying 'On Fairy-Stories' as a guide to understanding Tolkien's literature is that it opens up scholars to flawed interpretations of his books if they do not read the essay carefully. This dismissal of young readers is a prime example of the misapplication of part of this lecture.

In 'On Fairy-Stories', Tolkien contends that 'if fairy-story as a kind is worth reading at all it is worthy to be written for and read by adults' (*OFS*: 45). This remark has long been used by Tolkien scholars to indicate that Tolkien did not intend for children to read *The Lord of the Rings*. If one reads his critique closely, however, Tolkien never suggests that children should not read fairy-stories, he simply insists that the writers of fairy-stories should target adults. In fact, in a lengthy letter to W.H. Auden, dating from 7 June 1955, Tolkien clarifies his meaning, stating that 'the connexion in the modern mind between children and 'fairy stories' is false and accidental, and spoils the stories in themselves and for children' (*Letters*:

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[4] Flieger and Anderson call the essay 'Tolkien's defining study of and the centre-point in his thinking about the genre' in their introduction to the essay (*OFS*: 9)

216). Tolkien's statement here does not make sense if he believed that children should not read fairy stories. Instead, this statement presents Tolkien's belief that, if fairy stories were written 'correctly', i.e. with adults as their target audience, then the reading experience of children would be improved. Even if one were to argue that Tolkien wrote *The Lord of the Rings* for adults, the disassociation of his desires from the ultimate reality of the readership, combined with this clarification of his own understanding of how children can enjoy adult fantasy, opens the door for a reception theory of Tolkien which focuses on young readers.

Of the articles which consider a young readership of J.R.R. Tolkien's work, only a few spend any time addressing *The Lord of the Rings*. In her chapter 'J.R.R. Tolkien and the Child Reader: Images of Inheritance and Resistance in *The Lord of the Rings* and J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter*' (2007), Lori M. Campbell agrees with my assessment of the misuse of 'On Fairy-Stories'. She claims that Tolkien 'does not mean to suggest, of course, that children *should not* read and *cannot* enjoy the fairy-story, only that the form should not be solely identified as childhood reading' (Campbell 2007: 291, emphasis in original). This chapter provides an excellent discussion of Tolkien's views of Children's Literature and the need to look at *The Lord of the Rings* 'as a work with accessibility, or to use his term, "applicability" to the younger audience' (Campbell 2007: 292). The article concerns itself primarily with textual analysis and engagement with scholarly conversations.

Importantly, Campbell demonstrates how 'concepts of children's literature and age-based categories for reading collapse with relative ease' and that 'to fully comprehend the relationship between *LotR* and a younger audience lies as it does with any work, in the content' (Campbell 2007: 296). Many of her contentions push back against the popular narratives surrounding the monolithic reception of children, the easy distinction between children's literature and adult literature, and the importance of authorial intent. Unfortunately, she upholds the problematic tenet that the text determines response. While it is certainly true that the text helps to determine the general reception of a work, it is not the ultimate arbiter of a reader's response. The final say on reception always lands with the reader.

A second example of this small field which considers *The Lord of the Rings* through the lens of children's literature is Jaume Albero Poveda's 'Narrative Models in Tolkien's Stories of Middle-earth' (2003). While this article does not focus on the readership directly, it argues that Tolkien uses many characteristic elements of children's literature, specifically

those that he uses throughout *The Hobbit*, in the beginning of *The Lord of the Rings*. Poveda contends that:

> Bilbo's story fits into the rhetorical structure of children's fiction, which combines the following features: an omniscient narrator that comments on events and addresses the reader directly, characters preadolescent children can easily identify with, an emphasis on the relationship between time and narrative development within the framework of a condensed narrative time, and a defined geography in which safe and dangerous spaces are separate. (Poveda 2003: 9)

These four features are the main identifiers used throughout the article to discuss how *The Hobbit* is distinct from *The Lord of the Rings* in its style, and therefore in the audience it addresses. A prime example of his application of these features is how Poveda develops an argument for the second (i.e. identifiable characters) when he claims that 'Bilbo fits into the rhetoric of children's fantasy more than Frodo does because the former is a character that does not evolve at all throughout the story, and the events in which he takes part seemed not to affect him' (2003: 9-10). However accurate Poveda's observations, the arguments he tries to support using them may not be correct.

While Bilbo returns home after the journey and settles back into his daily routine, there is indication that he has undergone an internal change. He is not quite the same hobbit that left for an adventure begrudgingly. As Anne C. Petty notes in *Tolkien in the Land of Heroes*, 'Bilbo's safe return from adventure has darker overtones – friends have died and he doesn't settle back into his old life unchanged' (2003: 303). Additionally, Poveda's characterization of the songs in *The Hobbit* is incorrect. While they are typically suitable in content and tone for children, and indicate the personality of the singers, they are much more than the simple devices he suggests. They are often used to show intent, as in 'Far over the misty mountains cold' or 'Clap! Snap! the black crack!', to establish conflict, as in 'Fifteen birds in five firtrees' and 'Old fat spider spinning in a tree!', or for other significant purposes. The tone of the songs is certainly more unsophisticated, but their function is very similar to those in *The Lord of the Rings*.

Aside from this list of features, Poveda's main contention for the shift in the implied audience between *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* is the change in tone. He observes that:

> The initial tone of *The Lord of the Rings* is the same as in *The Hobbit*…however, as the writing of the work progressed, Tolkien had some troubles in making the most of the literary world of the hobbits. Little by little, he moved away from a funny tone of the

story of Bilbo [*sic*]. His style took on a more serious and solemn tone. (Poveda 2003: 15)

He correctly diagnoses the change in the tone of Tolkien's writing as he works through successive drafts of *The Lord of the Rings*. While this change may have discouraged some young readers from pursuing the text after its publication, there are still several elements identified as appealing to children in *The Hobbit* that persist even in the published version of *The Lord of the Rings*. Interestingly, much of Poveda's article serves to conflate the nature of the two works rather than distinguish them. Perhaps the most notable are the elements that Poveda points out when he observes:

> The hobbits and the dwarves, because of their height, their cheerful personalities and their habits[,] are creatures with which a young reader can easily identify. The hobbit houses, holes hidden in the mountainside, speak very well to the children's inclination to hide in small places. Just like children, hobbits are fond of riddles, puns and lexical creativity that sometimes transgress grammatical norms. They are also curious to hear old tales and stories. Their habits of eating six times a day, of going barefoot, etc. bring them closer to childlike behaviour. (2003: 10)

While this observation is made about the characters of *The Hobbit*, it holds true *The Lord of the Rings* as well, and may prove a useful insight when trying to determine why young readers are interested in reading the trilogy. In fact, many of the traits scholars observe about Bilbo are illuminating for the hobbits in *The Lord of the Rings*.

One might not expect to find anything about *The Lord of the Rings* in a book entitled *Talking of Dragons: The Children's Books of J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis*, but William Chad Newsom does address the text in passing. In the chapter dedicated to J.R.R. Tolkien's children's fiction, he mentions how some adults enjoy revisiting some of the texts that Tolkien intended for children and how some children enjoy reading *The Lord of the Rings*. He argues that some may claim that Tolkien's writing for children is '"over the heads" of most children…because of the vocabulary and perhaps even the themes' (Newsom 2005: 64). He goes on, however, to suggest that '*The Lord of the Rings*, certainly much more of an adult book than its predecessor, and, by the author's own admission, not written for children in particular at all, seems, nevertheless, to hold an appeal for children' (Newsom 2005: 64). Newsom appends the fact that he himself read *The Lord of the Rings* when he was young in an effort to help support his claims. While Newsom does not go into detail about why children are drawn to the work, one could contend that he finds the religious elements significant, and the themes of fellowship and camaraderie to be almost as essential as the plot based on the focus and emphases in his monograph.

In an article entitled 'The Childlike Hobbit' (1983), Tisa Ho explores the various ways in which the hobbits in *The Lord of the Rings* can be seen as children. Her article was published in a 1983 volume of *Mythlore* and subsequently has received very little critical attention. Ho begins her article by indicating that she is not concerned with whether *The Lord of the Rings* was intended for an adult or child audience, but rather that she would like to explore 'whether it is related to children in any other way' because this idea has been 'largely neglected' (1983: 1). Her contention is that 'the association of the book with children, particularly in the minds of unsympathetic critics, is largely due to childlike qualities of the principal protagonists – the hobbits' (Ho 1983: 1) and she sets out to demonstrate why this could be the case over the course of her article.

Initially, Ho seeks definitions for what exactly constitutes a hobbit and a child. Ironically, she finds the definition for the former, a mythical creation, to be much easier to settle upon than the definition of the latter. She then departs into an overview of the various interpretations and iterations of children throughout literary history, with particular reference to the classical view, the biblical view, and the Victorian view. Ultimately, Ho convincingly situates the characterization of the hobbits as fitting in with the various definitions of children that she finds in literary representations of childhood. This analysis suggests that it would be possible for children to see themselves in the hobbits, and identify with their desires, concerns, and portrayal.

Perhaps the most poignant example of this interpretation of the hobbits as children is the way that Ho describes how hobbits are repeatedly marginalized throughout the text. She observes: 'In the story of *The Lord of the Rings*, the hobbits are often not taken seriously by the Big Folk that they encounter. They are overlooked or patronized except by the few who either guess at their worth or are persuaded of it by Gandalf' (Ho 1983: 5). While this serves to be beneficial in the plot of the story, 'the simple, lowly little hobbit is overlooked by the enemy, whose attention is drawn to the lordly affairs of men', one cannot dismiss the sentiment as merely a means to forward the plot (Ho 1983: 5). Many readers, including children, have experienced this kind of marginalization in their personal lives. What serves as a mere plot point for some Tolkien readers results in an essential element of relatability for many others.

Ho then goes on to extrapolate how this portrayal of the hobbits as children shapes the way that their relationship to other characters are written in the text. For example, she sees

'Treebeard as grandfather, Gandalf (and Theoden) as father, Aragorn (and Eomer) as elder brother, and Eowyn as sister' (Ho 1983: 8). This understanding of the relationships that the hobbits form suggests that children can see much more than their own identity mirrored in the hobbits. They also see the hobbits forming the kinds of relationships with other characters that they form with the most important people in their lives, such as siblings, parents, or guardians.

Unfortunately, each of the scholars mentioned above rely primarily on authorial intent and textual analysis to support their argument. This means that there is little contribution to understanding the approach and response of young readers to *The Lord of the Rings*. Instead, what arises are suggestions about what themes or characteristics young readers might enjoy from the text. While these suppositions are not supported by direct observation of readers and their responses, they do provide an indication of an area that requires exploration.

1.3.2   *Tolkien and the Critics: A Childish Affair*

While many academic scholars and critics have tended to ignore the attributes pointed out by Ho, as well as significant indications that there are other elements of the story to which children can relate, popular critics have not. In the commentary that he wrote for release concurrently with a television adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings*, Isaac Asimov noted the childlike characteristics of the hobbits. He indicates that 'there are numerous forces trying to fight for the Good and to defeat Sauron, but of them all the Hobbits are the smallest and weakest. They are about the size of children and are as unsophisticated and simple as children' (Asimov 2001: 48). While Asimov's review is by no means scholarly, and often over-analyses elements within the story, it is significant to note how he views the hobbits. He is not alone in this assertion. Many popular critics have noted the similarity of hobbits to children. Perhaps by looking at their criticism we can attempt to determine why some readers consistently see the hobbits as children.

Critics have often pointed to the lack of one element or another in order to validate their perspective that *The Lord of the Rings* is intended for a younger audience. While not wholly of this camp, in that he sees such an absence as a contributing factor rather than as a defining one, Robert M. Adams provides a fitting example of this tendency in his article 'The Hobbit Habit' (1981). He laments how 'Tolkien's avoidance of sex is striking; given the mode of romance, it's a perfectly legitimate avoidance, but can't fail to heighten the sense of infantilism in the fantasy' (Adams 1981: 174). In order to make such a claim, critics must have

an innate understanding of the distinction between children's literature and adult literature. They seem to feel that there is a list of discrete elements that demonstrate how a text falls into one category or another. As we will see later in this chapter, no such list exists.

This same impulse is followed by Maurice Richardson in his review of *The Two Towers* for *New Statesman* (1954). Unfortunately, Richardson never read the first volume before writing a review for the second, so even he admits that some of his observations may not be fully developed. This does not prevent him, however, from seeing the story as 'an allegorical adventure story for very leisured boys' (Richardson 1954). Richardson summarizes his impression as follows:

> My first impression is that it is all far too long and blown up… that, although a great deal of imagination has been at work, it is imagination of low potential…And though their dialogue is carefully varied, from colloquial-historical for man and wizards to prep school slang for hobbits and orcs, they all speak with the same flat, castrated voice. (Richardson 1954)

While one can only surmise what Richardson meant by 'the same flat, castrated voice', whether a lack of sexuality in the text or a lack of depth, it seems to contradict his own claim that there is carefully varied dialogue throughout the text. It is true that certain topics are not addressed, but it is left unclear how this influences the 'voice' of the characters. Furthermore, Richardson seems to think that the length of the work, as well as the imaginative capacity of its writer, are also standards by which literature should be measured for its appropriateness for different audiences. Again, there is no list that dictates that the specific elements with which Richardson is preoccupied are the touchstones that designate the implied audience of a work.

The chapter 'Middle-earth and the Adolescent' by Janet Menzies (1983) focuses on the actual response of a reader as they contemplate their reactions to the text. Unfortunately, these observations are not made shortly after reading the text for the first time. This means that the chapter does not portray an unfiltered response to the text. Instead, the chapter is written by a critic who is revisiting the text after several years. This being the case, Menzies is able to reflect on the difference between her earlier reading and her adult reading. While this may seem beneficial, Menzies privileges her new interpretation over her prior interpretation. Furthermore, her whole article is written by an adult's memories of childhood, then cast as a more educated individual parsing these experiences with adult perception. It is a very problematic approach and is exactly the kind of thing I have tried to avoid in my reconstruction of my own first reading of *The Lord of the Rings* in blog posts.

Ultimately, Menzies decides that *The Lord of the Rings* appeals to younger readers, but may be insufficient for older readers: 'As a child *The Lord of the Rings* meant everything to me; coming back to it as an adult I find it superficially attractive but ultimately unsatisfying. It is a book of and for adolescence' (Menzies 1983: 71). She contends that the lack of internal development of the characters leaves a mature reader feeling like the book lacks a moral centre. Because of this lack, she believes that the book is perhaps most appreciated by less mature readers. As with other approaches which examine young readers in relation to Tolkien, this analysis contains a high level of prejudice. One could contend that Menzies is not so observant of her own high level of reading sophistication but is rather unobservant of her own personal bias when it comes to reading preferences. Simply because an author does not spend time detailing internal developments does not mean that the work does not warrant a mature reading.

As C.S. Lewis indicates in his essay 'On Science Fiction', the personal preferences and biases of a reviewer should be taken into consideration and weighed appropriately before giving critique. In greater detail, he says:

> a given reader may be (some readers seem to be) interested in nothing else in the world except detailed studies of complex human personalities. If so, he has a good reason for not reading those kinds of work which neither demand nor admit it. He has no reason for condemning them, and indeed no qualification for speaking of them at all. We must not allow the novel of manners to give laws to all literature: let it rule its own domain. (Lewis 1996a: 65)

Scholars have bias which influences their scholarship. Those who prefer a certain kind of text should not condemn a book simply for not falling into their preferred category. While it is true that Tolkien does not dwell on the internal workings of Frodo as an evolving hero, this does not necessarily mean that the text is simplistic or in any way deficient. Unfortunately, the reflections in Menzies's article leave the reader to assume that she means 'adolescent' in a pejorative sense. Such criticism does harm to the meaningful conversation of how to best understand children's literature and whether it is qualitatively different from adult literature.

A more even-handed approach to rereading one of Tolkien's texts is demonstrated in Jared Curtis's 'On Re-Reading *The Hobbit* Fifteen Years Later' (1984). Although both of his readings took place while he was an adult, Curtis is very careful to hold the tension of both readings at the same time:

> Which is my reading? In the sense that I can still recover the first one, they are both mine, both active and a part of my comprehension of the book, or of my experiences of

> reading the book. Each reading takes in about half the incidents in the story, sharing a few but not all, and thus, in a sense, dividing the book between them. But more important are the ways I emphasize, select, add, and omit on each occasion of constructing meaning from the book. (Curtis 1984: 119)

The realization that a later reading of the text is not the same as a better reading of the text is essential when attempting to fully enter into reflection on prior readings. This article is also illuminating because it demonstrates how different readers build meaning by intentionally selecting or unintentionally holding onto different portions of the same text. Understanding that the same person is a different reader at different points in their own life opens the door to the possibility of neutral criticism of one's own interpretation of a text by oneself.

Following on from Menzies's article, negative criticism seems to be the one bastion of criticism where *The Lord of the Rings* is frequently associated with children. Without a doubt, the negative review which is revisited more than any other is that of Edmund Wilson (1978). This study is wholly unconcerned with refuting Wilson's arguments, and will focus on his criticism only to understand why he employs childhood descriptors when he talks about Tolkien's text. This impulse seems to derive from two separate causes: because he sees the text as simplistic, and his desire to demean its reviewers. While the first of these motivations is certainly understandable, though in the current critical climate it would be deemed mistaken, the second is, quite frankly, poor criticism. In his penultimate paragraph, Wilson claims that the only reason why reviewers give Tolkien's work positive reviews is because:

> Certain people – especially, perhaps, in Britain, have a lifelong appetite for juvenile trash. They would not accept adult trash, but, confronted with the pre-teen-age article, they revert to the mental phase which delighted in *Elsie Dinsmore* and *Little Lord Fauntleroy*…you can see it in the tone they fall into when they talk about Tolkien in print: they bubble, they squeal, they coo; they go on about Mallory and Spencer – both of whom have a charm and a distinction that Tolkien has never touched. (1978: 42)

It seems, therefore, that for large portions of his text, Wilson is simply using images and descriptions of children in an effort to discredit and mock other reviewers. It is clear that he sees the accoutrement of childhood as demeaning when found in adults, and that the appearance of things associated with youth should be scorned when they appear in maturity. I will not attempt to rebut Wilson's observations; however, I think that an excerpt from C.S. Lewis's 'On Three Ways of Writing for Children' (1996), written more than two decades prior to Wilson's critique, stands as an admirable contention in his own defence. Lewis claims that 'critics who treat *adult* as a term of approval, instead of as a merely descriptive term, cannot

be adult themselves… When I became a man I put away childish things, including the fear of childishness and the desire to be very grown up' (1996b: 25).

Setting aside these examples, however, there is a secondary reason why Wilson discusses *The Lord of the Rings* as a childish text. In his third paragraph, he states quite clearly that he read the story aloud to his seven-year-old:

> This reviewer has just read the whole thing aloud to his seven-year-old daughter, who has been through *The Hobbit*… and whose interest has been held by its more prolix successors. One is puzzled to know why the author should have supposed he was writing for adults. There are, to be sure, some details that are a little unpleasant for a children's book, but except when he is being pedantic and also boring the adult reader, there is little in *The Lord of the Rings* over the head of a seven-year-old child. It is essentially a children's book – a children's book which is somehow got out of hand, instead of directing it at the 'juvenile' market, the author has indulged himself in developing the fantasy for its own sake. (Wilson 1978: 38)

Critics who have read this review before may have a hard time approaching this passage without vehemence; however, there is an important element that it is far too easy to overlook in this paragraph if you view it with unforgiving eyes. Wilson clearly believes that his seven-year-old daughter was able to follow along with the story of the text. At the same time, he admits that there are certain elements, though he gives them a negative connotation, that are 'over the head' of his daughter. Even so, Wilson admits that her 'interest has been held' for the entire three volume story. It seems that in an attempt to discredit Tolkien as a serious author, he ends up validating the fact that, even though Tolkien was not writing intentionally for children, there is something in the story that makes it appealing to them.[5]

There are several other critics who have lambasted Tolkien's work as juvenile or childish. One such reviewer is Judith Shulevitz who concludes her article 'Hobbits in Hollywood' (2001) by claiming that readers would need to be children in order to appreciate *The Lord of the Rings*: '*The Lord of the Rings* was written for adults, but unless you're a child it's difficult to accept its mounting pretentiousness without protest, as the price of entry into the longed-for past. One of the best things about growing up is realizing that grandeur doesn't have to be grandiose, nor does historical dialogue have to bristle with fusty archaisms' (Shulevitz 2001: 60). This use of the term child seems to share characteristics with the first category mentioned in Wilson's article. It is meant to be a slight to the quality of Tolkien's writing.

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[5] It is worth mentioning that reading difficult texts aloud to children automatically reduces the level of difficulty, so the fact that this is how Wilson's daughter 'received' this text is also something to be considered (Heisley and Kukan 2010).

One critic who has a more balanced approach to Tolkien's work and yet indicates that there is something qualitatively different about the hobbits when compared to the rest of *The Lord of the Rings* is Janet Smith, who appreciates the need for the hobbits as a literary technique:

> the device of the hobbits – small people, peaceful, merry, unhurried look, who can't live long on flights – is excellent. They stand for stability and common sense, as necessary to life as enterprise and discovery. The happy humdrum life of the hobbits in their Shire is a necessary counterpart to the magical and heroic happenings in the kingdom of Rohan and Gondor. But to my mind Tolkien's imagination fed on thinner stuff when he created the world beyond its borders.

> Behind that world is epic and saga, legend and fairy tales; behind the Shire is a sort of Chestertonian myth of Merrie England, a much thinner affair. With their tobacco and ale, their platters and leather jerkins, their wholesome tastes and deep, fruity laughs, their pipe-smoking male coziness, and jolly-good-fellowship, hobbits can be as phony as a Christmas card with stagecoaches and lighted inns. (Smith 2001: 66).

Even though a majority of her review lauds Tolkien's work and appreciates its cultural influence, she sees a marked difference when it comes to the hobbits. Not only does she detect a difference in inspiration, in that the hobbits do not seem to be inspired by the mythic sources that influence the other parts of the text, but she notices a total difference when it comes to describing and characterizing the hobbits. Therefore, perhaps it is not simply a matter of characterization, but also a matter of context for the hobbits that makes them more relatable to a young audience.

A final critical review to add to this list which employs a vocabulary of childhood towards Tolkien and/or his work is Edwin Muir's 'A Boy's World' (1955). Though he begins and ends the review with affirmation of the book's unique and remarkable qualities, he spends about half of his text commenting on the boyish nature of the characters within the story. He claims that:

> For the astonishing thing is that all the characters, except the few old men who are apt to be wizards, are boys masquerading as adult heroes. The hobbits, or halflings, are ordinary boys, the fully human heroes have reached the fifth form, but hardly one of them knows anything about women, except by hearsay. Even the elves and the dwarfs and the ents are boys, irretrievably, and will never come to puberty. The orcs who are on the opposite side, are very bad boys indeed, and the Gollum, the most real character in the story, is a most detestable boy. The good boys, having fought a deadly battle, emerge at the end of it well, triumphant and happy, as boys would naturally expect to do.

> Mrs. Naomi Mitchison is quoted on the dust cover as saying that one takes the story seriously: 'as seriously as Malory'. This is just what one does not do. The heroes of the Round Table did not end happily. They were as brave as the heroes of the Ring, but they knew temptation, were sometimes unfaithful to their vows or torn between the opposing claims of love and duty. Boys moving in a boys' world, with the boys' idea of heroism, romance, women, good and evil are not fully human, and cannot become Lancelots and Tristrams. (Muir 1955: 11)

The way that Muir employs the language of childhood in his review is perhaps unique among the perspectives that we have investigated in this section. It is not targeted towards the writer, audience, or critics of the text. Instead his criticism is of the characters themselves. This observation begins with the hobbits, but then is expanded to the rest of the characters of the Fellowship, and in fact all of the races portrayed throughout the story. Over the course of his criticism, however, it becomes evident that there is something more than characterization which is influencing his perspective. Muir seems to believe that certain narrative elements (such as characters experiencing temptation or failing to live up to their values) are essential in order for *The Lord of the Rings* to be a truly 'adult' book, and therefore portray truly 'adult' characters.

An examination of the critics who have equated *The Lord of the Rings* with children's literature or childishness leads to two culminating observations. First, that most of these critics use the vocabulary associated with adolescence as a value judgment, and more specifically as a way to demean the text. This overarching tendency often obscures the rather more important observation: several of these critics have either observed that children enjoy the text or see parts of the text as similar to literature that they believe was written specifically for children. Perhaps the next couple of sections, which look at how readers are intended to identify with hobbits and how the hobbits can also be perceived as children specifically, will help illuminate some of the aspects to which these naysayers are responding.

1.3.3   Readers as Hobbits

Initially, it is significant to note that, for one scholar at least, it is the inclusion of the hobbits in *The Lord of the Rings* that makes the text uniquely different from other works. As Jared Lobdell claims in his monograph *The World of the Rings: Language, Religion, and Adventure in Tolkien* (2004): 'the prevalence of the Hobbits is what chiefly distinguishes *The Lord of the Rings* from other tales of what used to be called derring-do, and also what (I

believe) has determined its popularity' (2004: 55). This indicates the level of importance that scholars invest in the characters of the hobbits.

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. At the opening of the story, Frodo, like Bilbo before him, 'is reluctant to leave the homely, familiar comforts of his hobbit hole and is scarcely confident of his ability to carry out the dangerous quest which has been laid on him' (Schaafsma 1986: 64). He then fulfils a quest which brings both experience and wisdom, a kind of bildungsroman. Ultimately, both hobbits find maturity over the course of their journey.

William H. Green's monograph takes up this perspective, especially in relation to Tolkien's *The Hobbit*. In *The Hobbit: A Journey into Maturity* (1995), he makes this observation about the two texts:

> Readers accept Bilbo's home as a point of departure because its names are familiar, so they will later suspended disbelief easily when, with Bilbo, they leave this comfortable center and find monsters and marvels 'out there'. This effect is important to Tolkien's art. Even in *The Lord of the Rings*, names of hobbits and their home shire are anglicized to create a familiar point of departure, and lengthy initial chapters linger in hobbit lands. Plain English is used to establish acceptance and belief. (Green 1995: 109)

This passage encapsulates the view that is adopted by the majority of Tolkien scholars regarding which characters the reader is supposed to find most relatable in the text. Green convincingly demonstrates how the reader is contextualized with the hobbits in order to enforce this kind of relatability.

Verlyn Flieger echoes this observation in *Splintered Light*, though her focus is less on how the reader is contextualized to identify with the hobbits and more on how the characterization of the hobbits themselves makes them relatable to a modern reader. She notes that 'it is through the hobbits more than any other of Tolkien's peoples that readers can see themselves – their pleasures, sorrows, weaknesses, and strengths' (Flieger 2002: 149). Since a majority of the characters in the text are portrayed at a level above the experience of the

normal reader, they immediately associate themselves with hobbits who are more mundane in their depiction. It is certainly worth mentioning that Shippey also comments on how the hobbits are mediators for the reader in his monograph *The Road to Middle-Earth* (2003: 65).

In her chapter 'Everyclod and Everyhero: The Image of Man in Tolkien', Deborah C. Rogers argues that Aragorn represents 'Tolkien's man par excellence' and seeks to determine what his portrayal adds to Tolkien's conception of mankind (1975: 73). In order to argue this point, however, she must concede that 'hobbits…are central to Tolkien's picture of humanity' (Rogers 1975: 69). Her necessary identification of this fact as a background for her thesis provides a good overview for demonstrating the humanity of hobbits and how readers often interpret their characteristics. Rogers claims that 'we are all in some way small, provincial, and comfort-loving – and we see ourselves as such. At first we like to imagine ourselves as heroes, but experience makes us sceptical; we become convinced that, in fairness, we are not heroes' (1975: 72). She concludes that 'Hobbits, then, are Tolkien's primary picture of Man' before going on to make her case about what Aragorn adds to this portrayal (Rogers 1975: 72). This demonstrates how, even when scholars are attempting to examine the way in which other characters demonstrate particular characteristics or aspects of humanity, they must first acknowledge that the hobbits exist in a space of primacy when it comes to discussing this theme.

Scholars have also noted that it is more than just characterization and contextualization that lead readers to associate more with hobbits than any other character. Brian Rosebury claims that the very plot of *The Lord of the Rings* 'reproduces the perspective of the hobbits, who have no experience of the world outside their shire, and initially grasp little more than that a malevolent power is searching for the Ring' (1992: 21). He expounds upon this initial observation, noting that:

> For hundreds of pages the perspective of the hobbits, and particularly Frodo, is preserved with unbroken temporal continuity, with careful linking passages accounting for the time-lapses between major incidents… A gradually broadening sense of what is going on in Middle-earth is achieved, as under the pressure of events Frodo and his companions gain a measure of enlightenment. (Rosebury 1992: 57)

These remarks indicate how readers must see Middle-earth the way that the hobbits see it. To dig a little deeper into narratology, the hobbits serve as the focalizers for the text. The reader's reference point is manipulated by the writer so that they share the hobbits' point of view. Because of this, the action of the story is mostly defined by the experience of the hobbits and readers must experience the world through their eyes.

Furthermore, the hypothetical overlaying of recognizable dialects and language patterns onto the text by a translator in essence fossilizes the text. This means that, ostensibly, even if readers wanted to abrogate the forced hobbit perspective it would be impossible because the text in front of them denies many of the nuances and subtleties that would allow for such a reading. Instead, hypothetically, what the reader defies when they read against the linguistic framing devices of the text is the understanding of the 'translator', in this case Tolkien.

While this metanarrative function is instilled in Tolkien's text, it does not prohibit readers from refusing different perspectives or projecting onto the text their own understandings. Instead, it indicates the sophisticated level to which Tolkien attempted to strengthen his intended narrative perspective.

1.3.4   Hobbits as Children

One scholar who has incorporated a view of the hobbits as children into their interpretation of the text is Derek S. Brewer. In his chapter '*The Lord of the Rings* as Romance', he contends that one of the key themes of romance literature is 'the transitions of early life' (1979: 261). In his conception of the text as a romance, Brewer proposes that the hobbits 'represent the emergence of the individual from childhood into realms of responsibility and danger' (1979: 261). He bolsters this claim by describing their adventure in archetypal language:

> The departure from the Shire and from Bree into a strange and uncertainly hostile environment, where vague figures of evil are chasing one, where the way is lost through tangled thickets, yet one may be watched, and one may even be guided; where strange men much taller and older than oneself, facetious and impenetrable, offer help; and where one commits errors by sheer carelessness and inattention. (Brewer 1979: 261-262)

Brewer completes this summary with the argument that 'all this is a marvellous evocation of the world when one is young' (1979: 261-262). His entire interpretation is predicated on the perspective of the hobbits as young individuals who undergo a process of maturation as the story progresses.

Another scholar whose perspective of *The Lord of the Rings* necessitates a view of the hobbits as children is Jonathan D. Langford. In his article 'The Scouring of the Shire as a Hobbit Coming-of-Age' (1991) he describes the final overthrow of Saruman in the hobbits'

own country as the culmination of a process of maturation that each hobbit has experienced over the course of their adventure. Langford describes in great detail how Merry and Pippin undergo a process which ultimately leads them to 'display signs of a growing maturity and of a greater impact on the events of the outside world' (1991: 4). For these two hobbits, the journey is a movement away from society and into isolation in which they can define themselves anew in various social structures and capacities of responsibility. They leave the Fellowship and then they leave each other, forcing them to redefine themselves in service to an authority figure. Included in this analysis is the recognition that 'this increased power and ineffectiveness in the wider world is symbolized by the ent-draught they ingest, which causes a literal and ongoing increase in physical stature' (Langford 1991: 5).

Langford also discusses how 'Frodo and Sam's coming-of-age is of a very different sort' from that of Merry and Pippin' (1991: 6). Instead of gaining influence in the outside world through an assertion of the self, he claims that 'the focus of Frodo and Sam's education is…on developing the internal moral and spiritual strength that will enable them to carry out the quest into Mordor' (Langford 1991: 6). He demonstrates how they undergo a very different process from the other hobbits, one which leads to less notoriety and influence. Nevertheless, the culmination of each hobbit's development is their experience once they return to the Shire. He concludes his argument by indicating how the journey of the hobbits relates to the journey of the reader of fantasy. He claims that the hobbits' 'journey – out from the protected world of childhood, on the one hand, or of non-heroic commercialized society on the other – is the quest each of us undertakes whenever we embark into the realm of the imagination' (Langford 1991: 9).

One critic who has actively argued against the conception of hobbits as children is Jared Lobdell and his book *The World of the Rings: Language, Religion, and Adventure in Tolkien*. He recognizes the objection to his argument that 'the comparisons to children are valid, the Hobbits are childlike (or childish)' (Lobdell 2004: 107). Despite this claim, though, he goes on to contend that the hobbits were created by Tolkien when he was middle-aged and are 'self-portraits drawn by the portraitist when he was forty' (Lobdell 2004: 107). He builds upon this observation to create his interpretation of how the hobbits work in the text:

> the shift from the high style, the elevated diction, to quiet rusticity is partly a shift in viewpoint from youth to middle age, the hobbits, like Tolkien himself, seem in many ways perennially youthful. This perennial youthfulness notwithstanding, and the frequent comparisons to children as well, the Hobbits are recognizably the creation of an older man… The Hobbits are a kind of reassurance that this youthful romanticism,

this version of Middle-earth, will continue to have meaning into our own middle age…
(Lobdell 2004: 107-108)

Therefore, to Lobdell the hobbits act as a bridge to Middle-earth for more mature readers. His interpretation, however, is unnecessary in order to appreciate the hobbits as a fulfilment of the role of mediators for the text. Even if the hobbits were children, they could serve to minimize the gap between the reader and the fantastic world that Tolkien depicts, regardless of the reader's age. Lobdell concedes the childishness of the hobbits and stakes the majority of his claim on the age of the author at the time of composition. This is an unfortunate vantage point: from this logic a majority of children's literature is not ultimately targeted to children because it is written by adults. Furthermore, this gets into the murky waters of authorial intent in order to determine the 'true meaning' of the text. Simply because an author is writing a childlike character from her perspective which is reflective of childhood rather than actively engaged in it does not mean that the character is not relatable to children. This perspective certainly opens up an interpretation of the character that may appeal more to an older reader, but it does not necessitate it.

1.3.5   Child Readers of Tolkien's Work

When discussing how critics typically view the audiences of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, Louis R. Kuznets's 'Tolkien and the Rhetoric of Childhood' (1981) is a good place to start. Kuznets begins the chapter by rehashing the prevailing opinion about *The Hobbit*. The author claims that, 'If there is anything left to say about *The Hobbit*, it is this: no matter how Tolkien wished to deny it, to repudiate those very qualities that confirm it, his first novel is solidly based on the great tradition of the British children's classic' (Kuznets 1981: 150). Kuznets is not alone in this assertion, far from it. Most Tolkien scholars make this claim at some point and it has been variously supported with several different articles analysing the content and reception of the tale. Furthermore, most scholars support the view that '*The Lord of the Rings* [is] adult fiction' (O'Sullivan 2013: 16). Kuznets agrees with this latter contention and aims 'to show how, in *The Hobbit*, in contrast to *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien employs a "rhetoric of childhood"' which is influenced by writers of British children's literature (1981: 150).

The 'rhetoric' that Kuznets examines is in reality a list of several features common to children's literature which is remarkably similar to the one used by Jaume Albero Poveda above. These features include:

> An obtrusive narrator, commenting, addressing the reader, and using richly descriptive prose; characters with whom preadolescent children can comfortably identify and who develop and change as they do; an emphasis on the relationship between time and development within a compressed narrative time scheme; a circumscribed geography and a significant concern with the security or danger of specific places in the setting. (Kuznets 1981: 150-151)

This is a typical approach of scholars who look at *The Hobbit* as a children's story. What is intriguing about this analysis is that Kuznets seems to accept *The Hobbit* as a work of children's literature even though it does not conform to all the characteristics in the list; however, the critic arbitrarily decides that *The Lord of the Rings* cannot be considered children's literature because of an arbitrarily-decided-upon degree to which it does not conform to the same list.

Scholars have also been willing to identify other works by Tolkien as children's literature. In her article 'Beyond *The Hobbit*: J.R.R. Tolkien's Other Works for Children' (2004), Janet Brennan Croft discusses several works by Tolkien other than *The Hobbit* that can be considered children's literature. The texts she identifies as children's literature are *Roverandom*, *Mr. Bliss*, *Farmer Giles of Ham*, *Smith of Wootton Major*, and *Bilbo's Last Song*. Since this is a short article, a mere four pages, Croft does not go into a systematic examination of different elements within each story, but instead often uses an assessment of the level of whimsy or seriousness within each tale to distinguish the intended audience. While this attempt to diagnose the tone of the work is very important in determining the authorial intent or the implied reader of the text, it does not contribute much in terms of understanding key questions about the readers of each text, namely: do children read these books more than adults? If so, why? What are their responses to these texts? Are the responses of children different than those of adults? Such questions are outside the scope of Croft's article, but they are essential to the present study.

Croft's approach, while useful in showing similarities across Tolkien's short works, should be applied with caution when attempting to determine the audience of the texts. In his book *Language and Ideology in Children's Literature* (1992), John Stephens cautions against using this kind of thematic or tonal understanding to differentiate between children's literature

and adult literature. He describes how, by the middle of the twentieth century, this thematic approach was becoming increasingly problematic. He observes that:

> The urge to polarize fantasy and realism into rival genres…had solidified into an identification of seriousness with realism and a concomitant consigning of fantasy to non-serious or popular literature for those audiences, such as children, deemed incapable of complex aesthetic responses. (Stephens 1992: 241-242)

While Croft's intent is not to use seriousness to create delineation between realism and fantasy, it does partake of some of the troublesome aspects of the same endeavour. Simply diagnosing the tone of the work alone is not sufficient evidence to be able to determine whether it is intended for an older or younger audience. This is true for multiple reasons, and the way in which fantasy itself has been stereotyped as lacking in depth is not the least important of these.

One remarkable study which traces the response of children to *The Hobbit* in better detail than perhaps any other is not found within the field of Tolkien scholarship proper. Instead, it is from *Powerful Magic: Learning from Children's Responses to Fantasy Literature* by Nina Mikkelsen (2005), which is dedicated to understanding how children learn by gauging their responses to story. The writer's frequent variation of spelling of main character names such as Gandalf/Gandolf indicates that she is not the most attentive reader of Tolkien. I do not include this detail to cast aspersions on the quality of the work, far from it. It indicates that the emphasis on the work is not on Tolkien at all, but on the processes of reading and responding to text that the researcher witnesses. In many ways, these errors act as a reassurance that the scholar is not a Tolkien scholar, and does not have a vested interest in making sure that Tolkien or his works come across in a particular light: be that positive or negative, childish or mature. Even in this most unlikely of places, we find an intersection which is useful to the present study. In the chapter 'Fighting the Dragon—and Winning: *The Hobbit*', Nina Mikkelsen discusses how her two children respond to their first reading of *The Hobbit*.

The text is truly a delight as readers are invited to watch as her children react to, develop their own theories about, and rewrite the work with very little intrusion from Mikkelsen. The chapter presents excerpts from original writing inspired by Tolkien, short transcripts of dialogue between the researcher and her children, and a summary of the different kinds of learning and engagement that her children experience as they work their way through the text. It provides some truly important insights into why the children enjoy the story and how they relate to it. Even though the major premise of the chapter focuses on *The Hobbit*,

there are a few mentions of *The Lord of the Rings*, which they read shortly after, and even more observations that can apply to both texts.

One of the most important initial responses is how the older child, Vinny, fairly quickly reflects on how he is like a hobbit:

> 'I'm like a hobbit', he declared this time, in relation to Tolkien's description of hobbits. 'I'm short and fat and I laugh after I eat, and I have two things for supper'. Fascinated by a creature in some ways like himself (he was short and stocky and certainly loved food), Vinny was soon thinking about other ways he was like and not like a hobbit. (Mikkelsen 2005: 116)

As most of the previous scholars have indicated, one aspect that enables children to read a text is the ability to identify with one of the characters in the text. Mikkelsen's research clearly indicates that children have this ability with hobbits. Therefore, it would be likely that those who could identify with Bilbo in the earlier work could also identify with him in the later work, and by extension the other hobbits portrayed in *The Lord of the Rings* as well.

An additional observation which has implications for the current study comes from the discussion that the researcher has with her children regarding the distinction between fantasy and reality. As will be examined below, children have the ability to make this distinction; however, this ability develops throughout their adolescence, and, when under the age of four, they may require external prompting if there is not enough context to help them make judgements concerning the narrative. From this chapter, however, the important observation is that her children were so convinced by the verisimilitude of Tolkien's descriptions that one of them 'decided hobbits were "real"' (Mikkelsen 2005: 117). The researcher had to indicate that she was not aware that hobbits in fact existed and that Tolkien was the first to write about them. This indicates, however, that children are very willing to invest in stories, particularly those that they observe as having enough description and detail to mirror what they experience in real life.

Another important response to *The Hobbit* explored in the chapter is the way that the children made their own stories in response to the text. Vinny, the eldest, did not like the fact that Bard, not Bilbo, defeated Smaug. This failed to meet his expectations of a heroic figure. He assumed that Bilbo would be the hero because this was the character that he invested in the most emotionally. Because he experienced this frustration of his expectations, Vinny developed a story in which a hobbit protagonist defeats a villain in the heroic mold. The way that fantasy literature can inspire a creative impulse in a reader and drives them to create

fantasy of their own is a response which deserves to be examined in its own right. For the purpose of the present investigation, however, what these stories tell us about the interpretation and response of children is an important focus. The assumptions that children make about the stories they read often hinge upon 'gaps' in the primary text that they are able to explore with narrative responses. Wolfgang Iser was first to meaningfully propose a methodology for discovering and elaborating upon gaps within a text.[6] His basic proposition is that each work, no matter how well-crafted, is invariably incomplete and that readers must fill in the gaps with their own experience and understanding.

Reflecting on her son's story, Mikkelsen is able to demonstrate which explicit and implicit factors of his reading most influenced his own creative processes. This kind of analysis reinforces the earlier observation that the child's identification with Bilbo was very strong. This is why he decides to make hobbits the main characters in his own story. Additionally, his story was heavily influenced by the plot and by the character descriptions throughout *The Hobbit*. One of the more remarkable observations that Mikkelsen is able to validate is that her children seem to respond more to the descriptive and empathetic passages of the text than to the action passages. In fact, it is these passages which make children care about the action of the plot. This is contrary to many assumptions about children's literature made by critics who believe that plot is more important to keeping a child engaged in the story.

This observation is beneficial for an exploration of children's responses to *The Lord of the Rings* because Tolkien's larger work has a plot which is slower to develop. Therefore, if children are mainly concerned with action, then they may have less interest in this work; however, the world is larger and more fully developed, so perhaps this descriptive power in the text makes young readers more likely to continue the story. It is true that the character descriptions in *The Lord of the Rings* are not as detailed as they are in *The Hobbit*, particularly when considering the non-Fellowship characters. On both of these fronts, the current study demonstrates how children show a large degree of engagement with the settings and characters. Often their first reflections are aesthetic or relational rather than plot-driven. This will be discussed more in the chapters that follow.

Although Keith O'Sullivan begins his chapter 'The Hobbit, the Tale, Children's Literature, and the Critics' (2013) by restating the prevailing opinion that the audience for

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[6] See Iser's *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (trans. 1978).

The Hobbit is younger than that of *The Lord of the Rings*, his sentence concludes by admitting that there is some uncertainty in these definitions. Ultimately, he provides a strong statement for the problematizing of these genre categories. His opening paragraph reads:

> While *The Hobbit* is a text for children, and *The Lord of the Rings* adult fiction, the literary-historical relationship between the two is complicated. With the publication of the first volume of *The Lord of the Rings* in 1954 the status of *The Hobbit* as children's literature was problematized: although initially conceived by J.R.R. Tolkien in isolation from its successor, and published as literature for children, it could now be seen as a precursor to a more complex and ambitious narrative…In fact, from the very beginning, *The Hobbit* has occupied a precarious liminal space between fictions thought appropriate either for children or for adults. (O'Sullivan 2013: 16)

O'Sullivan quite appropriately complicates the perception of Tolkien's work as fitting conveniently into categories which use age or content as a means of delineation. While publishers, critics, and agents are quick to categorize texts in an effort to provide commentary on or market them, it is the work of good scholars to blur these lines and demonstrate how there are commonalities between works on both sides of this divide. Furthermore, the fact that *The Hobbit* is the precursor to *The Lord of the Rings* in content and quality further complicates these narrow definitions. This impulse by O'Sullivan mirrors what is seen in the larger critical community that discusses children's literature and reader response. He follows in the pattern of identifying discrete elements of *The Hobbit* that helped to define it as children's literature, elements which are lacking from Tolkien's most popular work. However, he, like several other scholars, realizes the complications that arise when *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* are viewed as two works addressing the same arc, whether it be as prequel and main text or as main text and sequel.

O'Sullivan continues by discussing how *The Hobbit* has not received much scholarly attention, generally because it is regarded as subpar writing when compared to *The Lord of the Rings*. He is concerned mostly with justifying the stance that *The Hobbit* deserves critical attention in its own right as an achievement in children's literature, and literature generally. The usefulness of O'Sullivan's article for the present study, therefore, is in its demonstration of the perspective which a majority of Tolkien scholars hold, rather than in reviewing his contentions concerning why *The Hobbit* should be studied in more depth.

These scholars indicate elements of Tolkien's work which may appeal to younger readers. Some consider certain features to be important to attract a young audience, like characters that are relatable to a young audience, discernible geography, and an emphasis on security and danger in specific places. Another proposes a distinction in tone which may be

significant for young readers. The third attempts to blur the line between child and adult readers and the firm conceptions that people hold regarding what type of literature each audience should read. In so doing, they imply that young readers and adult readers have many of the same concerns, even if younger readers are not as willing to invest in the same things as adults.

Examining how scholars have applied characteristics usually attributed to children's literature to *The Lord of the Rings* and how they have discussed aspects of Tolkien's other works which have attracted a young audience illuminates several important elements. Initially, it is pivotal to understand how young readers put emphasis on relatable characters and clear plot lines. These articles also demonstrate that younger readers can distinguish tone, to a degree, and that they share many of the same concerns and motivations as older readers. They also helpfully demonstrate the flaws in an interpretation of Tolkien's 'On Fairy-Stories' which precludes children from reading fairy tales and complicate an understanding of children's literature as a body of work which is easily distinguishable from adult literature.

Several of the conclusions garnered from these articles are reaffirmed when looking at reader response criticism of children's literature more generally. The next section will address several of these important ideas and contribute more observations that are significant when considering how young readers respond to a text.

1.4   Children's Literature and Reader Response

1.4.1   What Is Children's Literature

The final field that should be examined as foundational material deals with young readers and reader response. In order to have a conversation, we must define terms and clarify meaning where we can. Unfortunately, this is more difficult than it may sound.

Prior attempts to develop reader response criticism of *The Lord of the Rings* focus on varying groups of adults, and the only scholarship which addresses child readers relies on discussions of authorial intent and on textual analysis. This leaves any researcher interested in developing a reader response project which concentrates on children to use reader response criticism which focuses on children's literature more generally as a theoretical background for the endeavour. This examination of scholarship does more than just provide a background for

the present study. By examining the response of children to other works, it was possible to make some inferences about how young readers would respond to *The Lord of the Rings*.

That being the case, what follows is a survey of criticism that is applicable to the project. The first section concerns the problematic categorization of works as children's literature, followed by a section which complicates an easy distinction between children's literature and adult literature by discussing crossover readers. The third section gives a historical overview of reader reception studies in children's literature, and the final section examines scholarship which looks at how children respond to the fantasy genre specifically.

It is not uncommon for critics, and for adults in general, to assume that their reading experience is largely indicative of the generic reading experience of all readers. As we have seen in the previous sections, the 'implied reader' is often just a projection of the critic's own experience. This temptation, though, is particularly strong as readers look back on their reading history as children. Take, for example, this brief overview from Maija-Liisa Harju:

> After the lullabies and verse of infancy, my literacy autobiography (ML. Harju, 2006a) reflects a typical progression from picture books (e.g. the family fairy tale collection; Little Golden Books series (1942-2012) and titles by Dr. Seuss) to transitional books with fewer pictures (e.g. Jacob Two-Two meets the Hooded Fang (Richler, 1975), Encyclopedia Brown Tracks them Down (Sobol, 1963), and books by Louisa May Alcott, Beverley Cleary, Laura Ingalls Wilder, Roald Dahl and Jean Little) to young adult novels (e.g. books by Judy Blume, Gordon Korman, S.E. Hinton and Monica Hughes) to "threshold reading", books given to young people by adults (e.g. by J.R.R. Tolkien, George Orwell, Anthony Burgess, Kurt Vonnegut) or adult books appropriated by young readers that serve as an introduction to the world of adulthood and adult reading. (2012: 92-93)

Notice how casually she qualifies each category of book that she progressed through as a young reader. The overview presents a very structured and rational approach to reading development. Like most experiences, however, our motivation to narrativize and simplify the past in order to make meaning clear misrepresents the truth of the experience. Reading is a messy business that often does not follow a set pattern of development. I can use myself as an example of a reader who did not follow a straight progression in reading difficulty. I frequently read books that were well below my proficiency level when I was younger, and I still do. This is because I try to read for enjoyment as well as enlightenment, a sentiment that Peter Hunt would undoubtedly support, as we shall see in the discussion of his chapter 'Instruction and Delight' (2009) below.

Interrogating overly-simplified definitions of children's literature and young adult literature will help to problematize this kind of misconception and misrepresentation. Such an endeavour is essential to the present study in order to avoid trying to neatly categorize experiences and responses.

When trying to define something as complex as children's literature, a natural first impulse is to look for a historical starting point and identify the key elements that were used to differentiate children's literature from adult literature in the beginning. Unfortunately, such an endeavour proves difficult because there is no solitary occurrence that gave rise to children's literature. Instead, as with most complex ideas, history gives a series of minute steps of divergence with a culminating result of two, arguably distinct, forms of literature. I should also clarify that this section focuses on a strictly Western account of the origins of Children's Literature.

Several scholars have attempted to trace the history of children's literature. In his chapter 'The First Golden Age', Humphrey Carpenter contends that the transition to a stable, even flourishing, production of children's literature was dependent upon the shift in cultural perception of what children are, or what they were capable of. He discusses the perspectives of Locke and Rousseau, among others, who held that a child was 'simply a miniature adult' (Carpenter 2009: 56). He contends that the revitalization of children's literature could only happen after Romantic authors reconceptualized what it meant to be a child. He claims that William Blake's *Songs of Innocence* was 'an ardent affirmation that children have access to a kind of visionary simplicity that is denied to adults' (Carpenter 2009: 57). Mostly, though, he credits William Wordsworth with presenting the thesis of this movement in his poem 'Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood', although he recognizes that there were several writers who addressed the concept earlier.

Once this new conceptualization of children had been presented, it ultimately took root in the British mindset by the mid-nineteenth century. Carpenter gives several examples of how this new mindset infiltrated some of the most well-known literature from the time and claims that: 'by the second half of the nineteenth century, then, the child had become an important figure in the English literary imagination' (Carpenter 2009: 59). He goes on to describe some of the influential writers and themes of literature during the 'First Golden Age' of children's literature, including: eccentric individuals who are often ostracized, a search for an idealized place, and covert endorsement or rejection of religion.

Carpenter goes on to describe how children's literature developed two distinct types from around 1860 until the 1950s. He identifies these two types based on their tendencies toward the realistic or the fantastic. Of the realistic, he claims these stories were typically 'the breezy, optimistic adventure story, set firmly in the real world (though greatly exaggerating certain characteristics of that world)' (Carpenter 2009: 65). Of the fantasy category, he claims that these texts were 'introspective' and that each 'more often than not, involves some impossible things, such as talking animals or toys, or inexplicable or magical events' (Carpenter 2009: 66). He then discusses the cultural and social motivations behind each of these types and why fantasy became the more prominent of the two for most of the Golden Age.

Matthew Grenby commences his chapter 'Children's Literature: Birth, Infancy, Maturity' by revisiting the historical period covered by Carpenter, paying particular attention to the concept of the child throughout this period. He claims that 'the majority of scholars have placed the start line in London in the early 1740s' (2009: 39). He is very quick, however, to problematize this conception. He discusses how there are several French books which may encroach upon this claim, and then proceeds to give a lengthy discussion about how there were many works prior to this point that were read, and enjoyed, by children. He notes that 'the argument that books designed to entertain children appeared only… in the mid-eighteenth century is pretty easy to undermine – especially if we are open-minded about exactly what child readers would find fun' (Grenby 2009: 41). He supports this contention by discussing how there is documentary evidence of children reading and enjoying books back to the early modern period, the Middle Ages, and farther.

Despite this complicated view of the origin of children readers and books for children, Grenby attempts to suggest that 'surely something did change in the mid-eighteenth century in Britain' because writers and publishers were able 'to establish children's literature as a distinct branch of print culture' (2009: 43). Here he establishes a distinction between what he calls 'children's *books*' and 'children's *literature*'. He sees the real revolution of this era as the ability for the concept of children's literature to permutate into a 'kind of commodity' which 'gained a foothold in the market' (Grenby 2009: 43). Therefore, the real revolution that most scholars acknowledge is the ability to consistently produce texts specifically targeted toward a young audience from this point on. It is important to note, as Grenby does, the significant social factors that led to this possibility.

Since one cannot define children's literature using a historical approach, many scholars have attempted to assert that children's literature is defined by the readership: children. This perspective is as problematic as a historical approach, though, because the concept of the child is just as culturally constructed as the concept of children's literature. As is mentioned in the historical overview above, the notion of childhood shifts as cultural ideals and norms change. Also significant is the way in which literature participates in the shifting or upholding of established cultural perspectives. In the introduction to her monograph *Constructing Adolescence in Fantastic Realism*, Alison Waller indicates how 'portrayals of childhood only refer back to essential notions of the child, constructed through adult discourse, and that the "real" child reading the book is no less constructed by the institution of literature' (2009: 4). Both of these points complicate any attempt to define childhood.

In his chapter 'Theorising and Theories: How does Children's Literature Exist?', David Rudd suggests that there are two typical approaches for critics of children's literature who focus on the reader. He claims that 'on the one hand, notions that there is an underlying "essential" child whose nature and needs we can know and, on the other, the notion that the child is nothing but the product of adult discourse (as some social constructionists argue)' (Rudd 2005: 16). He states his goals as to 'suggest that neither of these positions is tenable' and to indicate that 'the problematic of children's literature lies in the gap between the "constructed" and the "constructive" child, in what I shall term a "hybrid", or border area' (Rudd 2005: 16). This indicates how a definition of children's literature based on readership is also a very complicated approach.

To return to Waller, she also argues, by paraphrasing Jacqueline Rose's argument from *The Case of Peter Pan: or the impossibility of children's fiction* (1984), that 'the impossibility of children's literature resides in adult perceptions of childhood itself, as a universal, innocent and primitive state which transcends the complexities of language and meaning' (2009: 4). This oversimplification that characterizes all children as belonging to the same subset of the general population standardizes interpretation in a way that marginalizes many responses and interactions that young readers experience. Therefore, studies of the response of young readers to a text should seek actual responses from real readers and should also appropriately contextualize the results so as not to apply findings to populations that do not fall within the scope of such a study.

Perhaps one of the most accurate and intricate descriptions of what constitutes children's literature, then, is a description of the milieu in which children's literature rests. In her article 'The Changing Status of Children and Children's Literature', Eva-Maria Metcalf briefly describes how 'children's literature… is situated in the field of tension delineated by social and institutional structures, technological advances, market forces, pedagogical and political claims, literary norms, and discursive practices, and is defined by the current dominant concept of childhood' (1997: 49). This brief description demonstrates that what seems to be simplistic writing for a less educated audience is actually not defined as much by content as it is by a complex series of influences, all of which help to determine the nature of children's literature. Furthermore, it is essential to understand that each of these influences fluctuate over time. As she explains, 'Subtle or more substantial changes in any or all of these factors will affect the role and the makeup of children's literature' (Metcalf 1997: 49). Therefore, the description of children's literature and the idea of what constitutes a 'child' that follows is necessarily bound up in the time and place of composition, as well as several other factors that are highly subject to change.

Further complicating the way in which these societal schemas can change is Rudd's depiction of how literary criticism itself often reshapes concepts of 'child' and 'children's literature'. He laments how the 'insight into the power of the child as a cultural trope (standing for instance, for the natural, the primitive, and so on) has led to a neglect of the child as a social being, with a voice' (Rudd 2005: 16). This demonstrates how, in the very effort to critique and understand popular notions of childhood, the child, and children's literature, scholars participate in dialogue which often exerts power on society as a whole. Therefore, scholarship can either endorse or redefine popular conceptions or misconceptions. It is also important to note that the current study seeks to remedy the exclusion of young voices by actively incorporating their opinions and their words into the text.

In terms of the contemporary approaches to children's literature, Peter Hunt questions how this genre is unique in its approach to readers and the ways in which scholars and critics address the text. In his chapter 'Instruction and Delight', Hunt contends that there are several complications when considering the idea of children's literature. Hunt queries:

> The subject is 'children's *literature*', but can the same types and scales of judgment be used as are used for adult literature – and if they are, does that mean that 'children's literature' is inevitably an oxymoron? And can all children be lumped together as one species – and if they are, does that imply wishful thinking or disrespect? And what does that awkward little possessive ''s' in 'children's' actually mean? Do these texts

really *belong to* children, or are they simply *aimed at* them? Are the texts we are talking about *of* childhood, *for* childhood, *about* childhood, or *by* children? (2009a: 12-13)

He expertly problematizes the phrase "children's literature" in a way that demonstrates that the term is, to a large extent, applied to a text by an external arbiter and rarely predicated upon the content of the text itself or even the context of composition. Significantly, Hunt goes on to contend that the phrase is an exertion of power by defining what is appropriate for children, what constitutes a child, what constitutes literature, and other significant cultural evaluations; however, this does not stop Hunt from pursuing a definition of children's literature.

Once Hunt has deconstructed the definition of children's literature he turns his critical eye to criticism itself. While his objective is to discredit scholarship that addresses children as a monolithic and homogenous group, he also criticises the same tendency in critics addressing an adult audience. He exposes this hypocrisy which is so often a tenet of literary criticism, claiming:

> The most common, and commonly unchallenged, oddity about all literary criticism is the assumption that all readers will 'read' the same thing from a text: the same images, the same emotions, the same allusions. This is difficult enough to imagine among adults even of the same class and same generation in the same country: to imagine that it is possible with inexperienced readers is absurd. If we are engaging with texts for children we need to see that our motivation does not entitle us to make assumptions about what any reader but ourselves perceives. (Hunt 2009a: 16-17)

This illuminates the fact that, contrary to what some scholars have proposed, children are a group of unique and diverse individuals who each approach a text with their own assumptions and ideas, their own presuppositions and prejudices, their own thoughts and opinions. While critics have started to realize this fact about adult readers, some still tend to characterize child readers with sweeping generalizations.

In the introduction of *Understanding Children's Literature*, Hunt revisits the idea of power and how it is exerted with a label like children's literature. He claims that 'the books have…been marginalized. Childhood is, after all, a state we grow away from, while children's books – from writing to publication to interaction with children – are the province of that culturally marginalized group, females' (Hunt 2005: 1). While most would certainly characterize this marginalization as a detrimental factor for children's literature, Hunt demonstrates how this very marginalization enables children's literature to do something unique: 'its nature…has been to break down barriers between disciplines, and between types of readers. And as a group of texts it is at once one of the liveliest and most original of the

arts, and the site of the crudest commercial exploitation' (2005: 1). Therefore, children's literature sits at a unique intersection in literary criticism where it can enable the voice of the marginalized to speak to other groups.

Hunt complicates this progressive portrayal of children's literature in his essay 'The Same but Different: Conservatism and Revolution in Children's Fiction'. Here he indicates that children's literature has an essential tension between bolstering the projected values of a society and challenging the status quo in which the books are written. He asserts that this tension often displays itself in the need for difference and yet sameness that children's literature often encapsulates. In fact, he claims that 'sameness and difference is the essence of children's books' (Hunt 2009b: 71). While these texts generally appear to uphold the values and norms of their time, he claims that the very best children's literature often subverts expectations and stereotypes in a clandestine manner.

Kimberley Reynolds's chapter 'Transformative Energies' agrees with this contention from Hunt. Furthermore, she believes that children's literature goes farther than Hunt indicates. She concludes her argument by claiming that: 'Children's literature is not just capable of preserving and rejuvenating outdated or exhausted genres; it also contributes to the creation of new genres and kinds of writing' (Reynolds 2009: 112-113). She contends that this ability to change literature 'has gone unacknowledged because…there is a widespread assumption that children's literature is a second order of creativity that lags behind and imitates what happens in adult fiction' (Reynolds 2009: 113). Children's literature is stereotyped in a way that belittles the influence that it has on society as a whole. This observation also helps to illustrate why critics often seek to label texts that they do not appreciate as children's literature in order to denigrate the work.

Some critics may attempt to claim *The Lord of the Rings* is young adult fiction rather than children's literature. It is essential to note that young adult literature as a category simply did not exist at the time that Tolkien's works were being written and published. The term 'first found common usage in the late 1960s' (Cart 2008). To claim Tolkien's works as young adult literature proper is an anachronistic endeavour to an extent. Additionally, appealing to this term comes with its own vast array of complications. Michael Cart succinctly indicates the problem in a statement for the Young Adult Library Services Association. He claims that 'the term "young adult literature" is inherently amorphous, for its constituent terms "young adult" and "literature" are dynamic, changing as culture and society – which provide their context –

change' (Cart 2008). Determining parameters for this category, then, is just as difficult as doing so for children's literature.

In the 1960s, the term young adult literature usually referred to texts written to readers 'aged approximately 12-18' (Cart 2008). In just under six decades, however, the definition has shifted dramatically in several ways. One of the most important is that 'the conventional definition of "young adult" has expanded to include those as young as ten and, since the late 1990s, as old as twenty-five' (Cart 2008). Furthermore, the word literature has become more inclusive, now incorporating 'new forms of literary – or narrative – nonfiction and new forms of poetry, including novels and book-length works of nonfiction in verse […as well as] picture books, comics, and graphic novels and nonfiction' (Cart 2008). As a result of these shifting definitions, both the kinds of texts that are discussed and the audience to which they are addressed have expanded greatly.

It is also important to note that the number of books published in this field, as well as the number of books purchased, have grown exponentially as the definition has expanded. Such vitality exists within this area that it led Michael Cart in 2008 to exclaim that 'young adult literature has, since the mid-1990's, come of age as literature – literature that welcomes artistic innovation, experimentation, and risk-taking' (Cart 2008). While young adult literature may be coming into its prime, it still defies easy definition.

A further complication to young adult literature is the fact that, as Beckett notes, the production of such literature is often the impetus of a publisher. She observes that:

> in many cases, the initiative for the so-called children's books by mainstream writers comes from a publisher anxious to capitalize on its stable of most celebrated and best-selling authors. In some cases, it is not so much a commercial endeavour as a sincere attempt to bring together great authors and young readers. (Beckett 2009: 38-39)

She also indicates that 'the texts of a large number of children's books were originally published for adults' (Beckett 2009: 39). These observations illustrate how this genre of literature is often instigated, or in fact determined after the writing is completed, by publishers, not by authors. If the text of a book is not the measure of who reads the book, then how can the paratext, epitext or supratext be the determining factors? If scholars and critics are capable of, and even in favour of, disregarding authorial intent when discussing a text and its readership, then how much more willing should they be to disregard the desires of a publisher.

Ultimately, the attempt to create a permanent definition for children's literature and young adult literature proves to be a futile endeavour. Fortunately, it also seems to be an

unnecessary, and at times unhelpful, means of restricting literature(s) by placing texts into an ill-defined in-group and out-group. What this means is that scholars should clearly state what their functional definition of these groups are at the time of writing, but also concede that such definitions are prone to change and fluctuation, and what is used, ultimately, for the purposes of limiting the implications of their research should not be used to limit the potential of works of literature. Therefore, for the functional purposes of this study, the researcher will adopt the definition of children's literature proposed by Rudd:

> Children's literature consists of texts that consciously or unconsciously address particular constructions of the child, or metaphorical equivalents in terms of character or situation (for example, animals, puppets, undersized or underprivileged grown-ups), the commonality being that such texts display an awareness of children's disempowered status (whether containing or controlling it, questioning or overturning it). (2005: 25-26)

There are two significant caveats to this definition. The first is that it does not exclude adults from participating in the creation of or dialoguing about these texts. As Rudd states:

> Adults are as caught up in this discourse as children, engaging dialogically with it (writing/reading it), just as children themselves engage with many "adult" discourses. But it is how these texts are read and used that will determine their success as "children's literature"; how fruitfully they are seen to negotiate this hybrid, or border country. (2005: 26)

The second is that, as already stated, such definitions are subject to change. Therefore, the purpose of adopting this definition is solely to establish a foundation by which to make comparisons between texts and audiences to which they pertain *within the context of this study*. What this means is that this definition, and the one which follows, have no bearing on the ways in which literature, as a whole, should be considered. The researcher agrees with Beckett's proposal that 'Perhaps we are finally entering an era when good fiction can simply be considered good fiction without worrying about the audience' (2009: 9). Instead, these definitions are useful for parsing out the pre-existing audience of the text, in order to delineate the various interpretations among different reader groups.

With these two caveats in mind, the current study will also adopt a functional definition of young adult literature. Perhaps one of the most useful for its description is the definition proffered by Agnew and Nimon:

> As a genre, young adult fiction did not exist until well after World War II… It deals with a teenage identity which is separate from that of either adulthood or childhood, and often takes its cue from J.D. Salinger's influential *Catcher in the Rye* (1951). Often characters experience a sense of isolation and exclusion from the rest of the world

which has to be worked through before they can establish their own identity. Young adult literature is often concerned with teenagers' search for this identity as they struggle against the apparent restrictions of adult authority. (Agnew and Nimon 2001: 775)

This definition gives an idea of the societal context for the beginning of Young Adult Literature. It also gives a very succinct overview of the usual content of such works. Characters in these works are usually fairly modern in characterization, they fight against strictures imposed upon them by adult society, and they are constantly seeking to find their own stable sense of identity. Themes of rebellion and alienation, as well as journey and meaning-making are staples in this field.

The goal of this research is not to label Tolkien's work as somehow confined to a single category, but rather to indicate that whether it was intended for children, young adults, or adults, all three audiences are reading and have always read and produced meaning from Tolkien's works. Perhaps a consequence of this study is to understand that any and all applications of the terms children's literature and young adult literature as a means of delineating how a piece of literature is different from, or even subpar to, an implied category of adult literature is inevitably flawed and unnecessary.

1.4.2   The Crossover Question

In the introduction to her monograph *Crossover Fiction*, Beckett claims that Crossover literature 'refers to fiction that crosses from child to adult or adult to child audiences. Since the success of the first *Harry Potter* books, however, critics, journalists, publishers, and even writers have generally adopted the term for books that crossover in one direction only, that is, from children to adults' (Beckett 2009: 4). It is important to note that both of these relationships between texts and unintended audiences have always existed, and did not begin with the development of the term crossover. In a modern, popular context, however, the term is almost exclusively used to describe text that is written intentionally to appeal to children, but has the added benefit of also appealing to adults. Returning to Beckett, 'although a few scholars have criticized this limited use of the term, the media has rarely recognized that crossover literature is not a one-sided phenomenon or a one-way border crossing' (2009: 5). It is significant to note the use of the term crossover in public spheres and the power exerted by such a term.

Many scholars are quick to point out when discussing crossover texts that the occurrence of this category demonstrates how there is no strict boundary between children's literature and adult literature. Rachel Falconer asserts that 'the practice of cross-reading also demonstrates how our attitudes of childhood, adulthood, and the in-between state of adolescence are all shifting, becoming flexible and porous, as we adapt to changing social conditions in the developed world' (Falconer 2009: 4). This uncertainty of definition is not unique to the developed world, or indeed to the modern world. As discussed above, what defines an individual as a child or an adult has shifted over time and is often vague or unclear when trying to determine discreet lines of delineation.

Falconer goes on to insist that 'now both adults and children are challenging reading constructs that attempt to erect barriers between them' (2009: 7). Many critics place an emphasis on crossover reading in the new millennium because of both the greater availability and affordability of texts and what is often characterized as the relaxation of content restrictions; for example, Falconer observes that:

> From the early years of the new millennium children had unprecedented access to adult reading material, and the subject matter deemed appropriate to young readers expanded in the late twentieth century to include many topics which earlier writers, publishers and adult book buyers would have regarded as off-limits. Sex, drug abuse, torture, depression, mental illness, death, the Holocaust and genocide are all subjects treated in contemporary children's literature, so whether or not they are consciously reading a novel 'for adults', today's children are arguably cross-reading more than they have in previous generations. (2009: 7)

While the impetus behind such a paragraph is admirable, one assumes the motivation is to emphasize the importance of crossreading in a modern context, it is mistaken to characterize crossreading as more popular now than in any previous generation. After all, children have had to read books meant exclusively for adults for centuries before writers began to target this audience specifically, much less before the creation of the young adult literature genre.

Children have always read popular books whether they were intended for a young audience or for everyone. This type of transgression is not an aberration in today's youth, but is instead a function of what it is to be a child. To grow is to consistently test boundaries and reshape the world one perceives according to new freedoms as they become available. This is obvious in the historical approach that children have had to literature in general. Beckett confirms this by claiming that 'readership transgression has been commonly practiced by children for centuries' (2009: 7). She goes on to support this claim in the first chapter of *Crossover Fiction*, when she describes several popular nineteenth-century novels which

appealed to a young audience. She contends that books like *Dracula, The Last of the Mohicans, Jane Eyre,* and *Heart of Darkness* 'were never intended to be crossover books' (Beckett 2009: 19). Regardless of authorial intent, these books appealed to young readers because of their content.

Grenby's chapter mentioned above traces several early works to which children were particularly receptive. He indicates that 'journals, memoirs, spiritual autobiographies and other such sources reveal that, throughout the early modern period, children were reading fables, courtesy books, the *Gesta Romanorum* (a collection of legends, lives of saints and heroes and stories), chapbooks (short, cheap popular stories often sold by peddlers), even chivalric romances and novels' (Grenby 2009: 42). While reflecting upon this list, Grenby suggests that 'none of these titles were intended especially for children, but clearly this did not stop children reading and enjoying them' (2009: 42). Children have always appropriated stories that were intended for adults.

Furthermore, many of these crossreadings were actively encouraged by adults who believed that these books 'contained scenes that other adults saw as useful vehicles for conveying religious, patriotic, psychological, or moral values to children' (Beckett 2009: 19). Significantly, Beckett directly addresses one of the major concerns of critics who don't want to believe that children appropriate adult literature. She protests against this portrayal, saying that 'children may not understand all the layers of meaning in these works, but then neither do all adults, and that is not necessary when readers are gripped by the story' (Beckett 2009: 19). This is an important observation because it leads to the realization that it is the act of reading that makes a child a reader, not the act of understanding. It is also the fact *that* children read a book and not *how* they read a book that makes them a reader. This naturally extends the scope of criticism of children's literature to touch on any books that children are prone to read, because it is desirable to understand what kinds of interpretation a child would derive from those texts. Rather than being prescriptive about what children should or should not read, the critic in this instance becomes descriptive of what they read and how they read it. This is an important realization for the current study, which seeks to understand how young readers respond to a text that has historically been classified as adult reading in most countries.

1.4.3   Background to Scholarship on Child Readers

The fact that readers do not respond to a text uniformly has been widely recognized for more than a century. Initially, this concern was thought to be problematic, and indicative of shortcomings by readers whose interpretation differed from those of more privileged status. The article 'Research in Response to Literature' (1983) by Lee Galda gives a nice overview of the development of reader response criticism beginning in the late 1920s. The current section draws heavily on Galda's article, as this history is necessary to contextualize the present study, though only a cursory background is integral. One of the first major advances toward the development of reader response criticism was the preponing of 'the reader as *crucial* to the construction of a literary experience rather than as the potential hindrance' (Galda 1983: 1, emphasis in original). This contention became prominently discussed with Rosenblatt who contended that 'a literary text was simply symbols on a page and that the literary work…existed only in the integration of reader and text' (Galda 1983: 1). This led to the realization that there is a transactional nature to reading a text which proffers the idea that there is no such thing as an 'objective' reading. Ultimately, this observation has led to 'a consensus across theoretical perspectives that a dialectic between reader and text constitutes reading and responding to a literary work' (Galda 1983: 2). It is this dialectic which most reader response criticism attempts to observe, describe, and discuss.

Michael Benton claims that reader-response criticism is valuable to children's literature scholars because of 'what it tells us about two fundamental questions' (2005: 112). These questions are: 'who is the implied child reader inscribed in the text?' and 'how do actual children readers respond during the process of reading?' (Benton 2005: 112). Many of the articles written in the field of reader response tend to address one or the other of these questions.

One critic who received notoriety for analysis addressing the first of Benton's questions is Aidan Chambers. In 'The Reader in the Book: Notes from Work in Progress' Chambers attempts to find a way to identify the implied reader of a text; or, as stated by the author, 'a critical method which will tell us about the reader in the book' (Chambers 1977: 64). Chambers's methodology is to 'consider some of the principal techniques' that authors used to establish a relationship with their reader, and thereby define their reader (Chambers 1977: 67). These techniques include the style of writing, the point of view, the gaps left in the text, and whether characters take the side of children or adults. Chambers contends that

analysing these four elements is 'a method which could help us determine whether a book is for children or not, what kind of book it is, and what kind of reader (or, to put it another way, what kind of reading) it demands' (1977: 78). Such a systematic approach is helpful when attempting to determine authorial intent for a text; however, as Chambers recognizes on the opening page of the chapter, people who argue solely on the basis of authorial intent have left out an important portion of identifying a work as children's literature. Namely, identifying whether children read the text.

Niel Cocks's chapter 'The Implied Reader. Response and Responsibility: Theories of the Implied Reader in Children's Literature Criticism' responds to Chambers's work. Here Cocks attempts to demonstrate how 'contemporary criticism is still labouring under the same assumptions such texts make about the child and its reading, and employ many of the problematic moves made by that text' (2004: 93). He contends that the personae created in the Chambers article are 'not as stable as they might first appear' (Cocks 2004: 97). He argues that the author is not the sole maker of meaning in the reading relationship, noting how the reader and text also have this right. He therefore suggests that this relationship, which is 'offered as "negotiation" between stable parties' is in fact 'no such thing' (Cocks 2004: 97). This observation leads to an unravelling of the claims that Chambers makes concerning the relationship between the reader and the writer.

Furthermore, Cocks argues that the goal of 'mature' reading is to find fulfilment, and that this objective is reached by subordinating the reader's will to the desires of the author. He holds that fulfilment 'is gained through the temporary acceptance of the alien, through subjection to the demands of reading as another' (Cocks 2004: 100). He views this move as problematic for young or inexperienced readers, and so authors must address this audience in a unique way:

> Yet where child readers are concerned the author and the book must take on the 'mature' reader's position of taking on the alien. The child takes on the position of the demanding author/text. Yet that does not mean that the child initiates the reading process. The child reader differs from its 'mature' counterpart through lacking an awareness of its own submission. The child is drawn into an already existing text, a text that has adopted the unyielding identity it is trying to appeal to. Only the identity of the child in the text is not the same as the identity of the child reader. (Cocks 2004: 100)

Cocks accepts the concept of the implied reader, but does not agree with the characterization of the relationship described by Chambers. Instead, he sees a more fluid, dynamic relationship in which each participant may take on more or less responsibility at any moment. While

Cocks's discussion helps to push reader response away from simplistic interpretations like those which followed after Chambers, it also has problems in the way it characterizes the relationship inherent in reading predicated upon domination and subordination and in the way it portrays young readers.

By depicting the reading relationship as a struggle for domination, Cocks inevitably paints the reading endeavour as a difficult task, and one with inherent and unchangeable hierarchical structures. This is not dissimilar to the way that scholars often perceive literary history in the model of Harold Bloom. According to his *Anxiety of Authorship*, authors often reenact an Oedipal struggle with prior literary figures who have acted as an inspiration to them; however, just as Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar challenged this assumption as inherently patriarchal, and thus problematic (see *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979)) so too must Cocks's suggestions be challenged.

Rather than characterizing the reading relationship as a struggle, perhaps it would be more beneficial to see the relationship as one in which cooperation takes place to produce meaning. This interpretation of the reading relationship breaks down hierarchical structure, and thus distances the interpretation of reading from inherently patriarchal power structures, or adult-centred power structures in this case. While some may protest that this approach discredits the intention of the author, it is important to remember that in practice the ultimate arbiter for lived meaning in a text is the reader, as even their misreadings serve as the foundation for their personal interpretation. Again, this interpretation is not intended to be prescriptive as to the 'true' meaning of a text, but rather descriptive of the lived, or practical/actual, meaning of the text. In other words, the question answered by this approach is: what do the readers understand the text to mean?

Furthermore, by suggesting that children are unable to consciously submit to authorial intent, Cocks suggests that readers are incapable of finding 'fulfilment' in a work that is not specifically written in a way that bridges the gap in comprehension. This portrayal does not accurately describe the reading experience of children, who can find meaningful experience in reading books intended for adults. In the article 'Children's Moral Reading of Harry Potter: Are Children and Adults Reading the Same Books?' discussed below, a demonstration of how children read books in a manner which is different from adults is a central element. In his argument, Cocks implies that there is only one path to 'fulfilment', and thus to finding

meaning within the text. This assumption would seem to reinforce the idea that authorial intent is the true arbiter of meaning in a text, one of the very arguments that he is trying to refute. Therefore, Cock's theory of the meaning-making relationship must be denied, as interpretations often do not conform to the original intention of the author. Once again, we see that the implied reader methodology presents false conclusions. Instead critics must undertake the process of discussing actual reception with actual readers, as this study has done. Only then can scholars break from poor assumptions and attempt to appreciate and understand the wide diversity of interpretations that present themselves.

1.5   Fantasy-Specific Studies of Children Responses

Reception studies of Tolkien, Tolkien and young readers, and children's literature and reader response: with these three pillars in mind, we can turn our attention to a few articles that have a lot of cross-pollination with the present study. These articles do not all address Tolkien's work specifically, but are in a closely related field, and so have meaningful contributions for any study exploring how young readers interpret fantasy.

In 1980, the journal *Approaches to Research in Children's Literature* published its first issue. The very first article in this issue is entitled 'Can We Ever Know the Readers Response?' Perhaps the article's author Nicholas Tucker, from the Department of Developmental Psychology at the University of Sussex, had a sense of humour when he wrote the first sentence of his article on the very first page of this brand-new journal concerning varying approaches to children's literature. Here he claims: 'The short answer to this question can only be no, at least beyond only the vaguest of generalizations and platitudes' (Tucker 1980: 1). It seems that Tucker's article, and perhaps the journal itself, were off to an inauspicious start, if their opening endeavour was a fruitless one. As any good psychologist worth their hourly rate can attest, however, the short answer is seldom the same as the full answer.

Tucker's article problematizes his initial statement and becomes a lengthy reflection on how different readers respond to the same text in unique ways. By the second page, he is already citing Norman Holland, who observed that 'a reader responds to literary work by using it to re-create his own characteristic psychological processes' (Tucker 1980: 2). While

Tucker seems to believe that each reader interprets a book in a unique way, he also contends that child readers are more simplistic, and therefore more uniform than adult readers. He suggests that:

> any discussion of the 'adult' response of necessity covers a vast, pluralistic range of skills, attitudes and approaches, childish responses, I would maintain, although also very variable, even so have a far greater chance of resembling each other at various stages of mental growth at least in certain particulars. (Tucker 1980: 2)

Tucker goes on to clarify that what he actually means by this sentiment is that children have a smaller knowledge base, and thus frame of reference, for approaching a piece of literature. Because of this smaller frame of reference, 'there is a greater limit on the material a child can understand, and on the intellectual, emotional and experiential variability that he or she can be expected to bring towards it' (Tucker 1980: 2-3). While it is certainly true that children, to an extent, have fewer life experiences than adults, it is mistaken to misrepresent the variability of interpretation as somehow less than that of adults. Even though they have fewer experiences, each child has unique experiences. Therefore, there can be just as many intricate and essential distinctions between each child's interpretation as there are between each adult's interpretation.

In contemporary reader response scholarship, this plethora of interpretive possibilities is nowhere more apparent than in studies pertaining to one of the most popular children's series published in the last several decades: the *Harry Potter* series. Since its publication, J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series has become a bedrock for literary criticism of children's literature and of fantasy literature more generally. Looking at some of the reception studies about this influential series gives insight about the possible response that young fantasy readers could have to *The Lord of the Rings*.

Initially, research has validated the idea that *Harry Potter* is a significant series in terms of how it has influenced an entire generation of readers. The article 'What has *Harry Potter* Done for Me? Children's Reflections on Their "*Potter* Experience"' explores the value that young readers ascribe to their reading of the *Harry Potter* series. In the article, researchers survey several small groups of children who read the series and conclude that most claim *Harry Potter* was 'a major contributor to both their self-identification as readers and their wider literacy development' (Dempster *et al*. 2016: 278). Furthermore, these young readers report a rise in confidence and motivation to read larger, more challenging books. This demonstrates how young readers ascribe importance to early readings that they enjoy,

especially if those readings represent a challenge to or a maturation of their prior reading experiences.

Since the *Harry Potter* series is so popular and has played such a significant role in the literary lives of young readers, the scholarship surrounding this series would be helpful in determining how young readers approach fantasy literature. This scholarship seeks to answer many of the important questions that arise when considering a young readership. Mary P. Whitney, Elizabeth C. Vozzola, and Joan Hoffman focus on the kind of morality that children interpret in their reading of fantasy. Their article 'Children's Moral Reading of Harry Potter: Are Children and Adults Reading the Same Books?' suggests that children and adults read texts, including children's literature, at different levels of complexity. The difference in reading that they research mostly concerns the moral judgments made by adult and child readers. Most notably, their research indicates that children have a difficult time seeing morally ambiguous characters in a positive light:

> At the highest education level (postgraduate), one fifth of the participants acknowledged that Snape sometimes expressed concern for others. Almost no children, even among the expert readers, saw that. The influence of the 'mean teacher' schema was even more evident in ratings of whether Snape noticed other's point of view (moral sensitivity). Only 6% of children rated that item as true in contrast to 38% of postgrads. (Whitney, Vozzola, and Hoffman 2005: 12)

This difference in interpretation of morally ambiguous characters could easily be ascribed to the kind of lack of life experience described by Tucker; however, it is important to realize that such an ascription would be an assumption on the part of the critic, as there is no firm data to suggest this as the cause for the interpretation.

Furthermore, while the study demonstrates that there is a difference in the way that readers who have more education interpret a text, it is also important to note that their data suggests that there is no correspondence between the complexity of interpretation and the willingness to read or reread the text. By examining their first data set closely, it is evident that readers who have a middle/high school education or less are actually more likely to reread the first three books of the Harry Potter series. This can actually reveal quite a lot in terms of reader motivation. It is also important to recognize that while the interpretation of young readers may be characterized as more simplistic on this moral level, it may very well be more intricate when it comes to other significant aspects of the text. The findings of this research have several implications for the understanding of young readers of fantasy.

It is important to understand how children view fantastic elements in literature. Can they tell the difference between reality and an account which is unrealistic? In their study entitled 'Abraham Lincoln and Harry Potter: Children's Differentiation Between Historical and Fantasy Characters', researchers determined most children can differentiate between fantastic characters and realistic characters, though some of the youngest readers (3 and 4 years old) require minimal promptings. Furthermore, children over the age of five can generally distinguish between fictional and real characters without the aid of promptings. This means that children must have the ability, if not the will, to distinguish between novels which tell an unbelievable story and those which focus on realistic events.

1.6   Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated how several scholars have vigorously refuted the idea that there is an easy way to distinguish which audiences will enjoy what texts or that children's literature is a simplified version of adult literature. It has discussed elements within stories that have traditionally been used to label them as children's literature, and argued that the prescriptive approach of using authorial intent or textual content to determine who will read the text is flawed. This chapter has also demonstrated how external factors often influence the reception of a text and indicated how the methodology of the current study has made every effort to avoid pitfalls of earlier scholarship: including the tendency to privilege later readings and to downplay the voices of children in gathering information.

This chapter has suggested that children have similar desires and concerns to those of the hobbits. This is especially true when the hobbits experience feelings of marginalization or neglect and when the hobbits form relationships with other characters that are similar to familial or friendship ties, and this may result in them identifying with these characters. This has proven to be true as the largest areas of engagement by young readers include relational concerns, as we will see in the chapters that follow.

In addition to these arguments, this chapter has contributed additional insights that are beneficial for the present research. Furthermore, because the studies mentioned in the last section of this chapter involve real participants, they lead to stronger inferences about responses to *The Lord of the Rings* by young readers than previous Tolkien scholarship. The

studies presented here demonstrate that children over the age of five are capable of distinguishing between fictional and realistic characters. They indicate that children are capable of perceiving and communicating moral distinctions within a text, though to a lesser degree than adults. They espouse the notion that young readers are profoundly influenced by the stories that they read. All of these observations are critical to a project which seeks to understand the interpretation that young readers have of *The Lord of the Rings*. As we shall see in the forthcoming chapters, many of these conclusions are validated in the present study.

Chapter Two

Rationale and Methodology

2.1   Introduction

As the previous chapter illustrated, children were often characterized as underdeveloped adults in the past (p. 51). This same perspective was also found in sociological research. As Epstein *et al*. note:

> Until recently, most researchers and clinicians have used proxy reports to obtain information about children. Consequently, children have been excluded from research and from many aspects of decision-making because they are considered less experienced, less rational, more dependent, and less competent than adults. (2006: 2)

It is not until fairly recently that scholars have attempted to incorporate the perspectives and lived experiences of children into their research. As Johanna Einarsdottir notes, 'children's participation in research has come into focus recently, building on the beliefs that children, just like adults, hold their own views and opinions, they have the right to express their ideas, and they are capable of expressing their ideas' (2005: 524). The contemporary approach to incorporating children into visual research is aptly stated by Thomson in her chapter 'Children and Young People: Voices in Visual Research'. She dispels this earlier notion in her first sentence, where she claims that 'there is no biological "truth" to suggest that being young equates with nothing to say. As scholars involved in the "new" childhood studies argue, it is a product of our place and time to judge the nature and capabilities of people on the basis of their age' (Thomson 2008: 1). This leads to a different perspective of children for some researchers:

> Instead of seeing children and young people simply as family members or students or as 'becomings', that is, people not yet mature enough to have an opinion or act responsibly, contributors to this volume see them as competent 'beings' whose views, actions and choices are of value. (Thomson 2008: 1)

Modern researchers assert the agency of young research participants and insist that children are fully capable of participating in research, and are, in fact, essential contributors to research when the outcomes directly impact children. Einarsdottir gives a very succinct overview of the implications this shift has had on researchers:

> The growing interest in giving children a voice in factors that influence their lives and involving them in research emerges from different ways of looking at childhood and children. From a sociological perspective, childhood is viewed as a social construction and children are viewed as social actors instead of merely entities who are in the process of becoming such. Childhood and children are therefore seen as worthy of investigation in their own right, separate from their parents or caregivers…From a postmodern perspective children are looked upon as knowledgeable, competent and powerful members of society…Hence, children are seen as capable and knowledgeable experts on their own lives, possessing knowledge, perspective and interest that is best gained by interaction with them. (Einarsdottir 2005: 524-525)

This shift in perspective has led to a broader interest in incorporating children in sociological studies, as well as in trying to directly involve them in answering crucial questions about perceptions and needs of childhood.

This emphasis, however, does not always lead to the desired results. Clark notes how 'effective and authentic child participation is not easy to achieve in practice' (2012: 223). This means that researchers interested in an honest and thorough integration of the thoughts and ideas of children need to find novel approaches which do not hinder the involvement of young participants or constrain their voices until they fit into a series of predesigned adult conceptions.

Woolner *et al.* indicate how 'it is important to understand our methods as completely as possible and to make choices based on methodology rather than convenience' (2010: 18). To address this contention, the following chapter will lay out as clearly as possible the methodology and decisions made when designing the research methods of this project. It will include how materials were gathered, produced, and implemented, as well as an overview of the ways in which the researcher conducted interactions with participants.

After completing the literature review summarized in the preceding chapter, I read and analysed over one-hundred and fifty sources of Tolkien scholarship and discussed in a written document how they outline the thematic and critical consensus on Tolkien. I have included the list of Tolkien scholarship consulted in Appendix E (p. 268).

The main themes I identified in this literature review were: Good vs. Evil, Morality, The Hero, Language, Myth, Nature and the Machine, Quest, Religion, and War. Some of these themes were also present in the responses of young readers. In these cases, the theme was adopted as an 'organizational category' to be used for comparison, as I shall explain below. If the theme did not arise in a significant number of interviews, as was the case with the theme of language, then that portion of the literature review was set aside.

In addition to these themes, this process indicated that questions of genre, characterization, and setting have been important considerations for scholarship of *The Lord of the Rings* and fantasy in general. I have decided not to provide this entire analysis in the literature review for the sake of space, and instead have included the most pertinent sources in my analysis of the study activities in the following chapters.

There was much deliberation on the best way to proceed in gathering the thoughts, opinions, and responses of young readers to Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. As there has not been much research done with children and their reception of this text, the methodology had to be adapted from several fields of inquiry. This led me to discuss methods with several colleagues and mentors in order to find approaches that would help promote the voices of research participants, enhance the validity of the study, and lead to meaningful engagements between the researcher and participants. The field of visual research methods was determined quickly, for the reasons discussed in this chapter, and I ultimately decided to use a diamond ranking activity and a photo elicitation interview in conjunction with a more traditional survey.

In order to be as transparent as possible, I wanted to provide a quick summary of the process that led to the choice of the specific activities used in this study. I will go into more detail about the specific methods and rationale given for these activities later in the chapter, but I believe a brief overview would be helpful at this point.

After completing the readthrough of various sources of Tolkien scholarship discussed above, I was left with the question of how best to interview young readers about their experience of *The Lord of the Rings*. I wanted to find research activities that would encourage participants to reflect on and discuss these aspects of the text, but that would also empower them to talk about other aspects of the work that they found important. I wanted methods that would enable children to speak with their own voice rather than simply conforming to or rejecting prior thoughts about Tolkien in a binary way.

Through my own research, I found numerous examples of photo elicitation activities being used with young research participants as a means of enabling conversation and reflection. Since this was a particularly visual activity, it made sense to use it in a way that participants were drawn to reflect on their own mental images. Therefore, I decided to pair this activity with a discussion of the settings of *The Lord of the Rings*.

I consulted with several colleagues and mentors for their advice on the best activities that they have used to interview young research participants. The idea of the diamond ranking activity was proposed fairly early in the process by a mentor in the field of education who indicated that the activity has recently become more popular in interviews after being adapted from a pedagogical tool that has a long history in the classroom. It was serendipitous that the diamond ranking activity is typically implemented using nine items. Once I realized this, I immediately made the connection that there were nine members of the Fellowship of the Ring, and so this activity would lend itself well to having a discussion with young participants about how they view the members of the Fellowship and by extension initiate discussion about characters.

Finally, I knew that I wanted to employ at least one interview technique that would allow me to have statistics or numeric data in order to help me identify quantitative trends in my sample of participants. I also wanted a third activity to help with the study in terms of triangulation. Because of these considerations, I decided to use a questionnaire which would allow me to ask questions about genre, but also ask questions that could screen participants who did not meet the minimum requirements for the study before they participated in the full interview.

The adoption of multiple methods helps to improve the accuracy of the information gathered through triangulation, e.g. adopting multiple methods to investigate the same information. The data collected from each method is then compared to the data set from the other methods as a means of testing the validity and accuracy of the information produced. Mays and Pope explain that triangulation helps to improve the quality of data collected by researchers because the use of multiple research methods allows a 'researcher to look for 'patterns of convergence to develop or corroborate an overall interpretation' (Mays & Pope 2000: 51). This means that researchers seek to find an overlap in the data between research methods. This overlap provides a more solid foundation for the conclusions that they draw from the study.

Mays and Pope conclude their summary of triangulation by claiming that it is, perhaps, best used 'as a way of ensuring comprehensiveness and encouraging a more reflexive analysis of the data…than as a pure test of validity' (Mays & Pope 2000: 51). This means that triangulation itself does not ensure that the conclusions drawn from a study are accurate and valid, but rather that it helps to ensure a deeper analysis of the data. This analysis, in turn, may

lead to more accurate results because they are arrived at from multiple vantage points. Additionally, triangulation helps to avoid one of the obstacles which can skew the data collected by researchers: it is a means of collecting multiple data sets using multiple methods, and thus limiting some of the bias that any singular method could introduce into the study.

Inescapably, the interview activities chosen for the study influenced what the topics for the interviews. Therefore, the interviews focused mostly on characters and settings. In a way the choice of activities limited the scope of the study. By using triangulation, I have attempted to make the conclusions I draw based on this very narrow line of inquiry more solid and substantial. An additional limitation is that, since the qualification for participating in the study was to have read through the first volume of *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, then the characters and settings chosen for each activity must come from that volume. The impact of this limitation will be explored in the following sections of the chapter.

The final thing outlined in this summary are the sources that helped me determine the best way to structure my analysis of the activities. I did not know the best way to present my findings when I set out to conduct my interviews. After reading several example analyses, however, I decided to employ a framework developed by Fiona Maine and Alison Walker. They used four themes drawn from Robert Protherough's *Developing a Response to Fiction*. The framework focuses on character, setting, genre, and the act of reading. This sounded like an ideal format for focusing on the themes I had already noticed among the responses of young readers, but also encouraged me to look at the data in a new way to see if there were any insights into the young readers' interpretations that I had overlooked.

Furthermore, I should clarify that I have adopted some terminology from Joseph A. Maxwell's *Qualitative Research Design* (2013). In the analysis chapters, then, the term 'organizational category' is used to describe ideas that were identified prior to doing the research (so in this instance, themes noted as significant in scholarship prior to analyzing participant responses) and the term 'theoretical category' is used to describe groupings of observations from participants that arise from analysis of the interviews themselves.

The sections that follow (2– 7) give a brief introduction and rationale for using the research methods used in the study. They also provide a short description of how the methods were implemented practically with each participant.

2.2   Survey

2.2.1   Background

Surveys have a well-established and diverse history. In her monograph *Survey Research in the United States: Roots and Emergence 1890-1960*, Jean M. Converse details the history of this research method. In her introduction, she claims that 'survey researchers generally assume an internalist interpretation of these beginnings, seeing their ancestors in science as having been weightier than those in either politics or business. I see the genealogy as the other way around' (2017: 4). This perspective allows her to broaden the scope of her study to include significant precursors which occurred outside of academia. Most notably, these precursors include the implementation of surveys in the political and business spheres. She demonstrates how all three fields use surveys before, during, and after the Great Depression. While each of these fields have continued to use surveys in their own particular fashion, they each contributed to the development of the methodology now used in social research.

After establishing a significant history for the use of surveys in various fields, Converse goes on to demonstrate how academics and scientists began adopting and employing survey methodology between 1935 and 1945. This was not an easy transition. Converse notes:

> Social scientists interested in survey methods came to academic life (or came back to it) with experience in applied empirical research before and during World War II. As a group, most of the survey researchers were bent on trying to shed these externalist beginnings in order to join the community of scholars and chart an internalist future. Yet they felt the strain between the two cultures, needing the money of applied business and government while desiring the prestige and freedom of basic science. (2017: 5).

This tension, Converse claims, is often what characterizes the field of social sciences today. Researchers have found an uneasy acceptance within academic walls because of the way in which their methodology challenges humanist perspectives and because of their consistent need for higher funding than traditional humanities research. Her history demonstrates that surveys are often well-regarded for the data that they produce, but are sometimes stereotyped as a lesser science in academic circles.

2.2.2   Definition, Methods, and Approaches

The preliminary research method with participants in this study was a questionnaire. A questionnaire was chosen for several reasons. Since most of the recruitment for the study happened online, the questionnaire allowed participants to start engaging in the study shortly after completing the consent forms. This enabled sustained engagement from participants until the time of the interview and increases participant willingness to schedule a time to complete the visual research methods later. Additionally, the exposure to the topics and idea of the study that would occur as the participants completed the questionnaire could make them more familiar with the concerns of the study, and therefore alleviate some of their possible anxiety at talking with an interviewer. This means that using a questionnaire addressed several of the key practical concerns for the study: it provided quantitative data relating to the research objectives, it improved the response rate of participants, and allowed for a higher overall recruitment than the individual interviews alone.

This is the most traditional of the research methods adopted in the current study; however, this does not mean that the method is free from the need for close scrutiny. As Paula Christina Pelli Pavia *et al*. indicate, 'even when adolescents are the object of investigation, studies describe findings based on questionnaires originally designed for adults, often completely overlooking the perceptions of adolescents as active social agents' (2014: e103785). This being the case, a rationale for the method chosen is warranted, as is a brief discussion of the way in which the questionnaire was employed.

Initially, surveys are a means of collecting a larger number of responses without too much investment or additional time from the researcher. As Martyn Denscombe notes in *The Good Research Guide: For Small-scale Research Projects*, 'surveys can be an efficient and relatively inexpensive means of collecting data. In the case of small-scale surveys the researcher's time might be the only significant cost involved' (2014: 'Advantages of Surveys'). The cost-efficiency of the method was certainly an important consideration when determining whether to use it in the current study. Another important consideration was the amount of information that could be produced from such a survey. Denscombe also addresses this concern, noting how surveys 'can produce a mountain of data in a short time for relatively low cost' (2014: 'Advantages of Surveys').

Another significant benefit of using a survey is the way in which such an approach lends itself to both qualitative and quantitative research. While it is true that 'survey

interviews are primarily used in quantitative research because they tend to be highly structured and therefore not as conducive to the goals of qualitative interviewing', this is not always the case (Ravitch and Carl 2016: 172). Denscombe outlines how such a method can be used with either qualitative or quantitative research, specifically noting how 'surveys can just as easily produce qualitative data, particularly when used in conjunction with methods such as an interview' (2014: 'Advantages of Surveys'). The usefulness of surveys when used as one of several methodologies in a study employing triangulation is particularly noteworthy. Sharon M. Ravitch and Nicole Mittenfelner Carl note that even questionnaires 'can be a useful data source within a larger data collection plan for a variety of reasons that relate to triangulation of methods' (2014: 172). As the questionnaire was the first part of the study to come to fruition, it allowed the researcher to continue to adopt other methods that would still complement the survey in producing qualitative data and not lead to unrelated or confusing data sets.

There are a few disadvantages to using a survey, and most of these are remedied by coupling such an approach with other methods of gathering information. Denscombe notes how, with a survey's 'emphasis on collecting empirical data there is a danger that the "data are left to speak for themselves" without an adequate account of the implications of those data for relevant issues, problems or theories' (2014: 'Disdvantages of Surveys'). This indicates that perhaps researchers need to include a method for gathering data which does not simply revert to the kind of easily systematized and numerical information gained from a survey, and which drives them to develop a deeper understanding of the data that is gathered through this collection method. This first consideration leads into the second.

The second notable weakness in using a survey is that they tend to emphasize breadth of information rather than depth of information. Again, however, this can be remedied by adopting other methods to ensure that depth of information is incorporated into the data and analysis, as well as limiting the size of the sample which participates in the survey. Denscombe indicates these concepts as well:

> The data produced through large-scale surveys are likely to lack depth and detail on the topic being investigated… This is not true, however, of small-scale qualitative surveys using interview methods. Where the survey uses interview methods, it can produce data that are rich in detail, although in this case the trade-off is that the number of people taking part in the survey will be much smaller. (2014: 'Disadvantages of Surveys').

Even with all of these possible disadvantages of surveys, it is evident that the other methods adopted by the current study are an effective means of addressing the shortcomings that can

occur. This indicates that the survey was a useful method to adopt. There are several different types of surveys that a researcher can use, for the present study I have opted for a questionnaire methodology.

2.2.3 Activity Description

First, a brief preliminary description of the project was given to each participant and their guardian or legal representative. Each participant and their guardian were given time to review the project information sheets and consent forms. After all parties agreed to take part in the study by signing the consent forms, the questionnaire was sent to the participant. The participant was allowed as much time as needed to complete the questionnaire and was encouraged to ask questions at any time throughout the course of taking the survey.

The questionnaire itself consisted of four demographic questions and twelve questions regarding their reading history and interpretation of *The Lord of the Rings*.[7] The demographic questions were designed to elicit information regarding the participant's age, education, gender, and home city, region or state, and country. This allowed the researcher some basic data to see if any trends develop which aligned with or crossed typical demographic categories.

The questions regarding *The Lord of the Rings* provide essential background information for the visual research activities, and also ask participants to answer some questions about their interpretation of the text. The background information regards their reading history and exposure to adaptations of *The Lord of the Rings*. Three questions asked participants about the thematic elements and genre of the work. Two open-ended questions ask participants to indicate their most memorable and least favourite parts of the text.

Spread among both types of questions were three specific questions which acted as screening questions, making sure that the participant met the requirements to participate in the study. A question in the demographics section clarified the age of the participants, while two of the questions in the reading history portion made sure that the participant had read *The Lord of the Rings*, at least through *The Fellowship of the Ring*.

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[7] You can find a copy of the survey in Appendix A.

2.3   Visual Interview Methods

The use of photo interviewing and visual interview methods has risen in popularity since the 1980s because of the type of qualitative data that they allow researchers to gain from participants that they might not be able to achieve from simple word-based interviewing techniques. This observation is developed further and applied specifically to children in the article 'Photo Elicitation Interview (PEI): Using Photos to Elicit Children's Perspectives' by Epstein *et al.* (2006). The authors claim that 'although there is a trend toward using interviews with children "to hear" children's thoughts, these traditional verbal interviews can be problematic and raise several ethical and methodological concerns' (Epstein *et al.* 2006: 2). They go on to elaborate three important claims about word-based interviews with children; namely: 'verbal language limits the issues and questions that the researcher can explore', 'the question-and-answer interview is outside [children's] sociolinguistic repertoire', and 'the verbal interview accentuates the adult authority as an expected feature of adult-child communication' (Epstein *et al.* 2006: 2). Ultimately, they support the idea that these complications 'might limit the research value of interviews' and that 'using photographs during an interview with children…might address some of these issues' (Epstein *et al.* 2006: 2).

The field of visual research, however, is still relatively underdeveloped in terms of the number of scholars who focus on the methodology and history of the pertinent scholarship. In fact, an article on photo interviewing cowritten by four scholars as recently as 2005 suggests that 'only a relatively small amount has been written concerning the use of the visual medium for evaluation purposes (Hurworth 1995) and even less about how photographs can be integrated into the interviewing process' (Hurworth *et al*. 2005: 52). This means that there remains a pressing onus on any researcher who employs visual research to diligently compile a meaningful history and rationale for their research methodology and analytic processes. That is why the current chapter provides this kind of background information for the use of visual research methods in the current study.

2.4   Diamond Ranking

2.4.1   Background

The article 'Using Diamond Ranking as Visual Cues to Engage Young People in the Research Process' by Jill Clark presents a concise and helpful overview of the history of diamond ranking as a learning and research tool. Clark traces the recognition of the usefulness of the activity in the classroom back to several texts published in the early 2000's. She also recognizes how 'in classrooms it can be used across any subject or group work situation' (Clark 2012: 224). She also indicates the extent to which institutions other than schools have used the activity to engage learners of diverse age ranges.

One article which elaborates on the usefulness of the diamond ranking activity for the classroom is 'Teaching and Learning Through Children's Literature' by Robyn English. This article evaluates diamond ranking exclusively as a tool for the classroom, so it considers the significant attributes of the method from a pedagogical perspective. English notes that 'this activity is a strategy that can be used to generate and structure discussion so that a good book can be discussed without over-analyzing it' (English 2016: 44). She goes on to claim how the activity is useful in evaluating student comprehension because diamond ranking 'encourages students to justify their beliefs and feelings' (English 2016: 44). Therefore, the usefulness of the activity in the classroom is for the same reasons that it is useful as a research tool.

This is demonstrated in Clark's introductory paragraph to the activity. She claims:

> Diamond ranking is a recognized thinking skills tool (Rockett and Percival 2002), valued for eliciting constructs and for facilitating discussion. Its strength lies in the premise that when people rank items, either statements, objects or images, and discuss the ranking choices, they are required to make explicit the over-arching relationships by which they organize knowledge, thus making their understandings available for scrutiny and comparison. (Clark 2012: 223)

Therefore, while the discussion which occurs when participating in the ranking activity is beneficial in the classroom for understanding student comprehension and analysis, this same dialogue is significant in research. Such vocalizations of the underlying assumptions and comparisons being made by participants is the major focus for researchers who use the activity. Clark clarifies this observation when she insists that 'the important feature of diamond ranking, is not the actual position of the statements…but the process of discussion, reflection, negotiation, accommodation to other perspectives and consensus seeking that takes

place in agreeing the ranking' (Clark 2012: 223-224). This helps to explain why some researchers have found the activity to be significant and beneficial to their research.

To return to Clark's literature review, the most significant portion for the current study is the section which discusses how diamond ranking has been used as a research tool. She indicates studies beginning in the early 1990s which employed the activity to understand diverse perspectives on educational evaluation and assessment protocols. She notes that the method shows promise with younger research participants:

> In research studies it is usually used with children and young people, often in conjunction with the collection of other research tools, to promote a dynamic element to the research. Using a diamond ranking activity enables the children and young people to play an active part in the research with an attempt to get at their opinions whilst not making assumptions about what they think. (Clark 2012: 224)

Therefore, the diamond ranking activity is useful in that it encourages more meaningful and more active responses from young research participants than other interview methods. The activity also enables young participants to communicate opinions and ideas which are not as structured around responding to adult questions and assumptions.

Clark goes even further, noting that 'there are also examples of diamond ranking being used as a research tool with those individuals who are perhaps less likely to be in mainstream education or are excluded or disempowered in some way' (Clark 2012: 231). This indicates how diamond ranking activities can be beneficial for eliciting responses from individuals who may not be able to express themselves as fully in a traditional word-based interview. Pamela Woolner and her colleagues also recognise the potential for the activity to be accessible to a diverse pool of participants. They claim that 'a central conclusion [of their research] is that the methods did indeed facilitate the engagement of a broad range of people' (Woolner 2010: 19). This further indicates that the diamond ranking activity is well-suited to any study which hopes to include a diverse range of young participants from various backgrounds, education levels, and socioeconomic statuses. Clark further contends that the activity encouraged 'animated discussions among all the participants, which led to rich, qualitative data' (2012: 234). Indicating that the activity not only benefits the interaction between participants and the research process, but also benefits the data that is produced from their participation.

The benefit to the data can be attributed to the ability that participants have to generalize from a very specific activity. Woolner notes how the commentary that participants

provided while they were diamond ranking a set of pictures 'often demonstrated that the pictures were prompting reactions to quite generalized ideas about the school, including aspects of construction, organization and learning' (Woolner 2010: 10). This ability to take physical artefacts and express abstract concepts on a more general level is not unique to the diamond ranking activity, it has been observed in many different visual research methods; however, the comparative nature of diamond ranking makes it easier for participants to elaborate on distinctions between discrete characteristics or items. Ultimately, the benefits that the diamond ranking activity can have on data is succinctly summarized by Woolner, who claims that 'the structure of this activity allow[s] a more quantitative approach to be taken to analysis of the results' than some other visual research methods, like picture sorting activities (Woolner 2010: 10).

2.4.2   Definition, Methods, and Approaches

Diamond ranking is an activity in which participants are given a set of (typically nine) pictures, phrases, or words. Each of the items in the set is written on a separate card which allows participants to manipulate and reorganize them in whatever order they want. Participants are then prompted to place these items in the formation of a diamond, see Figure 1.
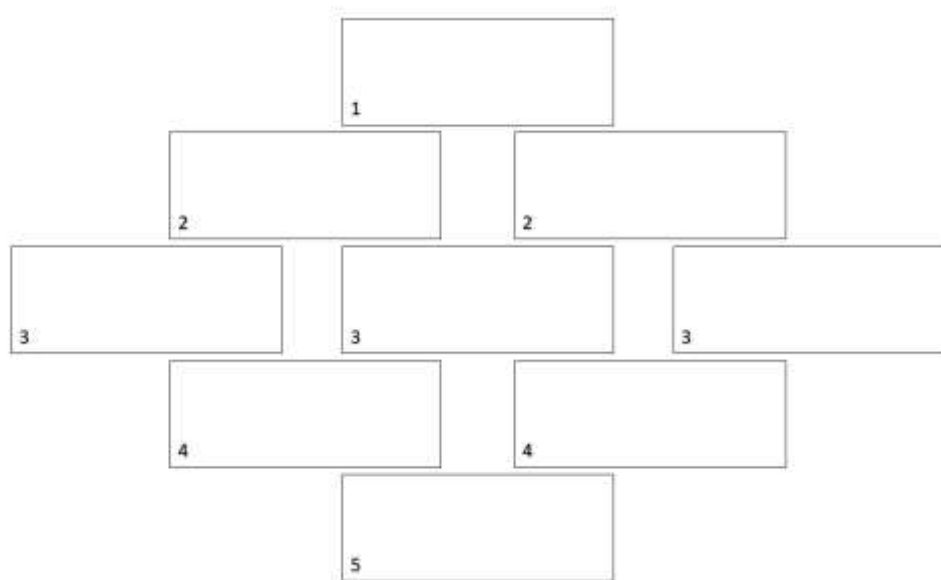
Figure 1 Basic Structure of a diamond ranking activity with rows labelled.

As Clark indicates, the criteria which participants use to rank the items is usually flexible and is dependent upon the research context in which the activity takes place. Often, participants are asked to rank the items with regard to a relatively vague descriptor, like 'interesting' or 'important' and are encouraged to place the most 'interesting' or 'important' item in 'the top (row 1) of the diamond' (Clark 2012: 223). The two items which are interesting, but not as interesting as the one given primacy of place in the formation, are placed side-by-side in the second highest position in the diamond (row 2). The third position of the diamond (row 3) is intended for the three items that are 'neither important, nor unimportant or are of medium significance' (Clark 2012: 223). The fourth position (row 4) is composed of two items which are equally the seventh most important or interesting of the set, and the final position (row 5) is reserved for the item which participants deem to be least important or interesting.

As indicated in the previous section, the diamond formation is a process which provides a structure for reflection and conversation as participants select items to place in each position. Clark claims as much when she states that the activity provides 'a scaffold to elicit processes and responses, whilst at the same time promoting active inclusivity' (2012: 234). Her statement also indicates the inclusive nature of the activity, which allows participants to engage with others, be they researchers or other participants, in a way which does not hinder their own self-expression. The most successful way to collect qualitative data about the responses of participants is to record their conversations, notes, and reflections as they complete the activity. Clark and her colleagues 'made use of comments, annotations and verbal reflections of [their] participants, which is not unusual in visual research' (2012: 228). In order to provide a more complete picture of the interpretation of participants, the qualitative data that their commentary provides is beneficial to enhance the more quantitative data that is actually present in the diamond formation itself.

For the purposes of this study, the majority of the interviews occurred via online conferencing software, which were audio recorded with participant and guardian consent. The one in-person interview was audio recorded using a voice recorder. These recordings allowed for accurate transcripts to be written, which provide similar material to enable analysis as would observations and participant notes.

A significant consideration when trying to justify the use of any visual research method is to determine the extent to which such a method is valid, necessary, and sufficient.

Initially, diamond ranking is beneficial to understanding children's responses because it 'is one research tool among many that can provide a stimulus for discussion and debate' (Clark 2012: 233). Since there are several methods that can produce such a discussion, however, there are more specific reasons to choose diamond ranking for the current study. Diamond ranking 'force[s] participants to quantify their preferences and allow[s] the collection of background reasons, through annotations and the constructed diamond' (Woolner 2010: 10). It is this benefit of the activity that makes it important to the present study. It encourages participants to make very difficult comparisons and evaluations in a way that is more engaging than a traditional interview. It also allows them to reflect on the activity in a way that enables them to express their opinions and thoughts without the restrictions that could be imposed by more direct questioning strategies.

Furthermore, as Woolner *et al*. claim, research methods should do more than enable researchers to gather information: 'Visual methods need to be more than ends in themselves' (2010: 18). In their study, they suggest that the diamond ranking activity allowed them to 'contribute to improved understanding and, ultimately, to better design of school setting for learning' (Woolner 2010: 18). A similar goal can be accomplished in the current study. The use of visual research methods like the diamond ranking activity enables children's voices to have a meaningful contribution to scholarly dialogue. In turn, this could reshape scholarship of Tolkien, and perhaps scholarship of fantasy literature as a whole, to be more inclusive and diverse in their approaches to a text.

The final consideration to take into account when providing a justification for using a diamond ranking activity is to demonstrate how such a visual research method is useful as a way to benefit the study participants if possible. Because of its long tradition of being employed in the classroom, diamond ranking activities have a verifiable history of enabling young learners to express their comprehension of a text in meaningful and productive ways. As Clark notes 'the arranging of various items during the diamond rankings certainly appear to assist individual participants in their thinking' (2012: 233). Clark also indicates how the diamond ranking activity can have other positive impacts on students: 'Our intention was not to use diamond ranking merely as a method to collect data from participants, but as a technique to support student voice in its wider sense by facilitating the learning focused, and reflective dialogue with students' (2012: 234). The diamond ranking activity can be employed to empower young participants and encourage them to give their opinions and views more

confidently. It can also expose them to ideas of inclusion and diversity in a meaningful and positive experience.

2.4.3   Activity Description

In the current research study, the diamond ranking method was used to enable young participants to rank the characters of the Fellowship of the Ring from J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. The researcher had at his disposal a sheet which had character descriptions to help participant recall, but no participants requested the sheet (see Appendix B). Twenty-nine of the thirty participants who engaged in the activity were shown a screen with nine character cards and a diamond outline with nine spaces, see Figure 2.[8]
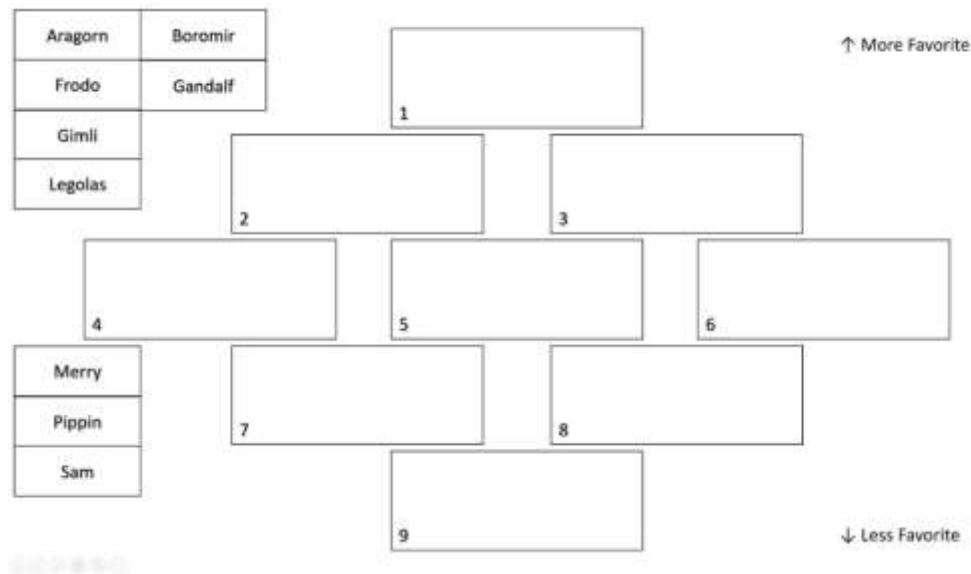
Figure 2 Beginning configuration for Diamond Ranking activity as employed for this study.

The names were placed in alphabetical order along the left side of the screen and this order was made explicit to participants. Each participant was instructed to place the names of the characters in the diamond outline. The order in which they place the names should indicate their level of preference for each character, with the top card being their favourite and the

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[8] One participant completed the activities in a face-to-face interview with the researcher and they therefore received a set of nine small physical cards. Each card had the name of a member of the Fellowship in the middle of it. The remainder of this explanation follows that given in the main text, with the understanding that the participant physically completed the activity described instead of completing it virtually.

bottom card being their least favourite. The rows indicate different levels of preference, but the orders within each row is not important.

After creating the diamond, each participant was asked to explain why they placed characters where they had in the formation. They were also asked specifically whether the relationships between characters or the character's actions had any influence on their placement within the diamond.

The hope was that active discussion fostered by the diamond ranking activity would yield data on how they respond to the characterization and give insight into which characters were the most significant for young readers.

2.5   Photo Elicitation

2.5.1   *Background*

As indicated by Lee D. Parker, photo elicitation is a very important avenue of visual research, and has 'a rich tradition from anthropology, ethnography, and visual sociology' (2005: 1125).

Hurworth *et al.* (2005) presents a history for the use of photographs in interviewing. Here the researchers suggest that photographs were used in the early twentieth century and then fell out of favour until the mid-1970s. They present a small number of researchers in the 1970s who suggested that 'photographs could provide strong evaluation data" (Hurworth *et al*. 2005: 52). They characterize Collier's *Visual Anthropology as a Research Method* as a 'classic', especially the later, revised, 1987 edition. Hurworth *et al*. indicate that, since the late 1980s, there has been an uptick in the number of researchers who use visual interview techniques, but that the field is still relatively underdeveloped and pragmatic guides for research methodology concerning photo interview techniques are rare.

A literature review conducted by Helen Pain indicates two overarching categories found for using visual methods in research. The majority of reasons given by researchers for using visual methods fall into one of two categories: 'those that were aimed at improving the quality and depth of the data collected or subsequently presented and those that pertained to the relationship between participant and researcher' (Pain 2012: 305). These were two of the primary concerns for the present study which the use of visual research methods address.

Researchers have often found that photo elicitation is beneficial in alleviating some of the awkwardness that can occur in an interview environment. Such an observation was made by Collier and Collier, who note how:

> Because photographs are examined by the [researcher] and informants together, the informants are relieved of the stress of being the *subject* of the interrogation. Instead their role can become one of expert guides leading the field worker through the content of the pictures. (1987: 106)

This typically puts the participant in a more relaxed state and allows them to be more candid with their responses to the researcher. Not only does the introduction of photo elicitation alleviate some of the pressure on the participant, it can also help the researcher manage the interview in a less overt or abrupt manner. As Collier and Collier indicate:

> Skilfully presented photographs divert the informants from wandering out of the research area. Without verbal pressure, another photograph drawn from your briefcase will bring the conversation back into the field of study. Photo-interviewing allows for very structured conversation without any of the inhibitive effect of questionnaires or compulsive verbal probes. (Collier & Collier 1987: 106)

This alleviates some of the awkwardness of cross talk or redirection that may at times be necessary when a participant begins to discuss topics which are tangential to the purpose of the research. This helps participants feel more involved in the research and less like an object being studied.

This concept is reinforced by Marcus Banks when he observes that, when using visual research methods, 'research subjects are not treated (or refuse to act) merely as containers of information that is extracted by the research investigator and then analysed and assembled elsewhere' (Banks 2001: 95). This is because 'the introduction of photographs to interviews and conversations sets off a kind of chain reaction: the photographs effectively exercise agency, causing people to do and think things they have forgotten, or to see things they had always known in a new way' (Banks 2001: 95). In essence, the photographs reposition the participant so that they take an active, investigative role, rather than feel like they are being examined. This helps to ease tension and mitigate some of the unequal distribution of power that can occur between a researcher and a research participant.

Epstein claims that visual research is a way 'to make interviews fun and not like a test in school' (Epstein 2006: 2). Because of this inclination, visual research methods 'seemed to offer different ways to elicit the experiences, opinions, and perspectives of children and young people, as well as a new means of involving them as producers of knowledge' (Thomson

2008: 3). It helps to balance the power dynamic in an interview and put the participant at ease as well as deepen their discussion.

Furthermore, visual research methods have been shown to improve the recall of participants as well as their ability to expound on difficult concepts. Hudson and Fivush (1991) demonstrated that 'when interviewed with photographs, the children reported as much information at six years [after the event] as they had in six weeks. Very few errors were made overall and, further, errors did not significantly increase over time' (Salmon 2001: 291). Salmon posits that photographs help to engage young research participants without distracting them with ulterior uses, as is sometimes the case with other interview aids or props:

> A potential advantage of photographs is that they may enhance retrieval but minimize the risk of the additional errors introduced when children interact with the props. Further, to the extent that photographs have an identity primarily as a representation of something else, they may be more helpful as aids to retrieval than toys and scale models for younger preschool children. (2001: 291)

This means that images will help children maintain focus in an interview environment without adding the distraction that can occur from a resource that they can more easily manipulate. Salmon also observes how photographs improve the amount of feedback given to researchers by participants, but cautions that images can also cause errors. While this is true, Salmon clarifies that 'Photographs did not compromise accuracy relative to the verbal-only condition' (2001: 291). This means that participants may make errors, but no more so than when they are simply interviewed without photographs.

Since children gravitate toward visual research methods, studies have tended to adopt such approaches when working with young participants. Some scholars acknowledge a certain efficacy of using visual research methods with younger participants. As Hurworth notes, 'Photo-elicitation seems to be have been [sic] of particular use when working with children and young people' (2005: 53). Perhaps this is because the ability that visual research has to redistribute the power dynamic of the interviewer-interviewee relationship, as mentioned above, or perhaps it is because of the appeal of visual activities to younger participants. These several considerations are clearly summarized and attributed in this passage from Einarsdottir:

> Graue and Walsh (1998) claim that generating data on children challenges one to be creative and find new and different ways to listen to and observe children, and this requires constant improvisation. Barker and Weller (2003) talk about a child-centered research method based upon children's preferred methods of communication as one way of addressing the issue of power relations. Punch (2002) states that using methods

that are more sensitive to children's competencies and interests can enable children to feel more at ease with an adult researcher. (2005: 525)

With so many considerations raised and addressed by visual research methods, it is difficult to make a case for pursuing research with young participants without using them. As Parker notes, 'photo-elicitation offers a vehicle with significant emancipatory potential' precisely because 'it is accessible in today's dominant societal language: the visual' (2005: 1125). In this way, visual research methods give 'a voice to under-represented and silenced groups' like children and helps to overcome 'communication barriers and restrictions' (Parker 2005: 1125). Such observations are not new.

Keeping the limitations of the research method in mind is important, but these limitations are outweighed by the advantages. As Salmon notes, the benefit to memory and accuracy is significant. Beyond these concerns, there is the quite important aspect that 'photo-elicitation offers opportunities for deconstruction and critique of what we thought we already knew' (Parker 2005: 1125). That is, visual research methods allow for open responses that may question and challenge the presuppositions of researchers and interviewers and promote a stronger voice for young research participants.

2.5.2   *Definition, Methods, and Approaches*

Since many scholars regard John Collier as one of the founding figures in the field of photo elicitation, it would be remiss not to incorporate his thoughts on the practice in an attempt to define photo elicitation. Collier's early studies suggest that photo elicitation is a method adopted within an interview setting in order to reach more significant insight than a researcher could achieve with word-based interviews of the same length. He proposes that:

> Photographs can be communication bridges between strangers that can become pathways into unfamiliar, unforeseen environments and subjects. The informational character of photographic imagery makes this process possible. They can function as starting and reference points for discussions of the familiar or the unknown, and their literal content can almost always be read within and across cultural boundaries. (Collier & Collier 1987: 99)

This concise observation contains many of the essential components that researchers associate with photo elicitation. There is a recognition that photographs allow for a greater level of comfort between the interviewee and interviewer and an admission that introducing photographs can lead to unforeseen outcomes in an interview. Finally, there is the suggestion that photographs always incorporate a cultural element into the interviews that may otherwise

be ignored. This latter contention will be discussed in-depth below; however, it is important to note how the current research uses images metaphorically rather than representationally, which alleviates some of these concerns. Many of these aspects of photo elicitation are given as justifications and positive outcomes for using this method as opposed to word-based, semi-structured interviews.

Collier goes on to give detailed explanations for each of these aspects of photo elicitation. He discusses how the comfort that interviewees experience leads to a power shift in the interview process:

> The images invited people to take the lead in inquiry, making full use of their expertise. Normally, interviews can become stilted when probing for explicit information, but the photographs invited open expression while maintaining concrete and explicit reference points. Of course, refined verbal interviewing can achieve the same flow, but the photographs accomplished this end spontaneously… Psychologically, the photographs on the table performed as a third party in the interview session. We were asking questions of the photographs and the informants became our assistants in discovering the answers to these questions in the realities of the photographs. We were exploring the photographs *together*. (Collier & Collier 1987: 105, emphasis in original)

Collier's studies like this act as the prototype for the use of photo elicitation interviews in the qualitative research studies that would follow. Many of his observations about photo elicitation are echoed by researchers writing decades later. For instance, one could see Banks as paraphrasing Collier when he claims that photographs 'serve to bring about a research collaboration between the investigator and subject' (2001: 96). Such a power shift is particularly beneficial when considering children as participants in research. This consideration will be examined further in the section below.

Two final clarifications with regard to photo elicitation need to be made before an elaboration of the method used in the current study can be given. First, there are various ways in which the visual elements necessary for photo elicitation can be provided for the study. Xavier Matteucci indicates that 'a review of literatures indicates that four main versions of photo elicitation have frequently been used in social research' (2013: 191). Each of these versions is characterized by the origins of the visual materials used in the interview. The four categories given by Matteucci are:

- produced by the researcher,
- gathered by the researcher,
- produced by the research participant, or
- gathered by the research participant. (2013: 191)

The current study opted for the second of these four options. There are a number of considerations to review in order to understand how this decision was made. The next section presents justification for not having the participants involved in generating or gathering the photos, followed by a discussion about why the researcher gathered the photos instead of taking original photographs and how this process was conducted.

A second clarification is that there are many ways to conceptualize visual materials when conducting research with them, and the approach chosen for this study needs to be described. In the article 'Photo-Elicitation: Using Photographs to Read Retail Interiors Through Consumers' Eyes', the authors describe how 'within the field of visual research and its methodology, researchers have identified four visual research approaches' (Petermans 2014: 2244). They go on to summarize the four general approaches as follows:

> (1) acknowledging images as data themselves, that is, visual signs and symbols that allow to gain insight in the cultures and people that produced them [sic]; (2) using images as a way to truly document social, cultural and physical processes as they are happening; (3) employing images as stimuli to elicit information from participants whereby the image is produced by someone other than the research participant; and (4) using images to help participants to express their feelings, beliefs and so on, either as an aid to verbal narrative, or in place of it. (Petermans 2014: 2244)

As mentioned above, the current study adopts a methodology in which the researcher gathers photographs for the photo elicitation interview. This indicates that the study falls within the third approach, which is the only one to explicitly mention how the images are not produced by the participant. The images used during the photo elicitation interview for the current study only retained meaning in as much as they are resources for participants to use to craft their own meaning. Any inherent value to the images themselves is only significant in what it helps to elicit from the participant, and is not necessarily significant for the final results of the study.

2.5.3   *Photo Gathering Process*

Practical considerations led to the decision to use researcher-provided visual materials for the current study. The first set of considerations allowed the researcher to determine that it was preferable for the participants to be unencumbered by the responsibility of providing images for the study. First, having preselected images for the interview limited the amount of responsibility and time investment that participants had to make. This is especially important when considering younger participants, as this naturally involves making concessions for the schedules of their guardians as well. Furthermore, it is possible that young participants would

see the responsibility of taking pictures prior to an interview as a form of work, rather than as an enjoyable task. Ethical issues relating to the content of pictures taken by children were also important in making this decision. The photographs produced or gathered by children might show a person who did not consent to be a part of the study. The photographs themselves could be obtained in a manner which would make it impossible to use the photo in publications concerning the study, which would harm the transparency of the project.

Finally, the personal investment which a participant felt toward a photograph which they had produced or gathered might actually inhibit reflection on larger themes or the ability to generalize. As Banks indicates, 'The fact that the images used had only a generalized relevance to the interview subjects meant that a certain distance from personal circumstances could be maintained, allowing the interview to explore broader sociological topics: a displacement from the personal to the social.' (Banks 2001: 95) For these reasons, it was determined that it was preferable for the researcher to provide the materials for the interview.

A second set of considerations helped to determine that researcher-gathered materials were preferable to researcher-produced materials. Most of these considerations focus on the researcher. The first of these is the ease with which images can be gathered in the twenty-first century. As Matteucci indicates, now 'using found-images is convenient due to the large number of images available on the Internet' (2013: 191). The second researcher-driven consideration was cost-efficiency. Notably, using gathered images 'is less expensive in that it reduces the time that the researcher has to spend in the field' (Matteucci 2013: 191). Furthermore, the fact that the interview focuses on imaginary places, and that it would be impossible to gather truly representational photographs contributes to the argument that field work was unnecessary.

A final consideration helps to solidify that researcher-gathered materials were the preferred resources to use in the interview. As the method for the current study uses a dual-set approach to instigate as much feedback as possible, it was important that the researcher would be able to select images that had the potential to further the conversation that was initialized by the research participant. Combine these concerns with a lack of diversity in readily available landscapes and structures in proximity to the researcher, and the unremarkable photographic talent of the researcher, a gathered material method is far preferable to a production method in order to generate images for the study.

The photos used in the interview were selected from three online repositories for public domain digital images: pexels.com/public-domain-images, pixabay.com, and snappygoat.com. The reasons for using public domain images were their ease of availability, cost effectiveness, and ability to be used in various settings (like interviews and publications) without needing to seek permission from groups or individuals responsible for their production. The types of photos selected were all high-resolution, so that quality would not be an influencing factor.

Additionally, images were chosen to avoid showing people where possible. This is not an uncommon practice: 'Images of place were used in both studies rather than people *per se*, which is fairly common in studies that draw on photographs' (Clark 2012: 228). There is a very diverse and intricate set of assumptions and evaluations that viewers make of people, both physically and interactionally, that can be avoided by not incorporating people into images used in the study.

It is important to note that in selecting photos from repositories in this way, the pictures were 'produced by other people for reasons unrelated to the researcher's investigation' (Matteucci 2013: 191). This is significant because it alleviates one of the possible sources of bias in the study. As Pat Thomson indicates, the process of producing an image is inherently subjective in several aspects: '*An image is not neutral. It is literally and socially constructed* by a person or team of people' (2008: 10, emphasis hers). She goes on to elaborate several decisions that are involved in the production of any photograph, including: selection, processing, and editing.

This demonstrates how any image is a carefully constructed cultural artefact that comes with its own subjective background. Thomson continues, stating that 'there are a myriad of such decisions and choices that are made by the image producer' (2008: 10). Furthermore, each of these choices are 'in part determined by virtue of who the person or team is, where they are, what they think is important, their intentions and values, and their historical position and social membership' (Thomson 2008: 10). By gathering the photographs instead of producing them, the researcher takes the images out of the social context in which they were generated. Thomson indicates how this can lead to various interpretations of the same image: '*An image can be read in multiple ways*. Despite the intention of the maker, an image, like any other text, is presented to people who bring their own social and cultural understandings as well as their unique life trajectories to the act of interpretation' (Thomson

2008: 10, emphasis hers). By taking the picture out of its original context, researchers provide a platform that enables variant interpretations of an image.

While this first source of bias is somewhat alleviated, there is still the concern of bias in the researcher's selection of photographs. In any study which incorporates images into the interview process, it is important to recognize that 'just like a word, an image is a human construction and culturally specific' (Thomson 2008: 9). It is necessary to recognize that the images used in research always carry specific cultural markers for both interviewers and interviewees, and that these markers are likely very different from each other. The previous paragraph which indicates how the intent of the image producer does not always align with the interpretation of the viewer acts as a model of this same relationship between researcher and participant: 'Researchers using visual research thus take on board the understandings that their intentions about what images mean will not necessarily be how they are translated, and thus the ways in which their images will be read may not be what they anticipate' (Thomson 2008: 10). This recognition means that researchers have to be aware of their own bias and social investment in the images, this allows them to avoid inserting their own bias into the research interview.[9] In the present study, while my own bias certainly influenced the selection of photographs used in the study, the freedom of selection given to the participants helps to mitigate this bias to some degree as long as there is not reinforcement of bias during the interview itself.

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[9] The images used for this activity are catalogued in Appendix C. For the one physical interview, the images were printed at photo quality, each approximately 5.5"x8", and laminated for protection. Each photograph was assigned a three-digit number for ease of notetaking and reference (Formatted x.x.x). While the numbering itself was assigned in a fashion which was nonrandom, the final numbering which is visible to the participant would appear to be random. The first digit of the number assigned to each photograph corresponds to the setting that the photograph is associated with. The settings are assigned a number starting with one and going in chronological order based on when they appear in the text of *The Fellowship of the Ring*: the Shire (1), Bree (2), Rivendell (3), Moria (4), and Lothlórien (5). The second digit in the number assigned to each photograph indicates which set or subset the picture is a part of. The Primary Set for each setting has a middle digit of zero (0). Each Subset has a second digit between one and four that corresponds with the third digit of the picture in the Primary Set that the Subset is associated with. For instance, each image in the Primary Set for Lothlórien has the first digit five (5), followed by the second digit zero (0), and the third digit which indicates the individual picture's position within the Primary Set (1-4). If the participant were to choose the picture from the Primary Set which is associated with the Rivendell Rock Subset which has a four (4) as its terminal digit, image (5.0.4), then each of the images in the Rivendell Rock Subset has a four (4) as its second digit. The final digit for each image was assigned based on the alphabetical order that the images occupied within the Primary Set or Subset before the names of the images were changed for the purposes of this study. This means that the current numbering has no association with the names given to the images throughout this investigation.

2.5.4   Activity Description

In the current research study, photo elicitation interviews are used to enable young participants to reflect on five settings from *The Fellowship of the Ring* by J.R.R. Tolkien. Each participant who engaged in the activity was shown a slideshow to work through the activity. For each setting, there was a title slide followed by the Primary Set and all Subsets for the setting. The actions for the slideshow were developed in such a way that, for each setting, participants would only see the title slide, followed by the Primary Set, followed by the Subset which corresponds to their chosen picture from the Primary Set.

On the title slide for each setting was the name of one of the five settings from Tolkien's Middle-earth under discussion: Shire, Bree, Rivendell, Moria, and Lothlórien. Under the name was a brief account of the major plot elements that occur at the location in order to aid the participant's memory. These descriptions were carefully written so as to avoid any sensory description of the setting itself (see Appendix B).

As the interview moved to discussion of each new setting, the researcher read the description to the participant and then asked if they remembered the location. If they did, the activity proceeded with the following steps. If the participant did not remember the setting, it was discarded and the next setting chosen. This final contention did not have to be employed during the study.

Once the participant indicated that they remembered the setting, they were presented a set of four images. The first set of four images for each location is called the Primary Set (see Figure 3). For each setting, the photos for the Primary Set were chosen for their distinguishability from one another. The Primary Set for the Shire serves as a good example of this decision-making process: one picture shows a river with rocky banks set in the midst of a thick woodland (Image 1.0.4), the second picture shows a grassy meadow with copses of trees (Image 1.0.2), the third picture shows a very mountainous region from an aerial view (Image 1.0.3), the final picture is taken from within a forest and depicts a large number of trees (Image 1.0.1). Each Primary Set is intended to allow the participant to formalize their general impression of the setting.
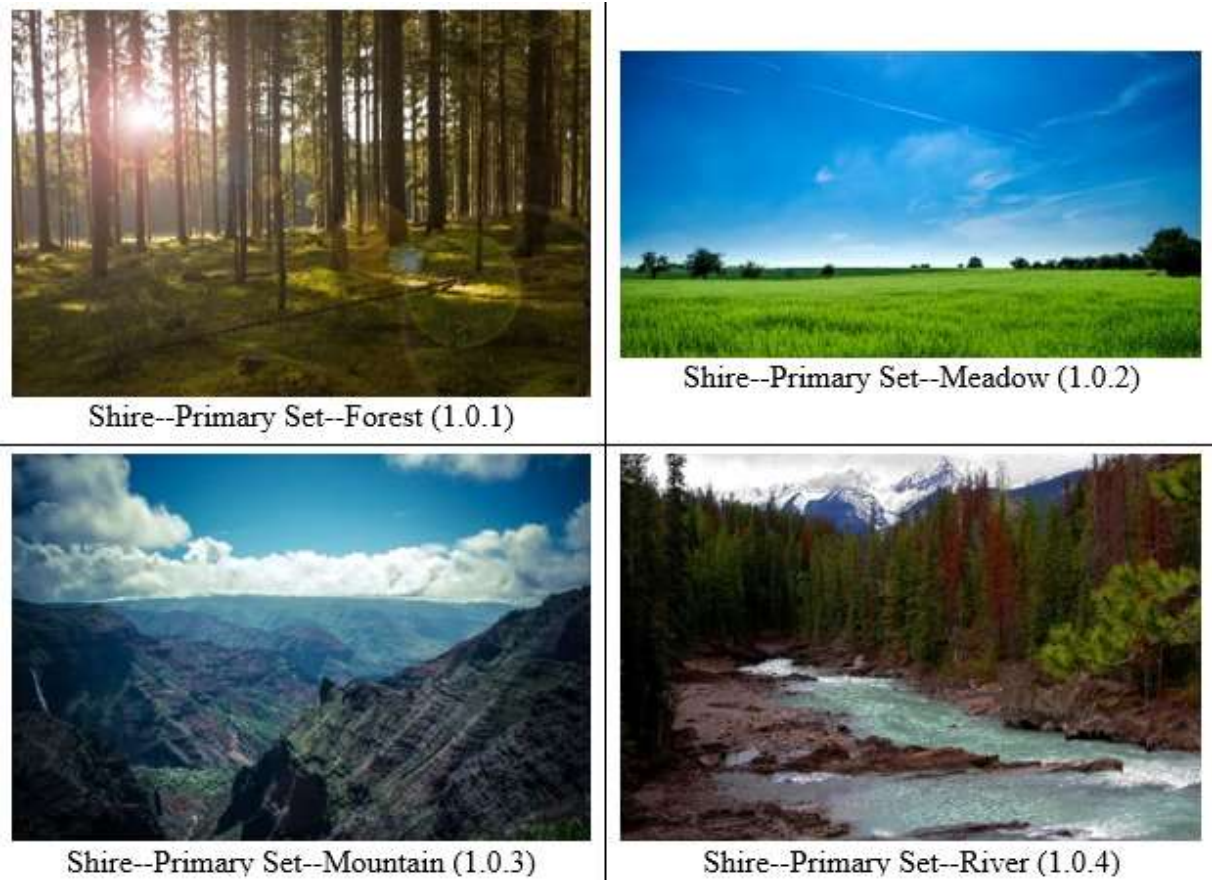
Figure 3 Shire Primary Set for photo elicitation interview

The participant was then asked to select the photo from the Primary Set which aligned with their perception of the setting being discussed. Participants sometimes struggled with their selection and were encouraged to 'think out loud' and, if necessary, were assisted by probes from the researcher (e.g. is there one picture that *does not* remind you of the setting?). Once the participant selected one of the four photos, they were asked a series of questions about their reasons for choosing the picture. The questions were designed to elicit a justification for their choice. The researcher also asked a few questions designed to get the participants to reflect on how their perception of the text informed of their selection (see Appendix D for interview protocols). After discussion of the Primary Set was completed, the researcher employed a Subset of four pictures.

Each setting has four Subsets. Each Subset is associated with one of the pictures from the Primary Set. These pictures were chosen for their diversity as well, but each contains a major element(s) of the picture chosen from the Primary Set. Going back to the example of the Shire: a good demonstration of how a Subset functions is the Subset associated with the

picture of the grassy meadow with copses of trees (see Figure 4). The entire Subset shares the prevailing feature of the photo selected from the Primary Set. Therefore, all of the pictures in the Subset associated with the grassy meadow (the Shire Meadow Subset) are of flatlands but have distinguishing characteristics. One is a very lush, open field with tall green grass (Image 1.2.3), one is a field of sunflowers (Image 1.2.2), one shows a field which is seemingly in an arid climate and has a mountain in the background (Image 1.2.1), and the final picture shows a large expanse of tilled farmland (Image 1.2.4). I have provided the Shire Meadow Subset below for reference, and all of the images used can be found in Appendix E.

Shire--Meadow Subset--Arid (1.2.1)

Shire--Meadow Subset--Flowers (1.2.2)

Shire--Meadow Subset--Green (1.2.3)

Shire--Meadow Subset--Brown (1.2.4)
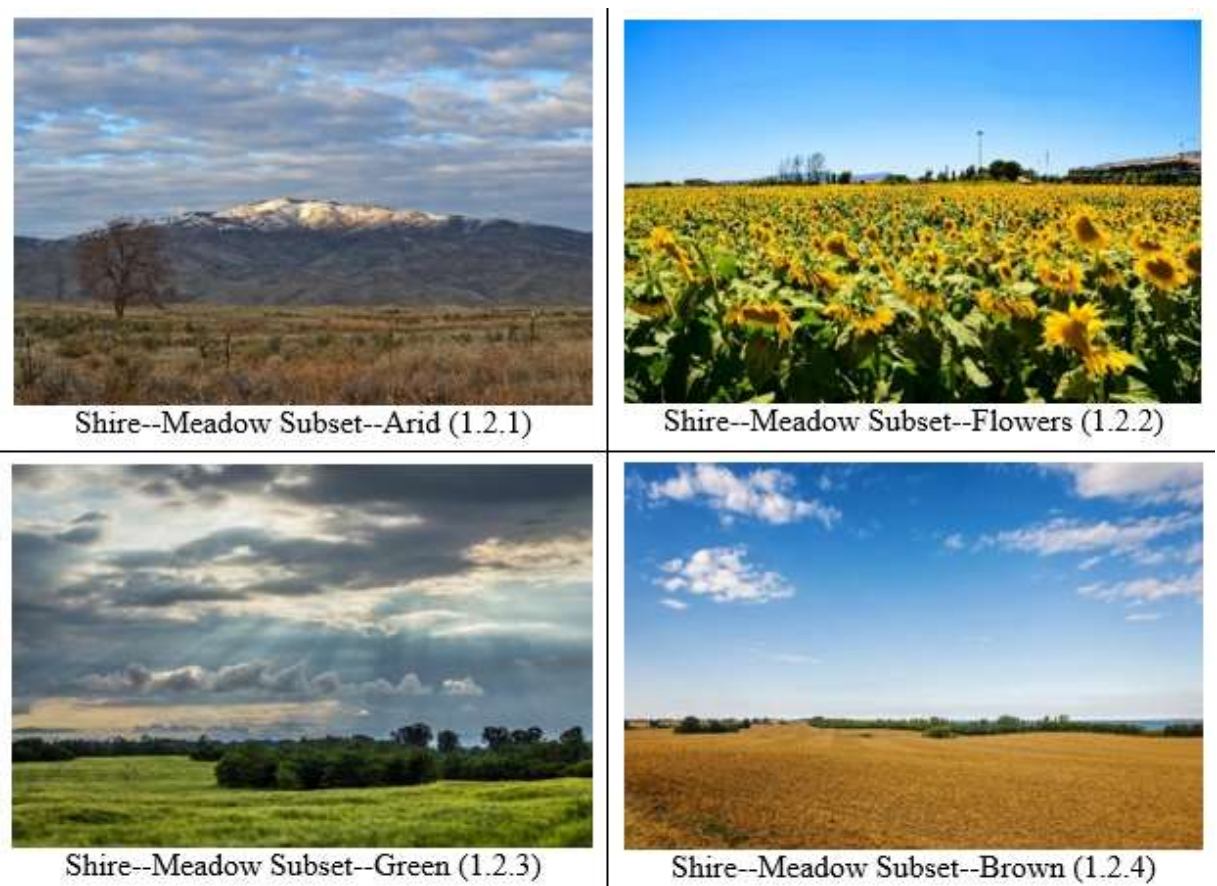
Figure 4 Shire Meadow Subset for photo elicitation interview

The fact that this Subset shares the major feature of the first picture selected by the participant means that the participant had to make further decisions about what was important in their perception of the setting discussed in order to choose their preferred picture from the Subset. Once the participants chose their preferred picture from the Subset, the researcher

repeated the questions asked during discussion of the Primary Set. Once these questions were answered, the interview moved on to the next setting.

As the discussion of cultural markers above indicates, there were times when the major feature of the picture from the Primary Set that the researcher assumed was not the most important element of a picture for participants. For instance, one participant did not think that any of the pictures in the Rivendell Primary Set looked like Rivendell. In such instances, the structure of the interview had to be adapted to the needs of the participant. There was one instance where a participant did not choose a picture from a Primary Set, but was able to choose among several pictures that the researcher culled based on their general description of the setting. In two other instances, the researcher was forced to use a different Subset than the one associated with the picture that the participants chose from the Primary Set because of the way that the participant discussed what was important in the picture. These decisions were made with the realization that ultimately the participant's discussion of the setting was more important than the structure of the activity. Such aberrations are noted in the analysis when they are significant.

After completing the preceding steps for each setting, the participant was thanked for their time, reminded of their rights as a participant in the study, and told that they had completed the interview.

2.6   Interview Protocols

The researcher initially used an eight question semi-structured interview protocol with the diamond ranking activity, and a seven question semi-structured interview protocol with the photo elicitation interview (see Appendix D).

While this structure was meant to elicit further responses from participants, and to make qualitative data easier to analyse, there were certainly responses that did not fall within the confines of such a formal structure. It is important to note that 'the analytical shift in the social sciences away from positivism and its static view of social facts, towards a more processual and contingent view of social knowledge makes following the unexpected and unanticipated a methodological necessity' (Banks 2001: 74). This means that the researcher must allow participants to reflect honestly and openly on their perceptions and ideas, and then

cater the interview to each individual participant. The original script was preserved as much as possible, but several allowances were made.

2.7   Recording

Collier and Collier note that recording can sometimes be a barrier to meaningful conversation in an interview. They state that: 'Ordinarily, note taking during interviews can raise blocks to free-flowing information, making responses self-conscious and blunt. Tape recorders sometimes stop interviews cold' (Collier & Collier 1987: 105-106). In their experience, however, using a visual research method like photo elicitation alleviates this tendency. They indicate that, when using photo elicitation, 'making notes was totally ignored, probably because of the triangular relationship in which all questions were directed at the photographic content, not at the informants' (Collier & Collier 1987: 106). The way in which visual research methods make the interview process seem more like a cooperative activity and less like a transaction enables a higher level of comfort between the interviewer and the participant.

Collier and Collier also note how the use of photo elicitation shifts the focal point of the interview, or at least the participant, onto an object instead of onto the participant alone. Because of this, the interview feels more objective to participants:

> This objectivity allows and invites the use of a notebook or even tape recorder… For the anthropologist is making notes *about the photographs*, it appears, not writing down incriminating judgments about the informant's life (though often the hypnotic pull of the photographs does trigger very great confidences). Photographic interviewing offers a detachment that allows the maximum free association possible within structured interviewing. (Collier & Collier 1987: 106-107, emphasis in original)

Taking the preceding considerations into account, it was predicted that the use of an audio recorder would not have a marked impact on the quality of participant responses or the interviews as a whole. Therefore, the current study employed audio recordings of both the diamond ranking activity and the photo elicitation interview so that the researcher could accurately transcribe the interactions at a later time. Since almost all of the interviews took place using video conferencing software, the recording software employed was non-invasive.

Chapter Three

The Question of Genre

3.1   Introduction

My survey asked participants several questions concerning genre and type in order to provide qualitative information about how they classify *The Lord of the Rings*. The first question of the questionnaire that addressed genre (question six-see Appendix A) asked participants what 'type of story' they see *The Lord of the Rings* as. The goal of this question was to be as open-ended as possible so that participants could emphasize the aspects of the story that they thought were most important in determining what kind of story the book is.

The next two questions utilized a different approach to parse how young readers identified the genre of *The Lord of the Rings*. Question seven gave participants twelve genres and asked them to pick the 'kind of story *The Lord of the Rings* is'. The genres in this question were not randomly selected by the researcher. Instead, the set of story types is exactly the same as the one used by Martin Barker, Ernest Mathijs, and their associates in the study which is most completely documented in the book *Watching The Lord of the Rings: Tolkien's World Audience* (2008). I adopted this set of story types because it had been effectively employed with a large and diverse population in their research, and only needed two small modifications to work in the current study. These alterations were as follows: Their option 'SFX film' was changed to 'science fiction' because the text in question was a book and the acronym 'SFX' assumed a base knowledge that could not necessarily be expected for the young readers of this study. Also, this study added the option 'None of these' to allow participants to reflect on a wider range of options if they felt the need to. Question eight asked readers to justify their response to question seven. It employed an open-ended why question to allow for a wide variety of feedback.

Unfortunately, when producing the questionnaires for the study, the page break moved so that the question which asked participants to pick a specific genre for the story out of a list (question seven) followed question six directly on the page. Therefore, it is impossible to assume that the appearance of genre types on the same page as this open-ended question did not influence the participants' response to this question. Therefore, the means of analysis

employed here is to treat both answers as a means of discussing which genre they selected from the question with set responses. If their opinion of the story seems different between questions six and eight, these differences are noted and discussed.

Each of the following genres received at least one vote in question seven: fantasy, quest, good versus evil, epic, allegory, myth/legend, and threatened homeland. The genres that did not accrue a single vote include: fairytale, game-world, science fiction, spiritual journey, and war story. The participants also had the option to choose 'none of these', and this option was never selected. In Table 1 below, I have given the number of times that each genre was selected by participants.

Genre	Number of Participants
Allegory	2
Epic	4
Fairytale	0
Fantasy	8
Game-world	0
Good vs evil	5
Quest	8
Myth/Legend	2
Science Fiction	0
Spiritual journey	0
Threatened homeland	1
War story	0
None of these	0

Table 1 Number of participants who selected each genre in question seven of the questionnaire.

I will analyse why participants selected certain genres in question seven by discussing their answers to questions six and eight of the questionnaire. Again, the first of these questions asked open-endedly what type of story the book was, and the second asked them to justify their answer to question seven. For ease of analysis, these genres have been split into three groups. The first group is comprised of the two genres 'fantasy' and 'quest'. These two genres are grouped together because they are evenly indicated as the most prevalent opinion for the genre of *The Lord of the Rings* by this sample of readers. The second group contains the two genres 'good vs. evil' and 'epic'. These genres are not as prevalent as those in the first group, and only received four or five votes when participants considered the genre of the story. The final group contains the three genres of 'allegory', 'myth/legend', and 'threatened homeland'.

The genres in this group are the least prevalent of the genres indicated by this population sample, and each only received one or two votes as being indicative of the genre of the story. As explained above, the genres of fairytale, game-world, science fiction, spiritual journey, and war story are not discussed here, as they were not selected by study participants.

3.2   Group 1

3.2.1   Fantasy

The fantasy genre was selected by eight participants of the study. This makes it one of the most recognized genres for the text, tied with the quest genre. Of the participants who chose fantasy as the genre for *The Lord of the Rings,* most participants did not change the way that they discussed the most important features of the story between questions six and eight. This could indicate that their answer for question six was influenced by the vocabulary given in question seven.

Many participants who chose the fantasy genre also mentioned the genres of epic or myth in their discussions. For instance, 17A saw the story as 'an epic, high-fantasy tale, and in some ways, it is like a tribute to the mythologies and epics of the past'. Similarly, 18A described the book as 'an epic fantasy story focusing on good versus evil, but also as a part of a whole mythology that Tolkien created'. A couple of participants also thought the idea of a quest was important. 19A called it 'a fantasy quest story', and 29A admitted that 'it's sort of a quest' in addition to being a fantasy.

Most of these participants also indicated that the setting played an important role in their decision. 8A provided a good overview of this perspective when he explained that 'I choose "fantasy" because, even though it has elements from the other categories, it takes place in a fantastical setting'. A few other participants indicated that setting was a major consideration when choosing the fantasy genre. How other people classify the story was also important for about half of the participants who consider it a fantasy. 18A noted how 'it's typically categorized as a fantasy novel or an epic fantasy'. Participants 23A and 29A also indicated that they thought about how others normally classify the story. 23A went so far as to claim that 'it like literally defines the fantasy genre'.

The number of participants who changed the way they talked about the story before and after answering question seven was small by comparison. Only two had drastically different discussions. 3A spoke very pointedly before the genre question, claiming that the book was 'a section in the history of Middle-earth'. After the genre question, he also spoke in a very pointed manner, but with different considerations: he claimed that 'the characters and settings are classic fantasy'. It seems that he uses the vocabulary readily provided by Tolkien (e.g. 'history' of Middle-earth) in order to define *The Lord of the Rings* prior to question seven. After question seven, however, 3A takes on a new vocabulary to describe the genre of the story. It may be that providing a list of specific genres allows participants to recall and employ words and terms that they otherwise might not. This is an important trend to be aware of as we continue in this examination of genre.

11A also shifted his discussion a bit. He started by addressing the plot of the story as 'an adventure tale' in which 'they are trying to travel across…the map to try to get to the volcano, which probably qualifies as an adventure'. After question seven, though, he focused more on the setting and characters than the plot: '*Lord of the Rings* is basically a fantasy world, I would say. There's monsters you can't find here, like some trolls and stuff like that' (11A). It seems that, to 11A, the term fantasy applies to the story because of the creatures and the setting. This agrees somewhat with the way that the other participants who chose this genre discuss their decision above. It seems, therefore, that the world created by Tolkien is the most important element of the story when defining it as a fantasy to these participants. It also appears that a secondary concern is the existence of creatures or characters that participants feel could not exist in the world as they experience it.

It is difficult to compare and contrast the responses of young readers to scholarship defining the fantasy genre because scholars have had a difficult time finalizing a definition. One of the most influential attemtenapts to do so comes from Brian Attebery's *Strategies of Fantasy* (1992). In the text, Attebery defines fantasy by using the concept of a fuzzy set that he borrows from logicians. In essence, he contends that a genre is defined by the texts that are most consistently placed at the centre of the genre and is comprised of texts that have a similar features or techniques. This results in genres that have unclear boundaries, rather than fixed walls. While this definition is helpful to combat overly-rigid implementations of the ideas of genre, there are some complications that arise for this conception when compared to the current study.

Initially, Attebery places *The Lord of the Rings* at the centre of the fantasy genre based on fourteen responses to a questionnaire that he developed for critics of fantasy literature. The current study has more than double the sample size and, arguably, includes a more representative sample of popular ideas of fantasy than did Attebery's. Since only eight out of the thirty participants in this study rated *The Lord of the Rings* as a fantasy text at all, this could potentially undermine Attebery's case by contesting the one piece of objective evidence that he presents. If, however, we still follow Attebery's model of the fuzzy set based on his own insights in the book rather than the results of his questionnaire, there are still problems to be found with regard to the current study. In his latest work, *Stories about Stories: Fantasy and the Remaking of Myth*, Attebery still holds onto this way of defining the genre. In fact, here he claims that "Fuzzy set theory does not say much about history, audience, or purpose, but it does not conflict with those perspectives, either" (Attebery 2014: 34). The current study, however indicates that there is significant conflict between the perception of young readers and Attebery's definition.

This is a significant point, since as recently as 2008 scholars such as Farah Mendlesohn have insisted that 'the debate over definition is now long-standing, and a consensus has emerged, accepting as a viable "fuzzy set," a range of critical definitions of fantasy' in the second sentence of her *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (xiiv). Furthermore, when it came time for Mendlesohn to partner with Edward James in editing *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature* in 2012, the two recognized Attebery's attempt to define fantasy literature as 'the most valuable theoretical text for taking a definition of fantasy beyond preference and intuition' in their introduction (1).

For now, it is important to note that less than a third of the study participants indicated that *The Lord of the Rings* belonged in the genre of fantasy. As this chapter progresses, we will discuss other genres that young readers indicated that *The Lord of the Rings* may belong to and their reasons for this decision. The question still remaining is whether these conversations give any indication of how the placement of *The Lord of the Rings* may have shifted since Attebery's definition. We will revisit this question in the conclusion of this chapter once we have discussed several others genres (p. 147).

3.2.2   Quest

The other most commonly chosen genre for *The Lord of the Rings*, also being chosen by eight participants, was the quest genre. Notably, in an inverse trend from those who chose the fantasy genre, only one participant who chose the quest genre did not change the way that he discussed the important elements of the story before and after question seven. The other seven participants all changed their discussion.

To begin with, the participant who remained consistent before and after question seven focused on how the book defined the story as a quest and later focused specifically on the plot to destroy the Ring. Before the genre question, 12B gave specific instances where he saw '*The Fellowship of the Ring*, Book IV, and Part one of book VI, as a quest, book III as a war story, (Rohan vs. Isengard), and book V as a war story too, all books falling under good versus evil in fantasy'. It is important to note, that all of the terms that 12B uses to describe the genre of the book are present in question seven. This seems to be a clear example of the terms used in question seven influencing the way that the participant answered question six. Regardless, his tendency to see multiple genres in the story reflects what the participants who chose the fantasy genre mentioned in their discussions covered in the previous section (p. 103). It is also important to note that, even though he used several of the terms from question seven to form his answer, he ultimately chose the quest genre in question seven.

After question seven, 12B went on to claim that his decision about what genre to choose ultimately boiled down to a consideration of the plot of the story: he wrote that none of the genres available in question seven provided 'a blend of good versus evil, quest, war story, and epic' so he decided to choose quest because 'the basic plot is the ruin of Sauron and the One Ring' (12B). The impulse demonstrated by this participant seems to be the opposite of the one that most of the participants who chose the fantasy genre espouse. While those participants decided what genre to choose based on how inclusive they feel the term presented in question seven to be, 12B selected the quest genre because of what he deemed to be the most significant element in the plot. He seems to regard specificity as a higher priority than inclusivity with regard to categorizing the story.

Unlike the participants who chose fantasy as the genre for the story, those who chose quest overwhelmingly changed the way they spoke about the story after question seven. Seven participants who selected this genre changed the way they discussed their choice of genre between questions six and eight.

Many participants who chose the quest genre initially talked about the story as a fantasy. 1A believed that the book is 'an adventure story. And it's obviously very thought-out, too. It's actually kind of like a fantasy history-book'. 6A also saw the book as 'an adventure/fantasy' and went on to claim that 'the whole series is like that'. 10A, 12A, 21A, and 26A all agreed with this perspective, mentioning fantasy at some point in their early discussion. Most of them suggested that the story is more than simple fantasy, as we see in the responses of 1A and 6A. These observations agree with 12B, whose responses reflect the complex understanding of the genres exhibited by the story.

After choosing quest as the genre of the book in question seven, 1A justified her response by saying that 'the whole book is their journey to throw the Ring into the fire. But it's also about a war, and it's also about good vs. evil, and it's also a fairy-tale/fantasy, and it's also they are going on the journey because they have a threatened homeland'. In a way, her response arrives at a similar place to several of the other participants' answers before the question. Just as with 12B's answer to question six and 3A's answer to question eight, 1A's justification adopts the vocabulary of question seven in order to explain her response.

Most other participants demonstrated a preference for discussing the plot of the story *after* they decided that it is a quest. 9A demonstrated this tendency when she described how 'when you break down the story, you end up with the quest to destroy the Ring'. 10A went a little further than the others. He indicated that there is more than one quest portrayed in the story:

> I think the part with Frodo, Sam, and Gollum, to me, it seems more like the main story because it deals specifically with the Ring and that's… more like a quest to go destroy the Ring. I also think a little bit of the part with Aragorn. He's kind of on a quest to regain his mantle of king. (10A)

These participants, then, make the same kind of consideration that 12B made when selecting the quest genre. Instead of attempting to find a more inclusive term for the entire story, they focused on specific elements within the text that they perceive to be the most important. In all instances, participants who chose quest as the genre for the story focused primarily on plot elements rather than character elements or setting elements.

The tendency to focus on the plot rather than the characters or setting of the story is well attested in scholarship. One of the first reviewers to become captivated with Tolkien's use of the archetypal quest narrative was none other than famed English poet W.H. Auden. In his essay 'The Quest Hero' he begins by defining a quest. He claims that 'to go in quest means

to look for something of which one has, as yet, no experience; one can imagine what it will be like but whether one's picture is true or false will be known only when one has found it' (Auden 2004: 31-32). This definition provides the foundation for the remainder of his explication of *The Lord of the Rings* and several other works.

To lend more specificity to his argument, Auden enumerates six 'essential elements' of a quest. These elements include:

1. A precious Object and/or Person to be found and possessed or married.

2. A long journey to find it, for its whereabouts are not originally known to the seekers.

3. A hero. The precious Object cannot be found by anybody, but only by the one person who possesses the right qualities of breeding or character.

4. A Test or series of Tests by which the unworthy are screened out, and the hero revealed.

5. The Guardians of the Object must be overcome before it can be won. They may be simply a further test of the hero's *aréte*, or they may be malignant in themselves.

6. The Helpers who with their knowledge and magical powers assist the hero and but for whom he would never succeed. (Auden 2004: 35-36)[10]

He then traces how these elements are portrayed over the course of *The Lord of the Rings*, particularly with regard to Frodo as the main character. Naturally, the One Ring meets Auden's first requirement for a Quest. For the second element, Frodo takes on a long and laborious journey to destroy the Ring. Although Frodo seems like an unlikely candidate to meet the requirements of the third element in the list, Auden demonstrates how Frodo is not a hero based on talent, but on determination and willingness to complete the quest. The fourth element is rather self-explanatory as Frodo undergoes several dire circumstances and overcomes multiple obstacles in order to destroy the Ring. As for the guardians and helpers, Auden carefully traces how each of them finds their resonance throughout the course of the narrative (e.g. Gollum, Sam, and Gandalf each act as guides for Frodo at different points in the journey). Importantly, while Auden mentions characters in this list of essential elements, it is evident that he cares more for the narrative function of these characters than their actual portrayal. This aligns with the kinds of observations made by participants as they focus more on the plot than the characters or settings.

Auden's attention to detail and his willingness to thoroughly trace every element of the plot of *The Lord of the Rings* and identify those elements which conform to his predetermined list of requirements firmly illustrates how *The Lord of the Rings* fits into this quest narrative

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[10] Here, Auden seems to be using *arête* in the classic Greek sense of excellence or moral virtue.

archetype. While Auden's analysis is very good at identifying the story as falling into a particular trope, the reader is left with the distinct feeling that there is yet more to say on the significance of the quest in terms of literary form and how this can inform readers and/or readings of *The Lord of the Rings*.

Auden's commitment to diagnosing the quest in Tolkien's work has certainly had an influence on Tolkien scholarship. Many scholars have observed, and now take for granted, the fact that the story of *The Lord of the Rings* is a quest narrative which is undertaken by the Fellowship, more specifically by Frodo. In fact, in *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy* (1996), David Langford and Roz Kaveney use Tolkien's work as one of their prime examples of how fantasy can consciously join both 'external quest' and 'internal quest' to demonstrate how 'full self-recognition combines with the gaining of an external goal in a tale whose various elements interweave, generating a sense of full story' (Clute and Grant 1996: 796). They, therefore, demonstrate the primacy that Tolkien's quest narrative holds in the minds of scholars who write about fantasy literature.

The assumption of a quest narrative in *The Lord of the Rings* has become so accepted that some scholars casually declare it in the first paragraph of their essays; for example, in the first sentence of a chapter, Lionel Basney asserts that '*The Lord of the Rings* is the story of the quest, and of the world in which the quest takes place, a world in which it can be meaningful' (2004: 184). He highlights the quest structure of the narrative, the essential world-building to make the story believable, and the effectiveness of this combination in conveying meaning in a single sentence. Many scholars spend entire articles, or even volumes, unpacking these seemingly casual observations. One such scholar is Anne C. Petty.

In her monograph *One Ring to Bind Them All: Tolkien's Mythology* (1979), Petty proposes to look at Tolkien's use of the quest from the perspective of Joseph Campbell. She claims that 'the universal myth of the hero's quest is perhaps the most perennial form of opposition and mediation found in folklore and mythology, supplying as it does "significant motifs of perils, obstacles, and good fortunes on the way"' (Petty 1979: 10, quoting Campbell). Petty goes on to propose a structure, rather than a series of elements, for describing the hero's quest. She claims that 'the classic stages of the hero's quest agreed upon by most scholars of folklore, sociology, and comparative mythology' are those of '*separation* (usually from the community), *initiation* (transition from childhood to maturity), [and] *return*

(knowledge gained)' (Petty 1979: 10, emphasis Petty's). She then uses this framework to analyse *The Lord of the Rings* on a metaphysical level.

In the end, Petty concludes her monograph by explaining the effect that the well-composed quest narrative of *The Lord of the Rings* has on readers. She claims that, because of Tolkien's use of the quest archetype 'a reading of Tolkien's trilogy is an experience rather than an intellectual exercise' (Petty 1979: 103). She contends that Tolkien 'successfully dramatizes rather than explicates the age-old patterns' found in myth and the quest (Petty 1979: 103). This leads readers to identify with the protagonists of the story.

The use of scenes such as Frodo's harrowing climb of Mount Doom, she claims, resonates with readers on a metaphysical level. This allows Petty to conclude: 'that the world of Middle-earth seems so real to so many readers of Tolkien's subcreation does not appear surprising in this light, for the experiences of the characters are universally valid, no matter how other-worldly their trappings may be' (1979: 104). Appealing to an archetype that readers are familiar with and have an ingrained knowledge of, if not appreciation for, lends itself well to the reader's experience. Perhaps her most pithy statement to this effect is that 'the validity and truth of the quest lie[s] within each of us, in the mythic consciousness' (Petty 1979: 104). Once again she suggests that this archetypal appeal rises to the level of the mythic when it reaches a receptive reader.

In *There Would Always Be a Fairy tale: More Essays on Tolkien*, Verlyn Flieger revisits the concepts of journey and quest. She argues that 'in the most general sense, both [*The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*] follow the traditional romance trajectory – a hero's journey and return' (Flieger 2017: 210). She goes on, though, to distinguish between the two as illustrating different kinds of journey: 'each kind is signaled by its keyword: *aventure* for *The Hobbit*, *quest* for *The Lord of the Rings*' (Flieger 2017: 210). She supports this claim using textual evidence in which several characters mention the 'quest' that Frodo must accomplish.[11] She also illustrates how Tolkien's attempts to rewrite *The Hobbit* in the style of *The Lord of the Rings* was an attempt to elevate it from an adventure to a quest. She expounds upon her observation of Tolkien's conceptual difference between adventure and quest with the following summary of the two works:

> Frodo's journey is in a different key from Bilbo's…because he was conscious of a
> different authorial purpose. Bilbo had *aventures* – dangerous escapades exciting for

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[11] The word 'quest' is used more than twenty-five times in *The Lord of the Rings*, and more than half of those occur in *Fellowship of the Ring*.

their own sake, ending in peace and prosperity for the Elves, Men, and Dwarves, and
for Bilbo himself. Frodo goes on a *quest* – a journey as careless for soul as for body –
with a fixed purpose, a goal beyond itself. (Flieger 2017: 210)

While her ultimate goal in this section is to illustrate the way in which French romance
influenced Tolkien's writing, along the way Flieger expertly explains how the different
archetypes to which Tolkien appeals in his two works change the way that readers respond to
the texts. The adventure of Bilbo has several contained, discrete episodes which are
magnifying in intensity as the book continues, whereas Frodo's journey has a singular
mission, but also has to overcome obstacles along the way. The former focuses on the way in
which the action changes the character, the latter focuses on the way in which the action
changes Middle-earth.

David M. Waito begins his article by claiming that the concept of the quest has been
variously identified and critiqued throughout Tolkien scholarship. He summarizes: 'the quest
narrative of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* (*LotR*) has been a thoroughly discussed,
analysed, and deconstructed element of Tolkien's epic novel since its first publication in 1954'
(Waito 2010: 155). He thus situates his own article as taking part in this lengthy conversation.
He admits that the primary focus of scholarship addressing the idea of the quest is the mission
to destroy the Ring, stating 'critics and essayists have carefully critiqued the quest to destroy
the Ring (the Ring Quest), assuming it to be the central conflict of the story' (Waito 2010:
155); however, Waito decides to focus on a different quest narrative: 'a quest to save the Shire
(the Shire Quest), which overarches the Ring Quest in the narrative' (2010: 155). The rest of
the paper is spent exploring how both of these plot arcs fulfil the demands of the quest
narrative, with particular emphasis placed on the Shire Quest.

Another scholar who expands the understanding of the quest structure employed
throughout *The Lord of the Rings* is Janeen Webb in her article 'The Quests for Middle-earth'.
Unlike critics who focus mostly on the actions of Frodo from a quest perspective, she contends
that the 'tale [is] composed of an intricately interwoven series of quests which provide a
complex structural basis for the work' (Webb 1992: 161). She draws on the work of some of
the scholars who discuss the multiple heroes in *The Lord of the Rings* in order to make such a
claim. Webb demonstrates how Tolkien's story:

includes sequences which range from the messianic death and resurrection of Gandalf
to the low-key fairytale quests of Merry and Pippin, but the main narrative attention is
focused upon the interlocking quests of Aragorn and Frodo: two distinct but
complementary narrative sequences undertaken simultaneously by very different

protagonists whose actions are drawn respectively from the epic and fairytale forms. (1992: 161)

Webb sees many of the main characters of the text as fulfilling their own quest journey. She does, however, recognize the significance of Frodo's quest as the central pillar of the plot. This contention is very similar to the observations made by participants 9A and 10A above.

Anna Caughey also believes that there are multiple quests presented in the text. In her essay 'The Hero's Journey' she claims that 'the text works successfully in both the adventure-story and elegiac modes because *The Lord of the Rings* offers the reader not one quest-narrative or Hero's Journey but several, which run simultaneously in a number of registers and at a number of levels' (Caughey 2014: 404). She argues that the way Tolkien employs these multiple narratives helps the work appeal to multiple audiences, including various age ranges. Her chapter culminates in a quite convincing argument which is particularly relevant to the current study:

> Throughout *The Lord of the Rings* Tolkien draws heavily upon multiple versions of the Hero's Journey. One of the keys to the novel's complexity and appeal as both a children's book and a text for adults is its use of multiple quest narratives combined into a single story using the medieval romance technique of *entrelacement*… Ultimately, the multiplicity of heroic journeys, characters, and modes that this combination makes available provide some of the greatest pleasures that the text has to offer, no matter the age of the reader. (Caughey 2014: 415)

Not only does Caughey indicate Tolkien's employment of multiple quest narratives, but she also postulates how these narratives function to engage the attention of readers at differing levels of maturity. Such an analysis helps to reveal one of the appeals that the text could have for younger readers. This perspective resonates with some of the findings of this study.

The contributions of Waito, Webb, and Caughey are reminiscent of the way that participants 9A and 10A recognize that the narrative surrounding the Ring represents a quest. Similarly, 10A also recognises that both Frodo and Aragorn have their own quests to complete over the course of the text. In all, there are many similarities between the scholars who discuss the theme of the quest and the observations made by this group of participants.

The genre of the quest as portrayed in *The Lord of the Rings* is very complex, and scholars continue to debate whether or not it conforms to all of the characteristics typical of the trope. Several scholars have found it convenient to cast the story of *The Lord of the Rings* as an 'anti-quest' to highlight the way in which the plot differs from a typical quest narrative.

This observation is usually attributed to Tom Shippey in his monograph *The Road to Middle-earth: How J.R.R. Tolkien Created a New Mythology*. In a passage where Shippey is addressing the work of Leonard Jackson, he notes that 'one thing absolutely certain about *The Lord of the Rings* is that it is about renunciation: it inverts a very familiar narrative pattern, in that it is not a quest to obtain something, but an anti-quest, to get rid of it' (2003: 324). Here he illuminates why many scholars have sought a negative terminology rather than appeal to the traditional archetype of the quest, because Frodo does not seek to gain something from his journey. The fact that the goal of the text is to relinquish power, the destruction of the Ring being the most literal depiction of this movement in the text, has problematised the story's depiction as a quest for some critics. Other scholars who have made similar observations include Flieger (2004), Curry (2004), and Webb (1992).

3.2.3   Conclusion

Participants chose fantasy and quest with equal frequency on question seven of the questionnaire. Between them, the two genres in this group represent the preferred classification of more than half of the participants in the study. There are a few conclusions, then, which seem significant about this group.

Initially, there seem to be two impulses guiding these participants as they try to define what genre *The Lord of the Rings* falls into. The first impulse is demonstrated by most of the participants who chose fantasy as the genre. These participants frequently chose fantasy because they felt that the term was more inclusive than the other terms found in the list. The second impulse was demonstrated more by the participants who chose quest as the genre for the story. These participants frequently chose their genre by determining what the most important element of the plot is and using that to classify the story as a whole. These two tendencies reflect the kind of conversations that Tolkien scholars have about genre, and careful consideration should be given to them as we consider the ways in which participants classify the story into the genres found in groups two and three.

Another important trend to keep note of is which aspects of the text participants emphasize in their discussions of genre. Participants who selected the fantasy genre in question seven often focused on the characters or setting of the story, whereas participants who chose the quest genre in question seven were more prone to focus on the plot. It remains

to be seen which, if any, of these elements are significant to participants who chose the genres discussed in groups two and three.

We will revisit the idea of fantasy in particular at the end of the chapter. The observations and responses of these young readers could have meaningful implications for the way that scholars often discuss *The Lord of the Rings* as an exemplar of the fantasy genre.

3.3   Group 2

3.3.1   *Good vs. Evil*

As with the fantasy genre, most of the participants who chose the genre 'good vs. evil' in question seven did not significantly change the way that they discussed genre in question six and question eight. The two most significant themes that were present in these discussions were the way that the story had a strong delineation between good and evil characters, as well as conflict between the sides. It is interesting to note how these comments sometimes focused on 'sides' as amorphous entities, while others focused on more concrete subjects, like 'people'.

There was a tendency to go from more vague notions before question seven to specific examples afterwards. This is seen in 2A's discussion: before the question, she claimed that *The Lord of the Rings* is 'a good vs. evil story'. It should be noted that this answer adopts the vocabulary of question seven, so there is the possibility that her answer was influenced by the question. After question seven she became more specific, stating that 'the whole story is about Frodo and his friends fighting against Mordor'. It may be that she adopted a more specific discussion for question eight because she felt the need to add more content than she provided on question six. 4A also followed this pattern, however, changing the way she characterized the story from 'the history of good and evil in a fictional world' to 'the story of the Fellowship (good) versus Sauron and Saruman (evil)'. There seems to be an impulse, then, by participants who chose this genre to think about the story on two levels but to ultimately discuss the story by referring to specifics.

The only participant who changed his discussion about the story went from a focus on the myth and fairy tales surrounding the story to a more clear-cut distinction of how the characters are well-defined. Before question seven, 27A claimed that *The Lord of the Rings* is 'a

culmination of mythology and fairy tales into an adventure of epic proportions, containing a myriad different races and languages, with characters who develop and grow in experience throughout'. It is possible that this answer was influenced by the vocabulary presented in the questionnaire. Significantly, though, this response demonstrates that some of the participants who chose good vs. evil as the genre also exhibited the tendency to see multiple story types in the text.

After answering question seven, 27A described how 'all the characters (except maybe Gollum) are obviously Good or Evil. These two forces are striving against one another for the entire story, with Evil looking the stronger side for most of the books, but Good ultimately triumphing in the end'. This participant became more concrete in his discussion of the story and focused more on specific characters. The later statements were much more in line with what the other participants who selected good vs. evil observed when discussing the story.

Both the focus on specific elements from the text and the importance that the mythical or global level of the conflict between good and evil has to the story are reflected in the way that Tolkien scholars have discussed this genre. If there is a source of disagreement between the interpretation of young readers and scholarship, it is about the level of complexity that exists concerning the line between good and evil. While the comments above demonstrate that many of the young readers who chose good vs. evil as the genre see a clear delineation between the two, the scholarship that follows illuminates how the scholarly community is adamantly opposed to this perspective.

From the scholarly perspective, the struggle in the heart of Mordor, at the very Cracks of Doom between Frodo and Gollum is, in many ways, emblematic of the clashing sides of a war long in the making. In a parallel plot line, armies clash just outside the gates of Mordor in a struggle that is just as stark. To suggest that this is a simple battle and that the two characters involved are shallow or stereotypical would be short-sighted. The events that led up to this point have exposed both characters as well-developed and dynamic when put into various circumstances and when opposing unique obstacles. This is indicative of Tolkien's treatment of good and evil as a whole. He never tries to encapsulate either into one single entity that is easy to understand. Instead, as the scholarship of this section indicates, Tolkien's portrayal of good and evil is complex and multifaceted.

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. In fact, one critic reflected on the pervasive nature of evil by proclaiming: 'to say that evil is one of the major themes of Tolkien's fiction is to state that water is wet. If we were to trace where the theme of evil appears in his three major works, we'd have to cite nearly every page and retell the entire history of Tolkien's mythology' (Petty 2003: 99). Therefore, while the theme has been covered so extensively as to be an obstacle for scholarly appreciation of an analysis, we must cover it to give a complete overview of the significant elements that scholars agree are contained within the text.

One article which directly confronts claims of simplicity in the depiction of good and evil in Tolkien's work is Craig Clark's 'Problems of Good and Evil in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*'. He begins by noting the oversimplification which is a 'frequent allegation made by detractors' of the work. He then goes on to argue that 'such criticisms are made in ignorance of the very real nature of good and evil in Tolkien's world' (Clark 1997: 15). His analysis describes how most of the tension throughout the text, would not exist if the heroic characters portrayed in the text were wholly good. This is because, as Clark indicates, the terrible power of the Ring is the ability to tempt those in its presence by appealing to their 'desire to wield power' (1997: 16). If the heroes did not desire power, this temptation would lack suspense because of its futility.

Clark diagnoses this central tension in several episodes. He describes how 'there would be no need for Gollum to seize the ring at the climax' of the text if Frodo was never tempted by the ring (Clark 1997: 16). Clark goes on to describe how three of the most positively portrayed characters in the text, Aragorn, Gandalf, and Galadriel, are each tempted. He claims that 'the fact that all three refuse the Ring – refused temptation – is not the point. The crux of the matter is that all three can be tempted, because each is susceptible to the particular form of evil to which the ring appeals' (Clark 1997: 16). These scenes would have no tension, as well as be a waste of time in terms of plot development, if each of these characters were pure and free from the ability to be tempted. Clark concludes his article by noting the elegiac tone at the end of the text. He observes that 'at the time of Frodo's departure from Middle-Earth [sic], good has still not triumphed, and has indeed lost a great deal… Much which was good and beautiful must now pass from the world, and the world is poorer without it' (Clark 1997: 19). He indicates that goodness does not decline, in either nature or prevalence, in stories that treat good and evil lightly.

Roz Kaveney identifies 'Good and Evil' as the central concern of fantasy literature (Clute and Grant 1996: 422). She indicates that the 'dynamic opposition' between the two elements is what 'drives much fantasy, supernatural fiction and horror' (Clute and Grant 1996: 422). In fact, her prime example of the tension between these two elements is Tolkien's writing. This not only indicates the significance of the theme to Tolkien's work, but also the way in which the significance in his text influenced other writers of fantasy to emphasize the theme as well.

Tom Shippey addresses the theme of evil for an entire chapter in his monograph *J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century*. He dwells extensively on trying to examine the types of evil which underlie the text in *The Lord of the Rings* and to demonstrate how philosophical tensions influence the plot and characterizations within the text. Shippey considers 'the question of the nature and source of evil…to be the central issue of *The Lord of the Rings*, as of so many modern fantasies' (2000a: 157). This statement reinforces the idea proposed by Petty that evil is a central tenet of the work.

Perhaps the argument that Shippey makes most forcefully is that, regardless of whether a reader agrees or disagrees with Tolkien's perspective, the depiction of evil in *The Lord of the Rings* is not simplistic. Shippey provides a lengthy discussion of how he views the nature of evil as having two sides: positive and negative. He contends that:

> things would be much easier for the characters in *The Lord of the Rings* if this uncertainty over the nature of evil were to be withdrawn. If evil was just the absence of good, then the Ring could never be more than a psychic amplifier, and all the characters would need to do would be to put it aside…Conversely, if evil were only an external force without echo in the hearts of the good, then someone might have to take it to Orodruin, but it would not need to be Frodo: Gandalf could take it, or Galadriel, and whoever did so would have to fight only their enemies, not their friends or themselves. (Shippey 2000a: 142)

Tolkien's depiction of evil is very complex, Shippey argues, which necessitates a more difficult plot than if he had simply had a monolithic view of the nature of evil. This contributes to the verisimilitude that readers often find in Tolkien's work because most readers understand that evil as they encounter it every day is not simplistic. This understanding contributes to the quality of the text:

> But if that were the case (and most fantasies are more like that than *The Lord of the Rings*), then the work would be a lesser one… As it would be a lesser one if it veered instead in the direction of philosophical treatise or confessional novel, without relevance to the real world of war and politics from which Tolkien's experience of evil so clearly originated (Shippey 2000a: 142-143).

Therefore, not only does Tolkien's complexity on this issue make it impossible for scholars to easily critique the work, it makes *The Lord of the Rings* qualitatively better.

Although Shippey is certainly one of the most notable Tolkien scholars, he was not the first to address the idea of evil. A significant early influence on this theme was made by W.H. Auden in 'The Quest Hero', where he discusses the nature of good and evil in *The Lord of the Rings*. One of his key contributions is to indicate how Tolkien is able to make the downfall of evil symptomatic of, perhaps even characteristic of, the nature of evil itself. Auden contends:

> One of Tolkien's most impressive achievements is that he convinces the reader that the mistakes which Sauron makes to his undoing are the kind of mistakes which Evil, however powerful, cannot help making just because it is Evil. His primary weakness is a lack of imagination, for, while Good can imagine what it would be like to be Evil, Evil cannot imagine what it would be like to be Good. (2004: 47)

This particular portrayal of evil as unavoidably self-defeating becomes one of the main tenets of scholarship surrounding the theme of evil in Tolkien's work. Auden's scholarship is not only remarkable for providing a pithy way to enunciate how evil operates in *The Lord of the Rings*, though. He goes on to clarify why there is no alternative to the downfall of evil with astute observations. He notes that 'the kind of Evil which Sauron embodies, the lust for domination, will always be irrationally cruel since it is not satisfied if another does what it wants; he must be made to do it against his will' (Auden 2004: 47). The ever-greedy nature of evil is a corrosive force. This leads to Auden's last observation that 'all alliances of Evil with Evil are necessarily unstable and untrustworthy since, by definition, Evil loves only itself and its alliances are based on fear or hope of profit, not on affection' (2004: 48). Auden perceives that, in Tolkien's work, the nature of evil is not simply corrupt but is corrosive. It is as if evil in Tolkien's secondary world works unstoppably as a force of entropy.

Another key text which deals with the theme of evil in *The Lord of the Rings* is *Master of Middle-earth: The Fiction of J.R.R. Tolkien* by Paul H. Kocher. Kocher addresses the nature of evil in his characterization of the Ring as:

> a powerful instrument of coercion on all who come within its influence, particularly its wearers, and a carrier of temptation to them to coerce the wills of others. Its method is the subtle one of gradually capturing the mind by radiating an incessant inflationary spell over whatever desires are dearest to it, however harmless or even noble they may seem. (1977: 56)

This passage is perhaps what provides the idea of the 'psychic amplifier' that Shippey picks up on in his chapter mentioned above; however, the Ring does more than just amplify the desires of those who wear it. It also, as Kocher identifies, tempts the wearer to abuse the

power of the Ring for self-aggrandizement or personal gain, desires that may not be innate for the wearer. Furthermore, the Ring works on a level which is not easily discernible to those in the text. It is a slow temptation, an erosion of morality by small steps.

This fondness that the Ring has for perverting and controlling its wearer is not merely a tangential element of its nature. Kocher exposes how:

> The Ring can work *only* by coercion of the will. Such is its nature. Anyone who uses coercion in even the best of causes is using an evil means to a good end and thereby corrupting the end – and himself. By definition, good objects turn bad when achieved by the absolute power over others' wills which the Ring confers. (1977: 56, emphasis mine)

The drive to coerce and control is the life force of the Ring. In a sense, this is a representation of how Sauron operates on a much larger scale. As Auden indicates, Sauron is consumed with his need to control and dominate others. Therefore, just as Auden concludes that evil must ultimately act as a corrosive force on itself, Kocher observes that, in Tolkien's work, 'evil is self-defeating' (1977: 62). Not only is evil short-sighted, but it actively works against its own self-interest.

An additional element to consider from Kocher's observations about the nature of evil is one of the first indications of how Tolkien scholars are often troubled by the moral ambiguity surrounding free will and the orcs. Kocher contends that 'If true [that orcs are evil by nature] it imperils the doctrine that underpins the moral structure of the epic, that every intelligent being has a will capable of choosing between good and evil' (Kocher 1977: 64). In other words, the admission that there can be creatures who are born without free will, without the ability to decide how they want to live their lives and what they want to do presents a problem when looking at *The Lord of the Rings* from a moral lens. Other scholars who have influentially addressed the idea of the free will of Orcs include Dimitra Fimi, Helen Armstrong, and Richard Angelo Bergen.[12]

Maria Alberto recognizes and appreciates several of the previous attempts to describe and define Tolkien's approach to evil, but she claims that many of these earlier attempts have failed to address an essential aspect of the way that evil functions in Tolkien's subcreated world. She claims that 'little to no mention has been made of seduction, which is an understated but recurring motif throughout the legendarium' (Alberto 2017: 64). Therefore, the majority of her article focuses on this motif. This is a significant contribution to the

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[12] For Fimi see *Tolkien, Race and Cultural History*, for Helen Armstrong see her article 'Good Guys, Bad Guys, Fantasy and Reality', and for Bergen see his article '"A Warp of Horror": J.R.R. Tolkien's Sub-creation of Evil'.

discussion of evil in Tolkien's world, as it helps to define how evil works. As Alberto concludes: seduction gives 'a rationale for the existence of evil: evil exists because created beings misuse their free will, and it is transmitted as those beings deceive others into misusing theirs' (2017: 76). As she indicates, this helps to answer the questions revolving around the theme of evil as it finds expression in Middle-earth. Therefore, while other examinations of evil have helped answer speculations about the nature of Sauron and other overarching evil entities, this interpretation helps to explain how evil pervades the more human characters portrayed in the story, e.g. Boromir.

Ultimately, while scholars may disagree on the exact portrayal of, or inspiration for, the theme of good and evil in *The Lord of the Rings*, there is widespread consensus that this aspect of the work is complex and warrants careful consideration. This seems to be a source of conflict between Tolkien scholarship and participants like 27A, who noted how 'all the characters (except maybe Gollum) are obviously Good or Evil'. It is possible, however, that this seeming contradiction is not a real source of tension at all, but rather like two armies clashing by night, neither aiming directly at the opponent. As will become evident in the discussion of characters in the next chapter, most of the young participants see the characters depicted throughout the text as complex. It would make sense, then, to infer that most of them would see both exterior and interior forms of evil that scholars discuss, and this inference would seem well founded given the discussion of Boromir in the next chapter.

This leads to the conclusion that young readers have complex interpretations of individual characters and the ways in which they can be influenced to be good or evil. Perhaps the area where they have a greater appreciation for simplicity than scholars, however, is in determining whether these characters are ultimately classified as good or bad as a result of their actions over the course of the story. Even this last conclusion, however, comes with the caveat that not all young readers appreciate this ease of classification. Of the thirty participants in the study, only five appreciated the distinction between good and evil enough to choose it as the major genre for the story. Of the participants who chose good vs. evil as the genre for the text, only a few noted the clear delineation between the two sides as a major influence on their decision.

3.3.2   Epic

Jane Chance's 2001 monograph has a chapter entitled '*The Lord of the Rings*: Tolkien's Epic.' In this chapter she characterizes *The Lord of the Rings* as an 'epic novel' (143). Her argument from the chapter is twofold: she argues that *The Lord of the Rings* participates in many of the same impulses as and has traits of an epic, and that *The Lord of the Rings* is a culmination of many of the ideas that Tolkien was concerned with in his previous writing (both academic and fantastic). Her initial claim is the one that has the most bearing on the current discussion. Chance claims that 'the epic form has proven useful in reflecting the clash of value systems during periods of transition in literary history' (2001: 142). And goes on to support the notion that 'Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* delineates the clash of values during the passage from the Third Age of Middle-earth, dominated by the Elves, to the Fourth Age, dominated by Men. Such values mask very medieval tensions between Germanic heroism and Christianity evidenced earlier by Tolkien in his *Beowulf* article' (Chance, 2001: 142). This intellectual history is often what scholars use as a means of determining whether Tolkien's text is an epic. This same consideration, however, does not seem to be the main consideration behind participants' claims that *The Lord of the Rings* is an epic.

Almost as many participants chose epic as the genre for *The Lord of the Rings* as chose good vs. evil. Of the participants who chose epic in question seven, only one participant's discussion did not change between questions six and eight. Notably, this participant's responses are the most in line with the perspective espoused by Chance. This participant mentioned how there is overlap between the epic genre and other genres, but he found the epic genre more inclusive. Before question seven, 22A claimed that *The Lord of the Rings* is 'more than a story... It is essentially a fantasy world, although one which is completely distant from our own. Therefore, it stands alone as an epic tale'. He maintained this perspective after choosing the epic genre in question seven:

> I see *The Lord of The Rings*, as a tale, all-encompassing in its own right. While it may be fantasy, so is Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* and they are not often described as a Fantasy. And while it may be a story about good versus evil, Tolkien made the story so much less black-and-white than that. Think of Gollum, or of Boromir, or of Lobelia Sackville-Baggins. (22A)

Even though the way he envisions the story did not change, he gave more specific details after choosing a genre. This echoes the approach of many participants who selected other genres, but for similar reasons. These responses have several areas of overlap with some of the discussions started above. Initially, this demonstrates that 22A does not share the perspective

that there is a clear delineation between the sides of good and evil that is held by a few of the participants who chose good vs. evil as the genre for the story. It also demonstrates how he finds the genre that he selected to be more inclusive than the other genres, which is a similar impulse to participants who selected the fantasy and good vs. evil genres.

Almost all of the participants who selected epic as the genre changed the way they discussed the story. These three participants go from discussing their impressions in more minute terms to then being more inclusive after selecting the epic genre. They all ended up somewhere near the sentiment expressed by 22A. 24A's responses to questions six and eight demonstrate this impulse. In question six, she claims that *The Lord of the Rings* is 'a story about doing what's right, no matter what it costs, to save and protect the people you love'. In question eight, however, she states that 'there are just so many elements of all the other story types that they all seem to come together in the most epic story imaginable.' It seems as though exposure to specific terms regarding genre in question seven made 24A consider elements of the story that she otherwise may not have taken into account. It is also worth noting that her use of the word does not necessarily convey an understanding of how the term is used in literary studies. This is because she has chosen to employ it as an adjective rather than a noun, and this is a mode that has become popular in the twentieth century and has an alternate meaning. This use of the word is as a modifier to express a heightened status or importance to the thing being described.[13] Regardless, the response also demonstrates the tendency, often exhibited by participants who chose other genres, to see her choice of genre as more inclusive than the other options given in question seven.

While 24A may have this more modern understanding of the word epic in mind, this is obviously not true for all participants who chose this genre. In fact, 14A and 15A explicitly discuss what the term means to them in their answers to question eight.14A elaborates on how:

> Obviously there's a modern connotation with the word 'epic'. The fact that it's used to describe something that's beyond the scope of things that are normally experienced by normal people. It's something extraordinary in that just most people don't get to experience and I think that's what makes it epic.

15A defines the term, stating that it means 'a poem about the adventures of a heroic figure'. These participants give a discrete reason for choosing epic as the genre for the story. For participant 14A, the choice seems to be one that's more experiential in nature. Helpfully, 14A

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[13] The *OED* records 1583 as the earliest use for the term 'epic' in the literary sense, and dates the colloquial sense as only dating back to 1983. It is worth mentioning that there is a liminal space in which the term is used to describe a work that has similarities with texts that are traditionally considered epics.

decided to give a justification for why he didn't pick any of the other options in question seven. He describes his thought process thus:

> I didn't choose the other words because: fairytale always seemed more lighthearted, more consequence-free things that the Grimm brothers write. Despite the fact that those are pretty intense sometimes, but I would not choose fairytale. Fantasy: I would guess at some point *The Lord of the Ring* stops being a fantasy because of the worldbuilding that J.R.R. Tolkien does. It seems so real to a lot of readers, and it has such a background to it that I don't think it really counts as a fantasy just because of how much there is to it. I would say fantasies are usually less developed. I guess it could be considered good versus evil, but I'd want to give it a better descriptor than that, and I think epic does that by itself. And…as for threatened homeland, I think that's a large portion of the story, but I think that that's not the main focus of a lot of the characters. (14A)

This is one of the most complete reflections on the thought process of a participant as they decide what genre to choose in question seven. As such, there are several things to unpack. Initially, it is worth noting that 14A sees several elements within the story that could lead him to classify it as many of the different options available. This demonstrates that his process of classifying the book is one of weighing alternatives, not making an easy choice. He did not immediately choose epic as a standout. This is similar to many of the other responses we have seen.

Additionally, it is important to note how the worldbuilding of Tolkien, as well as the characters play an important role in his decision. This is very similar to the justification that we saw from participant 11A who chose the fantasy genre above. It is evident that the process of choosing a genre is one that weighs multiple considerations in order to find a 'best fit', and that the concept of 'fit' for participants often includes considerations of three elements: setting, characterization, and plot.

I also wanted to include 15A's response to question eight, because it contributes to one of the major trends that is developing across participant responses. She claims that:

> *The Lord of the Rings* is a mixture of some of the types listed above; it is a quest, fantasy, and a good versus evil story. The central plot of *The Lord of the Rings* is about the deeds and adventures of Frodo Baggins, and an epic is defined as a poem about the adventures of a heroic figure. Epic is the one word that, for me, best captures the kind of story that *The Lord of the Rings* is told as, since it encapsulates the parts of it that are fantasy, a struggle against evil, a quest, as well as the parts where moral and virtuous lessons can be taught to us.

As with several of the participants who chose fantasy or good vs. evil as the genre for the story, 15A chose epic because she felt that this genre was able to include more characteristics

from the story than any of the other genres available. This reinforces several of the major elements seen in 14A's responses that we just covered: e.g. the need to judge the best alternative because many genres could be applied to the story.

Overall, participants' responses would seem to be more in line with scholars such as E. L. Risden than with those of Jane Chance. In his monograph *Tolkien's Intellectual Landscape* (2015), Risden argues that Tolkien's work benefits from the lack of other epic stories published in the same century as *The Lord of the Rings*. It would be a disservice to Risden not to mention the fact that he also argues for the influence of fairy tale and myth on *The Lord of the Rings*, however the way that he negotiates his claims about the epic genre are particularly relevant to the current conversation.

He insists that *The Lord of the Rings* 'appeals in its themes, motifs, and grandeur to the century's dearth of definitive epic poems' (2015: 124). Instead of putting Tolkien's work in a line of literature in order to tie it to a certain genre, Risden has identified discrete elements within the text that he perceives as belonging to the epic genre. Without digressing too far, Risden's primary argument is that 'traditionally, epic has been "about" two things: what we know of heroism and how we meet our Gods (that is, and how we behave to reach epiphanies)' (2015: 125). He contends that Tolkien's work deals with courage, heroism, and luck in the way that many epic stories do

It is important to note that Risden is hardly alone in arguing that Tolkien's work participates in, and in part functions to reconceptualize, the epic tradition. In his chapter entitled 'Pouring New Wine into Old Bottles: Tolkien, Joyce, and the Modern Epic,' Dominic Manganiello discusses how both *The Lord of the Rings* and Joyce's *Ulysses* urged readers to 'reconsider…the relationship between epic and novel' (2015: 171). Manganiello argues that both Joyce and Tolkien are modern writers engaging with an older genre, but that Tolkien rejected modern modes of writing while Joyce embraced them. While Joyce employed irony and individualism, Tolkien embraced community and hope. Once again, discrete elements from the text are used to support the claim of what genre the text belongs to, as is the impulse of most of the participants in the study.

3.3.3 Conclusion

As in Group 1, Group 2 demonstrates a number of tendencies that participants share regardless of what genre they chose for *The Lord of the Rings*. Initially, the trend where participants choose a genre that they feel is more inclusive than the other genre types continues to be a large influence on participant choice. Furthermore, the way that participants focus on characters to make a decision in preference for the good versus evil genre and focus on plot to make a decision in preference for the epic genre mirrors the way that these same decisions were made for the fantasy and quest genres in Group 1.

These trends suggest that these young readers differ in what they deem to be important and in their approach to the text. When one considers how often young readers are viewed as a monolithic category, these insights of diversity are significant. Additionally, these trends could suggest that the way young readers interpret genre is a more inclusive process than those used by publishers or critics. We will explore this latter possibility in the conclusion to this chapter (p. 147).

3.4   Group 3

3.4.1 Allegory

Only two participants chose allegory as the genre for *The Lord of the Rings*. One of these participants did not change the way they discussed the story before and after question seven, and the other did. The participant who did not change his discussion noted how the genre of allegory incorporates many meanings: 'I see *The Lord of the Rings* as an allegory for several different topics, from death and life to power and even historical and religious topics' (25A). His original observations follow the trend of participants picking the genre that they feel is the most inclusive out of those given in question seven. After answering question seven, 25A restates this is the primary reason for choosing allegory as the genre for the story:

> I have always thought of *The Lord of the Rings* as an allegory because of how many deep ways the book can [be] interpreted… The book isn't as simple as a parable or any other kind of allegory [that] I have learned about in various English and Language classes I have taken, it is *more*. As I stated above, I personally see matters such as mortality, morality, politics, history, and religion explored through allegory.

25A does not give any additional detail in his response to question eight, but does give a few different examples of the kinds of ideas incorporated into what he sees as the allegory embedded in the story. The other participant who chose allegory as the genre for the text ends up in much the same place, though his response to question six is in a very different vein.

Initially, participant 28A mostly referred to the setting and plot when trying to describe what type of story he finds in the text. He claimed that:

> I see *The Lord of the Rings* as a gateway into what Tolkien himself called "secondary creation" – where the world immerses you so much it becomes an alternative scenario of the real world. It is not, rather, the great battles, but the intricate stories and languages behind every, every blade, every mane, every noble lord.

After answering question seven, however, he changed the way that he discussed the story, and this brings him more in line with the response of 25A. He suggested that:

> Even though Professor Tolkien himself stated that the novel was not meant to be an allegory, I still found *The Lord of the Rings* to be rather allegorical in a sense. It is one of few modern books capable of standing up to such strict scrutiny and interpretation, and with many a hidden gem describing, in a somewhat symbolic tone, various human flaws and actions. I felt that the book was an allegory, shrouded in the cloak of an epic fantasy.

Once again, the participant's response to question eight exhibits the tendency for participants to choose the genre that they consider the most inclusive. Both of these participants suggest that the story must be an allegory because it contains such diverse elements that can be variously interpreted by readers. It should be noted that 25A adopts the language used in question seven in his answer for question six, meaning that he could have been influenced by the later question in his earlier response, whereas 28A does not seem to use any of the language of question seven in his answer to question six. This may indicate why one participant changed the way they discuss the genre while the other did not.

It is vital to take a moment to understand how these participants have used the term *allegory*. While many readers may have a very specific literary category in mind, wherein a moral is conveyed through typically religious imagery, e.g. stories such as *Piers Plowman*, it is apparent that this is not the definition that the participants are using in a strict sense. Instead, they are operating with a more general definition, similar to the one given by the *Oxford English Dictionary*. There, the first definition given for 'allegory' reads as follows: 'The use of symbols in a story, picture, etc., to convey a hidden or ulterior meaning, typically a moral or political one; symbolic representation. Also: the interpretation of this' (*OED Online*). Such a

definition allows for a broad array of texts and interpretations which would not be called allegory by more traditional standards.

Although neither participant focuses their discussion about allegory entirely on religion/spirituality, there has historically been an association between the two. As you can see above, 25A specifically mentions religion in his answers to both question six and question eight, so this is as good a time as any to investigate the way that previous Tolkien scholarship has explored the topic of religion in Tolkien's work, and to try to determine if there is any overlap with participant responses.

This section must begin with the clarification that it is not within the purview of the present study to analyse Tolkien's personal faith or the implications of his faith for his writing. There is a wealth of scholarship on the debate concerning if, how, and where Tolkien's personal faith influences his text, and for those looking for more information on this subject, I would commend them to the work of such scholars as Joseph Pearce, Bradley Birzer, and Matthew Dickerson. Unfortunately, many of these works rely heavily on extra-textual material, and so do not provide much information when considering the text alone. What is significant for our purposes, however, is how the theme of religion is presented within the text of *The Lord of the Rings*.

The ongoing debate concerning the treatment of religion in *The Lord of the Rings* is fairly well represented in the collection *The Ring and the Cross: Christianity and The Lord of the Ring*s edited by Paul E. Kerry. The first three articles argue whether Tolkien's portrayal of religion and morality in the text is based on Christianity or paganism. The third article, which acts as the last word on the discussion, aims to appease both sides of the argument by claiming that 'I still think that we can have a "pagan" Tolkien. I also think that we can have a Christian one' (Hutton 2013: 103). This characterization is amenable to the fact that readers from various faith traditions are drawn to the text and did not find the moral code presented there to be averse to their understanding of the world.

This characterization is also supported by Catherine Madsen's chapter 'Eru Erased: The Minimalist Cosmology of *The Lord of the Rings*'. Here she concludes that the absence of overt religious elements in Tolkien's work has made it a more effective piece of literature. She claims that:

> the theological elements [of *The Silmarillion*] were left almost wholly behind; for a
> combination of literary and religious reasons, he did not judge them necessary to the

> new book. He judged well. The absence of religious reference gives readers, some of whom would ordinarily be at odds, common imaginative access to a serious tale of danger and wonder and sacrifice. (Madsen 2013: 167)

Simply put, her contention is that Tolkien's reliance on applicability rather than overt religious statements has made his text more approachable for more people. This would seem like a logical conclusion considering, as Shippey observed, 'it is a mark of its success that it has been appreciated by many who share the author's real beliefs, but by even more who do not' (2000a: 187). While one hates to use anecdotal evidence to bolster claims about literature, there is an important implication in these words. Tolkien has received global acclaim. There are countries where Tolkien has received a popular reception despite the fact that Christianity is either sparingly practiced or is practiced in a manner that would be very different from what Tolkien would have been familiar with.

For a more detailed perspective on the spirituality embedded within the text, one can turn to the fourth chapter of this collection. Here, Stephen Morillo characterizes the spirituality embedded in *The Lord of the Rings* as 'dominated by a sense of the tragic inevitability of decline and loss, an inevitability that rises to the level of destiny or fate' (2013: 109). He demonstrates how this is true of most of the populations and peoples portrayed in Middle-earth, by indicating how: 'the power of the Elves is waning', there is 'physical evidence of the lost power and glory of the kingdoms of Men', and how 'even nature partakes of this decline: forests are old, haunted, circumscribed in their extent compared to the old days' (Morillo 2013: 110). In a way, many of these reflections sound similar to an observation by Flieger concerning the impossible problem of man living in harmony with nature that we will discuss in the fifth chapter (p.207). This is also reminiscent of Auden's argument that evil is always self-defeating (p.118). Throughout the stories of Middle-earth there is a lament that ideals cannot be achieved and that the entropy of the world will continue regardless of valiant efforts to delay the inevitable.

Perhaps the most persistent scholar to focus on Tolkien from a religious perspective is Joseph Pearce. Unfortunately, his monograph *Tolkien: Man and Myth* falls into a category which Drout and Wynne critique for having 'a tendency to rely upon Christian theology as a received truth' (2000: 109). They characterize this book in particular as an attempt by Pearce 'to quote the entire length and breadth of *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*' (Drout and Wynne 2000: 109) in order to validate his approach. A much more useful text for the present study is

his edited collection of essays entitled *Tolkien: A Celebration*, which contains several chapters that have a more focused approach to Tolkien's texts.

In his chapter 'Over the Chasm of Fire: Christian Heroism in *The Silmarillion* and *The Lord of the Rings*' Stratford Caldecott claims that 'heroism in *The Lord of the Rings* takes an unmistakably Christian form' (1999: 29). He illustrates his argument by demonstrating how three members of the Fellowship sacrifice their lives for the benefit of others, pass 'through darkness and even a kind of death', and find 'a kind of resurrection' (Caldecott 1999: 29). By naming discrete elements, Caldecott enables other readers to follow along with his logic and accept or reject his conclusion.

Another practical article from the collection is Charles A. Coulombe's '*The Lord of the Rings* – A Catholic View'. Toward the end of his article, he concludes that:

> It has been said that the dominant note of the traditional Catholic liturgy was intense longing. This is also true of her art, her literature, her whole life. It is a longing for things that cannot be in this world: unearthly truth, unearthly purity, unearthly justice, unearthly beauty. By all these earmarks *The Lord of the Rings* is indeed a Catholic work. (Coulombe 1999: 65)

Here, Coulombe takes a similar approach as that of Morillo's article mentioned above. He is concerned with diagnosing the thematic resonance of the text and indicating how this is explicable in the Christian, particularly the Catholic, tradition.

A final essay from the book which takes a close look at some of the elements contained within *The Lord of the Rings* is Sean McGrath's 'The Passion According to Tolkien'. In it, McGrath argues that 'the Questor for Life whose quest leads him to choose death is a distinctively Christian archetype' (1999: 182). He compares this archetype with the text, and discusses how this situates the work contrary to the classical worldview. Significantly, this overlaps with the quest motif, mentioned above, and has implications for the way that war is depicted throughout the text. For that reason, it is a useful observation when considering the thematic elements of *The Lord of the Rings*.

As with most modern scholarship, the article '"But Grace is not Infinite": Tolkien's Exploration of Nature and Grace in His Catholic Context' opens with a statement summarizing how the focus of the article, namely religion, is an ongoing and important dialogue within Tolkien scholarship. Phillip Irving Mitchell recognizes that 'the role of J.R.R. Tolkien's Roman Catholicism in interpreting his work continues to be a subject of lively debate' (2013: 61). Unlike some previous discussions of this topic, however, Mitchell does not

seek to demonstrate how Tolkien's personal understanding of religion is embedded in his work based upon the author's letters. Instead he hopes to prove that 'the positioning of pagan and Christian elements was at the heart of Catholic concerns with nature and grace, and that Tolkien…would see the order of Grace as calling for an account of the relationship of natural and supernatural in his secondary worlds' (Mitchell 2013: 62). In other words, because it was part of the Catholic endeavour to not only critique but sanctify various elements of pagan texts, this led Tolkien to write a text in which pagan elements could be sanctified.

Furthermore, Mitchell argues that this drive to sanctification is mirrored in the text itself. Near the end of the article, he diagnoses how Frodo is saved 'not by his own nature but by actions orchestrated beyond his control' (2013: 78). He contends that this is the concept of grace at work, though it is not explicitly stated as such in the text: 'indeed because Frodo is a pre-Christian, that salvation remains anonymous' (Mitchell 2013: 78). Therefore, Tolkien not only provides a text which is open to religious interpretation, but insists on such interpretation by suggestively modelling the process by which it should be done.

Tom Shippey also addressed the notion that Tolkien incorporates a kind of Christian fatalism into his text. He suggests that Tolkien's use of the word *luck* is highly idiomatic, and akin to the use of the word *wyrd* by the *Beowulf* poet. He suggests that '"luck", then, is a continuous interplay of providence and free will' (Shippey 2003: 152-153). Instead of directly confronting this tension in his text, however, Tolkien uses a word 'which people use every day, and with exactly the right shade of uncertainty over whether they mean something completely humdrum and practical or something mysterious and supernatural' (Shippey 2003: 153). Tolkien does not directly attribute circumstances or events to a deity or godhead, but he does suggest that there is a guiding force at work behind the major events of the story.

Some scholars have attempted to find a middle ground in which they can hold both the pagan and Christian elements of the text without attempting to resolve the tension. An exemplar of this approach is Claudio A. Testi's article 'Tolkien's Work: Is it Christian or Pagan? A Proposal for a "Synthetic" Approach'. In this article, Testi does a great job of summarizing the arguments for a Christian interpretation of Tolkien's work and the arguments for a pagan interpretation of Tolkien's work, as well as the shortcomings to each approach. Instead of attempting to shore up one argument or the other, he attempts to find a means of appreciating the elements of both arguments at the same time. Perhaps such an attempt to avoid a resolution to this debate helps preserve the beauty of the tension of the text and

enables readers to appreciate the work from both perspectives. In his conclusion he states that his goal was to demonstrate how Tolkien's mythology 'is meant neither for a single nation (England) nor specific religion (be it Christian or Pagan), but for "all of Mankind" capable of sensing with their natural capabilities that beyond the Circles of the World there is "more than memory"' (Testi 2003: 30). Ultimately, Testi arrives at an appreciation of Tolkien's use of myth which appeals to the most expansive audience possible. It takes elements of pre-existing beliefs and employs them in a way that most readers can appreciate.

One last, important perspective should be mentioned with regard to religion. It is not uncommon for critics who come from a strong faith background to want to interpret their faith tradition into the text. While this is not beneficial in terms of understanding how religion is portrayed in the text, it is beneficial in understanding how readers may interpret characteristics, virtues, or frameworks of the text from a personal religious perspective. There are a number of works that approach *The Lord of the Rings* from a Christian lens, and so read into the text what mostly lives within the critic themselves. These approaches range from the heavily text-based to the more devotional.

One of the more recent critics to use this approach often is Ralph C. Wood. In his monograph *The Gospel According to Tolkien: Visions of the Kingdom in Middle-earth*, he explores the text using his understanding of Christianity. He sees Tolkien's depiction of evil as a way of approaching the difficult topics of the twentieth century in a way that 'forces us to confront them' (Wood 2003: 1). While Woods uses a Christian understanding to support this argument, it is worth noting that Tom Shippey essentially argues the same thing from a humanist, non-religious perspective. Wood claims that Tolkien's Fellowship gives readers a model of how to confront the evils of the Primary World because of their attainment of virtues and reconciliation. He claims that 'reconciliation requires more than the completion and perfection of even the most splendid moral qualities; it demands the theological gifts of faith, hope, and love. It is to the Company's embodiment of these three uniquely Christian virtues that we now turn' (Wood 2003: 116). He goes on to illustrate the capacity that the members of the Fellowship have for these qualities. It is significant to note that the virtues that he extols are three aspects of morality that are found throughout various cultures and religious traditions.

While Wood does confess that these moral values are not specifically Christian, he counter-argues that 'the pre-Christian virtues that are common to many cultures can be

magnificently perfected by divine grace' (2003: 117). In essence, his religious lens leads him to believe that Christianity elevates these virtues more than other traditions. This is precisely how critics and readers place their own personal religious context onto Tolkien's work. Even after admitting that the work depicts a pre-Christian world, Wood still feels empowered to overlay his value system onto it. Also characteristic of this approach is to find some moral or deeper spiritual meaning to the text. Wood concludes his work by noting how the work of Christians is to look forward to the second coming and to reject the evil of the world. He argues that:

> One of our best guides for this high and holy vocation is the work of J.R.R. Tolkien, especially *The Lord of the Rings*… Christians are called to be hobbit-like servants of the King and his Kingdom. Frodo and Sam are first in the reign of Ilúvatar because they are willing to be last and least among those who 'move the wheels of the world'. (Wood 2003: 165)

Wood uses his faith tradition to impose a thematic message to the entirety of the text. It is interesting to observe how critics who choose to explicate *The Lord of the Rings* using a Christian lens, the very critics who perhaps have a closer worldview to Tolkien than many others, have been so eager to disregard the claims of the author himself. That is, Tolkien claims in his preface to the second edition that the story is 'neither allegorical nor topical' (Tolkien, *LotR* 2004: xiii). While he concedes in *Letters* that there is certainly Christian influence/inspiration because of his background, this does not mean that the story is intended to convey a Christian message. Unfortunately, in no other area of criticism have writers been so quick to allegorize and moralize the text as they have in religious criticism. In a way, this impulse is disheartening. Instead of using their unique vantage point to complicate and develop the intricacies of Tolkien's depiction of good and evil, of heroism, and of the interaction between spirituality and humanism, some of these critics seem to use their religious system to simplify what *The Lord of the Rings* can mean.

Another scholar who approaches *The Lord of the Rings* in order to interpret moral themes as Christian elements is Stratford Caldecott. In the penultimate paragraph of his introduction, he admits that 'the reader is never assumed to be a Christian believer' (Caldecott 2012: loc. 169). This does not stop him, however, from arguing that:

> the cosmological setting of Tolkien's imagined world, along with the creatures and events with which he filled it and the moral laws governing this imagined cosmos, were all intended to be compatible with his beliefs about reality, and in fact provide 'pointers' to a Christian world-view. Love, courage, justice, mercy, kindness, integrity,

and the other virtues are incarnated in the story through characters such as Aragorn and Frodo. (Caldecott 2012: loc. 169)

Once again, a scholar has taken attributes that many cultural and religious systems view as meritorious and decided to filter them through his own, and Tolkien's, religious tradition. The usefulness of this approach is not in the conclusions that these scholars draw about the 'meaning' of religion in Tolkien's work, but rather that they are able to interpret the writing in a way which validates their own worldview. These depictions of this interpretive impulse could be beneficial when trying to understand the process by which readers can see Tolkien's work as a validation of their own moral, spiritual, or religious background.

In a way, this relates back to the genre of allegory that participants 25A and 28A selected. Many scholars would see the selection of allegory and assume, given the long history of correlation between allegory and religion, that these participants made this choice for a religious reason. The responses of these participants, however, indicate that such assumptions would be a mistake. Instead of reflecting specifically on the religious importance that the story holds for them, both participants focus instead on the way that the story can be interpreted through many different lenses and have many different meanings. In a sense, both participants use a broader definition of allegory than Tolkien himself probably used. Instead, they both see allegory in a more general sense, one that agrees with the current *OED* definition, in which stories can be seen as allegorical if they can be interpreted to have a meaning beyond the literal level.

3.4.2   Myth/Legend

As with the genre of allegory, two participants selected myth/legend as the genre for *The Lord of the Rings*. Unlike the participants who selected the previous genre, both of the participants who selected myth/legend change the way that they discussed the story between questions six and eight.

Participant 16A discussed how myth overlaps with fantasy and adventure, but also how he appreciated the expansiveness of the world Tolkien created. In question six, he claims that he would characterize the story 'as a fantasy/myth, something like that. Yeah, adventure as well' (16A). His adoption of the language found in question seven indicates that perhaps 16A's response to question six was influenced by the next question. Interestingly, 13A's response to

question six does not indicate that he was aware of the vocabulary used in question seven. When asked to describe the type of story of *The Lord the Rings*, he responded:

> Well, I think that *The Lord of the Rings* is a story of growth. A story about Frodo who expands his entire view of the world, because he's never been outside the Shire and he goes out and he just sees so much that he didn't know was out there and it just changes him immensely. So, I think that's kind of the theme. A lot of the characters, not so much Aragorn and Gandalf, but definitely the hobbits and even a little bit Legolas and Gimli. (13A)

He uses discrete elements found within the text in order to discuss the central idea of the story. In both cases, the participants sought specific data to use in order to craft their response to question six. In question eight, however, when participants were asked to rationalize the decision that they had already made, they appealed to a more expansive understanding of the text.

In question eight, 16A justified his selection of the genre myth/legend by referencing the detail involved in Tolkien's worldbuilding:

> Because the whole world… how Tolkien made it. It is more than just a fantasy story. He created a whole world of different races and cultures, and different languages, and ideologies. For me, it's just way more than just a normal story.

Even though he specifically discusses a particular element of the story, he infers from this element that the text defies classification in a genre that he sees as less all-encompassing than the one that he chose. This impulse is also evident in 13A's response to question eight. When discussing why he chose the genre, he claimed that the story is:

> an Epic, but I think it's Myth and Legend for me, for sure. Because *The Lord of the Rings* is such a big thing that it's got its whole… Middle-earth is just a whole, well-developed, large history and it's not just a fairy tale, I guess… Yeah, just how big Middle-earth is, it's not like other fantasy worlds. Very few authors go so deep into the world and the mythology of the world and the history of the world as Tolkien does. (13A)

Once again, the expansiveness of Tolkien's world building is cited as a primary reason for choosing myth/legend as the genre for the story. It is important to note that both participants indicate how their understanding of world building is not constrained to the physical setting of the story. Instead it includes many elements that readers would consider cultural or personal: languages, ideologies, mythology, etc.

Both of these responses also indicate how the participants who chose myth/legend as the genre for the story also participate in the impulse to select what they believe is the most

inclusive genre from the list, as we have seen from participants who chose almost all the genre selected in the study.

The concept of myth in *The Lord of the Rings* is another element which is frequently taken for granted in modern scholarship because it has been so well addressed throughout the history of critical responses to the text. Tolkien scholars frequently refer to *The Silmarillion*, as well as Tolkien's extended corpus of writing as a 'mythology for England'. Flieger claims, in fact, that this work is 'conventionally referred to as his mythology for England' in her preface to *Interrupted Music: The Making of Tolkien's Mythology* (2005: ix). She understands how conceptualizing Tolkien's writings in such a way has mythic implications for his more popular works. In *Splintered Light: Logos and Language in Tolkien's World*, Flieger claims that 'the stories of Bilbo and the dwarves, and of Frodo and the Fellowship in the world of Middle-earth, are tales of adventure with mythic overtones' in her introduction (2002: xiii). As the scholarship in this section will demonstrate, several notable scholars have addressed the topic of myth in *The Lord of the Rings* before and after Flieger's assertion.

As he was with so many of these themes, Tom Shippey was one of the first to discuss the mythic elements of *The Lord of the Rings*. A particularly useful text for understanding his approach to this theme is the fourth chapter in his monograph *J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century* which is entitled '*The Lord of the Rings* (3): The Mythic Dimension'. One could paraphrase Shippey's main argument from the chapter as: Tolkien's work is not an allegory, but a story wherein Tolkien mythically revisits some of the major events and ideas that surrounded him when he was writing the text. This is perhaps a helpful way to unpack Shippey's argument that similarities between the text and history 'do not mean that *The Lord of the Rings* is a veiled rewrite of recent history' (2000a: 174). He proposes instead that:

> the patterns discernible in it, including the ironies of interlace and the moral they point out, can be applied to recent history and indeed to future action. The moral, obviously, is that one should never give up hope (like Denethor), nor on the other hand sit back and wait for things to change (like too many of the inhabitants of the Shire). But as Tolkien says, 'applicability… resides in the freedom of the reader', and should only be suggested or provoked by the author. (Shippey 2000a: 174)

Shippey also addresses how there is a religious undertone to much of Tolkien's work that contributes to this mythic appeal of the story. He addresses how the character of Frodo is Tolkien's attempt to wrestle with the tensions that he discovered as a Christian studying the pagan past. Shippey contends that 'as a scholar of pagan and near-pagan literature he could not help saying that there had been virtue, and a wish for something more, even among pagans.

The myth, or story, that he created expresses both hope and sadness' (2000a: 187). This reflection on how past and present cultures sometimes coincide and sometimes have different values gives Tolkien's work a level of complexity that transcends the concerns of a given decade.

This is reinforced by Shippey's next point, in which he illustrates how 'one of the differences between applicability and allegory, between myth and legend, must be that myth and applicability are timeless, allegory and legend time-constrained' (2000a: 188). As stated above, Tolkien avoided being too specific with his writing, which enables his work to take on an archetypal aspect. What this means is that his text is not tied to the actual historical events of any one decade, but rather that it has applicability to events in the primary world regardless of when they happen. To use an overly-simplified metaphor, instead of writing modern warfare as modern warfare, Tolkien wrote modern warfare as an epic battle. This allows the concept of war itself to be applied to post-modern warfare and even post-humanist warfare. One could easily interpret the Eye of Sauron as the ever-pervasive presence of a surveillance drone in the sky. By seeing past the physical trappings of concepts, Tolkien is able to draw them in a mythical pattern that can be re-applied in various contexts.

Shippey's chapter concludes with the brilliant application of Northrop Frye's literary modes from *An Anatomy of Criticism* to Tolkien's work. He demonstrates how Tolkien's work is able to simultaneously occupy all five modes that Frye describes: myth, romance, high mimesis, low mimesis, and irony. He claims that characters are able to exist in each of these modes, but that 'the whole story furthermore aspires in places to mythic meaning' (Shippey 2000a: 222-223). Therefore, Shippey firmly establishes the mythic quality of Tolkien's work. He goes on to push against Frye's classification system by offering a separate classification of his own, based on Tolkien. He claims that Tolkien's work is 'limited only by Tolkien's refusal to reach out to, to do any more than hint at, a sixth level above and outside Frye's categorizations, which one could call 'true myth', or gospel, or revelation or (Tolkien's word) *evangelium*' (Shippey 2000a: 223). His argument is that Tolkien's ability to operate at the highest level of Frye's narrative modes and even put in glimpses of something beyond is one aspect of his work that has maintained his popularity for more than half a century.

Jane Chance's monograph *Tolkien's Art: A Mythology for England* (2001) focuses on demonstrating how Tolkien's professional learning influenced his creative writing. She uses a diverse sampling of his creative output over a lengthy period of time in order to demonstrate

many points of influence. The most pertinent for the present study is her fifth chapter in which she examines *The Lord of the Rings* as a culmination of many of the mythic elements she has described in previous chapters. She attempts to demonstrate how Tolkien's academic background provides the source material which allows him to create a mythic feel in his text. Her analysis of this text concludes with a fairly pointed summary:

> This epic [*The Lord of the Rings*] constitutes a sampler of Tolkienian concepts and forms realized singly and separately in other works. The critic as monster depicted in the *Beowulf* article reappears as Tolkien the critic in the forward to *The Lord of the Rings*, a 'grown-up' version of Tolkien the narrator in *The Hobbit*. The hero as monster finds expression, as it has earlier in Bilbo, in Frodo, who discovers the landscape of the self to be a harsher terrain than that of Mordor. The series of monsters typifying the deadly sins –Saruman, Shelob – ultimately converge with the evil Germanic king of the trilogy – Denethor – combining ideas of 'King under the Mountain' in *The Hobbit* with the idea of the Germanic Lord presented in 'The Homecoming' and other medieval parities. The good Germanic Lord, hero-as-subordinate, too, from *The Hobbit* and the medieval parities, converges with the Christian concept of the king-as-servant from the fairy-stories, in the last two volumes of the trilogy. (Chance 2001: 182)

The Lord of the Rings, for Chance, represents a resounding echo of the work that Tolkien loved and spent his career studying. She finds several tropes and elements of earlier tales throughout the text, and expertly traces these inklings back to their sources. It is this invocation of source material that gives the sense of depth, or as Michael Drout calls them 'literary runes', to Tolkien's work. When it comes time to conclude her monograph, Chance quotes Christopher Tolkien's forward to *The Silmarillion* where he 'claims that this "compendious narrative" of mythological tales was "made long afterward from sources of great diversity (poems and annals, and oral tales) that had survived in agelong tradition"' (Chance 2001: 199). Following this excerpt, Chance wonders whether Christopher 'is describing the literary output of one man or of one nation. Perhaps he merely means to agree that, in Tolkien's fantasy mythology for Middle-earth, his father had indeed finally written that "mythology *for England*"' (Chance 2001: 199). Chance expertly models an approach to Tolkien's work which celebrates the ways in which he reflected on, responded to, or reacted against the subjects that he was passionate about in his professional life. This appreciation for his source texts and the way that he is able to weave them into a meaningful suggestion of something more, a suggestion of 'depth', behind his works has become a defining characteristic of scholarship that hopes to interpret how Tolkien uses myth.

In *Tolkien and the Invention of Myth: A Reader* (2004), Jane Chance has assembled an important collection of essays which explore the significance of myth to Tolkien and his work,

as well as identify the largest influences on his writing. The first portion of the book looks at how Tolkien approached myth in his own life and how this intersected with his passions, like philology. The main sections of the text, however, concern themselves with the ways that various traditions (Greek/Latin, Old Norse, Old English, and Finnish) influenced Tolkien.

The intent behind the collection is addressed by Chance, who states that 'What is clear from all these essays is the masterful way that Tolkien adapted from and changed his medieval sources in myth to suit his own cosmogony and literary purposes' (Chance 2004: 14). This purpose reflects eloquently the methodology that Chance uses in her monograph discussed above. The complex interweaving of many of the source materials mentioned in this collection give Tolkien's work the feel of a large corpus of texts which rely on a hitherto unexamined mythology. It is not that Tolkien's works give the feel that he has invented a mythology, they give the feel that he has somehow miraculously discovered and tapped into a mythology that has existed for centuries.

One of the more unique attempts to understanding Tolkien's appreciation of myth is Joseph Pearce's monograph *Tolkien: Man and Myth*. Although it focuses more on Tolkien's biography and letters than his fictional writing, it does offer some valuable insights. Initially, understanding that Tolkien views the story at the centre of his own religious affiliation as a myth helps readers appreciate the reverence and seriousness that he attributed to myth. Pearce describes a conversation between Lewis and Tolkien in which they discuss Christianity and religious myths. During the course of this conversation, Tolkien claims that 'myths, far from being lies, are the best way of conveying truths which would otherwise be inexpressible' (Pearce 1998: 58). This is one of the milder examples that Pearce uses to illustrate his claim.

Perhaps the most poignant example that Pearce uses to validate his interpretation is the letter that Tolkien wrote to his son concerning his wife's grave. In this letter, Tolkien tells Christopher that the inscription on Edith's grave, apart from her name and the years of her life, will simply read 'Lúthien'. Pearce beautifully extrapolates Tolkien's commentary on the decision: 'he was saying, in effect, that the only way to get at the truth of his love for his wife was to enter into the *myth* of Beren and Lúthien which, essentially inspired by that love, was itself the most powerful and poignant expression of it' (1998: 206, emphasis in original). From these, and other, instances, Pearce concludes that, for Tolkien, myth 'was the only way that certain transcendent truths could be expressed in intelligible form' (1998: xiii). This statement is broad and could certainly have implications for Tolkien's fictional work. It helps readers

understand his motivation to use stories that resonate with truth, though they may not choose to communicate entirely through fact.

I should indicate that what is novel about Pearce's text is not the conclusion that he draws. Indeed, Flieger had already stated something similar almost a decade earlier: 'one of the most important aspects of Tolkien's concept of story in general and of myth, legend, and fairy tale in particular [is that] that they convey not fact but truth and, even more important, that they are the best vehicles for certain kinds of truth' (2002: 9). Rather, what is significant about his contribution is the depth to which he probes Tolkien's letters and biographical information in order to draw his conclusion. It is a para-textual approach that most scholars avoid, but it helps to contextualize Tolkien's use of myth.

In his article, 'Myth, History, and Time in *The Lord of the Rings*', Lionel Basney is concerned with illustrating how Tolkien uses myth (sometimes he calls it 'lore') and history to create a stable background for the action of the story. He goes further than this simple observation, though, asserting that 'the importance of "lore" in Middle-earth is not only utilitarian. It is valued for itself. Further, we find it undergoing a definite evolution' (Basney 2004: 187). He uses several examples of cultures who are transitioning from oral traditions to written traditions, including Rohan, Rivendell, and the Shire.

Basney also claims that there is a mutually influential relationship between myth and history. To support this claim, he describes a scenario which happens several times throughout the text:

> an individual character, often on his home ground and thus confident of his ability to judge rightly, suddenly recognizes that some reality of which he had known only in legend now faces him in broad daylight, or is attested to by authority he cannot gainsay. The character's response is normally a blend of surprise, assent, and wonder. For the reality he confronts does not thereby lose its mythical fascination. Rather the myth merges with experience, or into experience, its wonder intact, but having gained empirical solidity. (Basney 2004: 188)

Basney contends that this pattern is repeated more than fifteen times over the course of *The Lord of the Rings*. He illustrates how there is a movement from 'legend to experience, from "imaginary" to "real"' (Basney 2004: 190) which permeates the text. His analysis demonstrates how Tolkien consistently uses the experience of the characters in *The Lord of the Rings* as an affirmation of, perhaps even a realization of, the mythologies they have inherited.

Extending Basney's argument farther than he probably intended, his analysis provides an interesting meta-textual framework for readers. In a sense, the way in which characters in

The Lord of the Rings find reality aligning with their conceptions of myth mirrors the way in which the text presents myth which aligns with readers' perceptions of reality. Readers are also given a model for how to reconcile the alignment of rational thought with what was once thought to be superstitious fiction.

This section demonstrates how there are several differing views within Tolkien scholarship on the theme of Myth/Legend. Myth is discussed as lies/superstition, as a technique to tell a symbolic story, or as part of folklore or cultural heritage through artistic representation. These are all important contributions to the scholarly field; the most important area for overlap with the participant responses, however, seems to be the final idea. In this conception, myth is often used as a verb, as in 'to myth' (Mary Beard, cited in Fimi 2012). It is the idea that a writer or creator takes ideas or source material, like the kind explored by Jane Chance, and develops them into a story that has a more resonant significance, like the type described by Shippey.

To return to the responses of the two participants who indicated that myth/legend was the genre of *The Lord of the Rings*: the participants conveyed that they appreciate the way that myth is able to incorporate a wide range of story and influences in order to convey meaning on a broad level. There was certainly an agreement with most of the considerations of scholars presented here.

3.4.3   Threatened Homeland

The participant who chose threatened homeland as the genre of *The Lord of the Rings* changed the way that he discussed the text between questions seven and eight. At first 6A described the story as 'an adventure/fantasy' and claimed that 'the whole series is like that'. After selecting threatened homeland as the genre, his discussion shifted. On question eight, he indicated that he chose this genre because 'Frodo doesn't really want to go but he knows that Middle Earth [sic] is being threatened and that if he doesn't go he will almost definitely see his world destroyed' (6A). This participant showed the same tendency as several of the participants who chose Quest as the genre for the story, in that he decided to focus on one element that he believed was particularly significant to the story when trying to determine into which genre to place *The Lord of the Rings*. The element indicated by participant 6A lends itself fairly well to a conversation of the way that war is portrayed in the text.

As with many of these themes, war has been so thoroughly incorporated into Tolkien's work that scholars often cannot help but address the theme in their work. Anne C. Petty acknowledges that 'to say that Tolkien infused his stories with his own first-hand knowledge of war, and a second-hand experience of it through his sons, is an understatement' (2003: 132). The prominence and significance of war and conflict throughout *The Lord of the Rings* became a topic of discussion shortly after the book's publication.

One of the first major voices to wade into the discussion was Tolkien's fellow Inkling C.S. Lewis. In his essay 'The Dethronement of Power' Lewis asserts that the war depicted throughout the text was true to his personal experience:

> This war is the very quality of the war my generation knew. It is all here: the endless, unintelligible movement, the sinister quiet of the front when 'everything is now ready', the flying civilians, the lively, vivid friendships, the background of something like despair and the merry foreground, and such heaven-sent windfalls as a case of choice tobacco 'salvaged' from a ruin. (2004: 13)

Perhaps there can be no better judge as to the realism of the portrayal of warfare in literature than a writer and critic who experienced the hardships of combat himself. The fact that war exists in Middle-earth is not what the debate focuses on. Rather, it is whether the war contributes something to the text. Whether the war adds more to the text than simply background noise or a mechanism for plot development.

In *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, Tolkien is the first author mentioned in the entry for 'Military Fantasy'. The authors initially clarify that 'though J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* can be seen as largely concerned with warfare, to think of it as MF would be to misread' (Clute and Grant 1996: 645). This demonstrates how warfare is thematically significant to Tolkien's text, but it is not the main focus of the work. Still, because of war's significant contributions to the overall understanding of *The Lord of the Rings*, Clute and Grant acknowledge that the book was 'an influence on MF' (1996: 645). They explain how 'the anachronistic specifics of its battle scenes and individual trials of arms, which combine the medieval/archaic with the modern, have been reproduced endlessly and faithfully' (Clute and Grant 1996: 645). Warfare, then, plays a prominent role in understanding *The Lord of the Rings*, so it is important to examine the theme of warfare as it is explored throughout Tolkien's text.

Two scholars have, for all intents and purposes, been at the forefront of exploration concerning how war influenced Tolkien's life and how this influence was conveyed into his

literature. For an intricate view of Tolkien's life throughout World War I and a timeline of when he wrote various pieces, consult John Garth's monograph *Tolkien and the Great War: The Threshold of Middle-earth*. Although Garth occasionally strays into short discussions on how the wealth of biographic knowledge presented in his text influences Tolkien, he is primarily concerned with the biographical element.

Therefore, for more complete discussion of how his war experience influenced his writing, as well as the significance of war as a theme in his work, readers must turn to Janet Brennan Croft's monograph *War and the Works of J.R.R. Tolkien* and her subsequent articles. In her monograph, Croft states:

> Understanding Tolkien's approach to war is crucial to fully understanding his works, particularly *The Lord of the Rings*, as a whole. Many critics and readers have viewed Tolkien as simplistically pacifist or war-loving, by reading shallowly and ignoring Tolkien's seeming self-contradictions, or simply disregarding the presence of war in the works altogether. What they miss by reading this way is a well-thought-out, comprehensive, and realistic philosophy of war. (2004b: 145)

Just as Tolkien's complex understanding and portrayal of evil leads to a more developed plot, so too does his complex understanding of war.

Contrary to the comments of several reviewers, Croft believes that Tolkien 'understood the unhappy balance between the occasional necessity for war on the one hand, and on the other, the price it exacts from the bodies and souls of participants' (2004b: 145). This puts him in a large grey area that defies placement on one end of a dualistic equation or the other. Additionally, Croft proposes that 'the key to his philosophy is just war theory, its sometimes sterile logic tempered by his understanding of what we now call posttraumatic stress disorder, his wide reading in history, his views on the art of leadership, and his distrust of modernity' (2004b: 145). Even in her rebuttal of criticism, Croft is unable to give a firm stance that aligns immediately with Tolkien's perspective without giving a few heavy caveats.

Just as Shippey sees Tolkien's understanding of evil as situating him within the context of the twentieth century, so Croft sees Tolkien's understanding of war as situating him firmly within his time. Unlike some of the other writers who were contemporaries of Tolkien, 'the war did not turn him into an ironic writer, as it did so many others of his generation; he retained his un-despairing but realistic outlook in spite of all the war could do' (Croft 2004b: 145). This should not be interpreted as saying that Tolkien did not understand the realities of war. Instead, Tolkien understands this kind of ironic motivation, but he 'rejects disillusionment as antithetical to his theory of courage, where the highest good is to go on

without hope and the greatest sin is defeatism' (Croft 2004b: 60). In a way Tolkien reacts against the prevailing irony present in so much of the literature of his time.

Perhaps Tolkien does not adopt irony because, unlike many of the other post-World War II writers who became notable for their ironic stance, Tolkien fought in World War I. This gave him a unique perspective when considering writers of his era. Critics must consider how this first war influenced Tolkien and his perspective of the second. Croft observes this when she notes that:

> This second war in his lifetime was even more bitter than the first, as he helplessly observed the inexorable advance of modernity and the machine culminate in the atomic bomb. Like Sassoon, Tolkien worried about the 'slavedom of mankind to the machine' ('Litany of the Lost'). In Tolkien's view, only one thing was 'triumphant' as World War II came to an end: 'the Machines', and he wondered plaintively, 'what's their next move'? (*Letters* 111). (2004b: 145-146)

While one does not like to downplay the significance of World War II in influencing the other writers publishing around the same time as Tolkien, it is evident that his own experiences in World War I heavily shaped Tolkien's perception and, thus, his literature. Significantly, this perspective intersects with Tolkien's dislike of the Industrial Revolution, as he saw World War II as a war won predominately by machinery and technology. This adversarial perspective on technology is examined more in depth in chapter five (p. 205), but the overlap between that theme and the theme of war probably served as mutually reinforcing.

In her 2015 article 'Noms de Guerre: The Power of Naming in War and Conflict in Middle-earth', Croft revisits the theme of warfare and illustrates how the conflict in *The Lord of the Rings* influences many of the names presented in the text. Perhaps her most convincing argument revolves and the place names in Gondor. She notes that 'place-naming can also reflect nationalism, reinforcing national identity and purpose' (Croft 2015: 110). To illustrate this point she discusses how Minas Ithil was changed to Minas Morgul after it fell to Sauron's forces, and how the Gondorians' own city Minas Anor took the name Minas Tirith. These specific examples help support the contention that the names used throughout the story indicate a depth and seriousness in attempting to depict the cultures of these fictional realms as believably as possible. The names indicate how Tolkien attempts to depict the Gondorians as people responding to world events by re-identifying places to fit into their new cultural context. This echoes the realism that Lewis ascribes to the text above.

After this and other powerful analyses, Croft concludes 'in the case of war and conflict, techniques of naming and un-naming underscore themes of power imbalance, reveal

characters to be fragmented or integrated, add power or take it away from people or objects, and drive plot' (2015: 114). Thus, naming in Tolkien serves to reinforce the already complex understanding of warfare in *The Lord of the Rings*. The fact that Tolkien made efforts to demonstrate how peoples at war would use names and changing of names to validate their own sense of purpose or identity as they struggle against an opponent gives more depth to his understanding of conflict. It also helps to reinforce the verisimilitude that the reader feels from the text.

One aspect of the text that many critics have recognized is its dearth of female characters. While it may seem odd to note this observation in a section addressing war, I mention it here because the two seem to have been related in Tolkien's mind. John D. Rateliff's chapter from *Perilous and Fair: Women in the Works and Life of J.R.R. Tolkien* begins by noting this connection. In 'The Missing Women: J.R.R. Tolkien's Lifelong Support for Women's Higher Education' he quotes an interview with Tolkien to illustrates this point: 'When questioned about the scarcity of female characters in *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien replied first by comparing his story to tales of polar exploration: "after all, these are *wars* and [...] a terrible expedition to the North Pole, so to speak"' (Gueroult, quoted in Rateliff 2015: 41, bracket and emphasis Rateliff's). There's a significant connection, at least to the author, between the theme of war and the portrayal of women in the text. While this precise connection may not exist for every reader of *The Lord of the Rings*, other scholars have also connected the portrayal of women to war stories.

In the same volume, Melissa A. Smith's article 'At Home and Abroad: Éowyn's Two-fold Figuring as War Bride in *The Lord of the Rings*' examines the way that Éowyn's portrayal seems to fall into a particular trope common among war writers. She claims that Tolkien's depiction of Éowyn demonstrates a 'failure to fulfill the role of war bride-left-behind' but 'success as a foreign war bride' (Smith 2015: 216). She uses this analysis to complicate the perspective that Tolkien 'is simply a narrow-minded misogynist who dooms the women in his work to weakness and failure' (Smith 2015: 216). Therefore, if the theme of warfare does not excuse the lack of women in *The Lord of the Rings*, it certainly helps to define their characterization.

To return to Croft's monograph briefly, there is one more contention that deserves to be recognized, as it is revisited by scholars almost a decade later. With regard to one significant, albeit tangential, character, Croft contends that there is a depiction of someone

who has a modern approach to warfare within *The Lord of the Rings*. She sees Faramir as maintaining a perspective toward confrontation that is often held by modern readers. She notices that 'Faramir has a more modern and thoughtful attitude toward war, and is perhaps a more realistic model to emulate for the twenty-first-century reader' (Croft 2004b: 101). She is not the only scholar to point out that Faramir seems to be anachronistic in his views of militarized combat.

Steven Brett Carter furthers this observation in his article 'Faramir and the Heroic Ideal of the Twentieth Century: Or, How Aragorn Died at the Somme'. He agrees with the characterization proposed by Croft. His contention is that Faramir 'embodies a redefined form of the heroic model that is more representative of the modern warrior by accepting war as a necessary part of Western civilization, but preferring peace' (Carter 2012: 101). In a way, this shift in perspective concerning warfare mirrors the shift in Tolkien's understanding of heroism. Faramir does not pursue battle for glory, but rather to defend and protect that which he loves. War is not a means to find individual value, but is a means to preserve larger cultural and interpersonal aspects of a civilization. This hesitancy to engage in warfare is not only confined to those characters who partake in war despite their reluctance.

Several characters dislike war in its entirety and eschew violence whenever they can. Contributing to the complex way in which Tolkien depicts warfare, several scholars have observed that Tolkien reserves a special place of prominence for pacifism throughout his text. One such scholar is Nan C. Scott in her article 'War and Pacifism in *The Lord of the Rings*'. While she concedes that a majority of Tolkien's text deals with the concept of war, she illuminates the significance that pacifism plays in the most integral plot arc: 'It is…four rejections of violence and killing, each at a time when expediency would have cried out for the sword…that save what can be saved through yet another night in Middle-earth' (Scott 1972: 29). She demonstrates how the pity and forbearance demonstrated by multiple characters towards Gollum are the means by which the evil in Middle-earth is ultimately overthrown. If these acts of restraint had not taken place, then all of the might and military prowess of the other characters would be for naught, as Sauron would be able to overtake any opposition in a direct confrontation. This latter point is emphasized by Gandalf while introducing his proposition to confront Sauron's forces at the Black Gate.

A final noteworthy critic to address is the one who gave the quote at the beginning of this section. Anne C. Petty's *Tolkien in the Land of Heroes* addresses how many of Tolkien's

writings are consumed with the idea of war. She addresses the idea of war from a thematic perspective and observes how readers might be tempted to contend that:

> Tolkien's legendarium is an example of what Joseph Campbell calls 'war mythology', as opposed to a mythology of peace… The war mythology personifies the ethic of an eye for an eye, of the rights to wage war in order to revenge perceived wrongs or to defend oneself when attacked. The mythology of peace turns the other cheek and forgives the attackers. (Petty 2003: 173)

She goes on to talk about *The Lord of the Rings* specifically, by mentioning how the One Ring must be completely destroyed 'before any hope of healing and peace can be achieved' (Petty 2003: 173). She contends, however, that this is not the full picture of the text. If readers are perceptive to Frodo's moral stance in the Shire when he tries to save Saruman's life, they will see that Frodo, at least, is a character that would fit in the framework of a mythology of peace.

The protagonist of *The Lord of the Rings* refuses to let the violence of the larger world influence his beloved Shire. Petty summarizes how, ultimately, 'it's Frodo's intention that the cycle of violence shouldn't be repeated there in his beloved Shire…The best use of power in this case is not to use it at all' (2003: 174). This scene reinforces the ideal that Tolkien's mythology represents a mythology of peace. In fact, most of Tolkien's works have this very sentiment toward the end. In order to find this endorsement on non-violence, however, readers must endure much battle and suffering.

This reluctance by Frodo to participate in the confrontation in the larger world is something that participant 6A perceives in his discussion of the threatened homeland genre. He contends that it is only because he wants to spare his homeland and the world that he unwillingly takes on the quest. There is a lot of overlap between the way that 6A describes his decision and the way that scholars have discussed the theme of war in Tolkien scholarship.

3.4.4   Conclusion

Group 3 was comprised of three genres chosen by participants as the best answer available to question seven: allegory, myth/legend, and threatened homeland. In the analysis of these three genres, it became evident that participants who chose allegory or myth/legend as the best suited for *The Lord of the Rings* often justified their answer by discussing how inclusive their chosen genre is. Inversely, the participant who chose threatened homeland as the genre for the story focused on a particular aspect of the book that he felt was the most significant and extrapolated that in order to arrive at his chosen genre.

3.5   Conclusion

The most significant trend that arises from the analysis in this chapter is the tendency for participants to choose whatever genre they perceive as the most inclusive option available to them when they try to categorize *The Lord of the Rings*. This tendency occurs in discussions about almost every genre chosen by participants. It is interesting that this trend developed across the genres, demonstrating that participants often used the same kind of justification to support their decision, regardless of what genre they chose. Participants who chose very different genres all claimed that they selected their genre because it is more inclusive than the others listed in question seven.

The other tendency, though it is present far less often, is for participants to choose one element and base their conclusions about the type of story that *The Lord of the Rings* is on that element. This trend is particularly strong in the genres of threatened homeland and quest. What follows is a brief discussion of these two tendencies and how they either conform to or defy the typical patterns of classification placed onto texts.

The second, and less common, tendency would seem to align more readily with the pre-existing system of categorizing books within genres. Participants find an element that they deem is important to the book, and they find a genre that the element fits within. The largest complication of this process is if what young participants deem to be the most significant element is different than what older readers perceive to be the most significant element. This certainly doesn't seem to be the case very often with *The Lord of the Rings*, since this process leads many readers to assume that the story follows a quest narrative, which is one of the most discussed topics by Tolkien scholars.

The larger trend in these responses, however, presents a more liberating approach to classifying the story within a given genre than is traditionally used by critics, publishers, and older readers. Perhaps this indicates that, to these young readers, *The Lord of the Rings* is a broad text that defies pigeonholing as a specific genre. When they were forced to choose a genre for the story, most of them simply chose the term that they found to be the most inclusive. Many of the participants specifically referenced other genres in their discussion as a

means of demonstrating that their chosen genre did not preclude the story from being interpreted as fitting into other categories.

This may demonstrate that the preconceived notions that scholars have when they discuss genre are either not universally accepted among young readers or, in fact, that there is an over-eagerness to apply clean labels to a text that defies such an easy categorization.

It also indicates that the way *The Lord of the Rings* is perceived as a standard for fantasy literature by older readers may be a disservice to the text and to other books. Since this text is often considered to be paradigmatic of fantasy literature, one would expect a majority of young participants to choose this as the genre for the story; however, that is not what happened. Instead of allowing *The Lord of the Rings* to define the fantasy genre, as many critics, writers, and readers have, these young readers believe that *The Lord of the Rings* defies any such categorization.

These responses indicate that we should approach proposals such as Attebery's centring of *The Lord of the* Rings within the fantasy genre with trepidation. If critics and scholars build a genre around this text, it appears that the genre will not only have liminal edges, but an unstable centre. Readers are free to interpret texts in a number of ways and to see commonalities that critics may overlook in their classification. Because of this, we cannot state with certainty that *The Lord of the Rings* shares more in common with certain texts than others for all readers at all times. When one considers how young readers may classify books as they are exposed to them, it is entirely possible that they may not perceive the story as fitting within the genre of fantasy as they have experienced it.

Perhaps, then, this chapter serves to help us keep in mind a very important caveat stated by Flieger: 'I do not propose to assign *The Lord of the Rings* to a particular genre, such as fairy tale, epic, or romance. The book quite clearly derives from all three, and to see it as belonging only to one category is to miss the essential elements it shares with the others' (2004: 123). These young readers inspire critics to keep their minds open to new possibilities and connections that they may overlook if they are too quick to assign the story to a single genre.

Instead of finding ways to limit our perspective and clean up the lines surrounding the story, let us revel in the messiness that great writing can achieve. Let's celebrate the various influences, overlaps, transmissions, and transmutations that we find in this story and many others.

Chapter Four

Responding to Characters

4.1   Introduction

As I mentioned in chapter two (p.75), the analysis in this chapter will use concepts borrowed from Joseph A. Maxwell's *Qualitative Research Design* (2013). The term 'Theoretical categories' reflects trends in the respondents' answers and were compiled after the interviews took place, during data analysis. The term 'Organizational categories', on the other hand, reflects themes in Tolkien scholarship and were developed prior to the interviews. It is the comparison of these two categories that enables the present study to create dialogue between prior Tolkien scholarship and the experiences of young readers interviewed.

When discussing characters from *The Lord of the Rings*, the kinds of observations made by participants touched upon two of the major organizational categories anticipated in my preliminary literature review. The two organizational categories most clearly exhibited in these responses are the concepts of The Hero and Morality. This chapter will explore the way in which the ideas about heroism explored in prior scholarship of Tolkien's work overlap or disagree with the observations that participants made about their favourite characters. It will go on to discuss how the theme of morality, as analysed in Tolkien criticism, is matched or challenged by participant responses concerning their least favourite characters. As the results of this analysis will make clear: young readers are capable of complex readings of characterization and morality, and they discern important differences between a hero and a protagonist.

To make the analysis clearer, I have placed the observations made by participants throughout their interviews into three theoretical categories. I have titled these categories 'Personal Attributes', 'Relational Attributes', and 'Narrative Function.' The first theoretical category, Personal Attributes, includes all observations that deal with a quality that could be seen as innate to the character or the physical or psychological attributes of a character. The second theoretical category, Relational Attributes, includes all observations of how a character interacts with other characters or items. The final theoretical category, Narrative Function, contains all observations about how a specific character fulfils a role within the plot. By categorizing observations in this way, the analysis can diagnose trends in what participants

value when ranking each character of the Fellowship. These trends can then be compared with the organizational categories identified in the literature review.

4.1.1 *Note about Statistical Significance*

Before digging into the particulars of why each participant rated these characters as their favourite, I should note the statistical significance in this activity.[14] Table 2 indicates the number of times that each character was placed into each of the five rows of the Diamond Ranking Activity. Using this data set, I calculated the statistical significance of several factors using a chi-squared test.[15] This test indicates that the distribution of several characters was statistically significant. These characters include: Aragorn, Boromir, Gimli, Merry, and Sam. This test also indicates that the distribution of characters in Row 1, Row 2, and Row 5 are also statistically significant.[16]

	Aragorn	Boromir	Frodo	Gandalf	Gimli	Legolas	Merry	Pippin	Sam	Expected
Row 1	3	1	2	7	0	6	0	2	8	3.22
Row 2	16	1	6	9	2	3	3	7	11	6.44
Row 3	8	5	13	8	15	10	12	10	6	9.66
Row 4	2	6	7	4	7	9	13	7	3	6.44
Row 5	0	16	1	1	5	1	1	3	1	3.22

Table 2 Number of times participants placed each character from the Fellowship in each row of the diamond during the diamond ranking activity.

What this indicates is that the distribution of rankings for these characters and these rows differ enough from an expected average distribution that they are statistically significant, and

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[14] For a reminder of the way the diamond ranking activity was conducted, see chapter two, p. 81.

[15] A chi square test demonstrates statistical significance or statistical difference between groups or categories. In a chi square test, a normal or relatively even distribution of the data is assumed. A chi square test is used to demonstrate any statistically significant differences between this expected normal distribution and what is actually observed in the data set. In this instance, a normal distribution would show no statistically significant difference in the frequency with which one character was selected as more or less favorable than another. In traditional sample analysis, a chi square result of less than 0.05 is considered statistically significant; meaning that there is a statistically significant difference between the observed results and the expected results. This calculation is designed to take sample size into account when calculating statistical significance. For a fuller explanation, see Pearson, Karl. 1900. 'On the criterion that a given system of deviations from the probable in the case of a correlated system of variables is such that it can be reasonably supposed to have arisen from random sampling', *The London, Edinburgh, and Dublin Philosophical Magazine and Journal of Science*, 50.302:157-175.

[16] The chi square value for each is as follows: Aragorn=3.53E-4, Boromir=4.50E-12, Gimli=3.63E-3, Merry=7.86E-3, Sam=4.56E-3, Row 1=1.83E-2, Row2=2.27E-4, and Row 5=1.47E-10.

therefore are probable areas where follow-up research could explore the rationale behind why the actual rankings differ enough from the expected rankings to reject the null hypothesis.

4.2 Favourite Character from the Fellowship

The three characters that participants ranked as their favourite the most were Sam, Gandalf, and Legolas. In their discussions of why they placed these characters as their favourite, participants blended the three theoretical categories in unique ways: for Sam, participants were mostly interested in his Relational Attributes, followed by his Narrative Function. Participants who ranked Gandalf as their favourite also focused mostly on Relational Attributes, but they found his Personal Attributes important as well. Finally, the participants who listed Legolas as their favourite character focused mostly on Personal Attributes, with a few mentioning his Relational Attributes. In the sections that follow, excerpts and analysis of participant discussion of these characters are given in more detail, along with the way these excerpts fall into each theoretical category. The patterns and analysis of these theoretical categories are then compared to the consensus view of Tolkien scholarship via the organizational category of the hero.

4.2.1 Organizational Category: The Hero

As mentioned previously (p.75), the organizational categories were decided upon prior to the interview phase of the research. They were chosen because they were significant discussions within the field of Tolkien scholarship and it was possible that they would be significant in discussions with young readers. In many instances, the ways in which participants discussed their favourite characters aligns with the way that previous Tolkien criticism has discussed the concept of the hero. Analysing participant responses using the theoretical categories developed from the participant responses helps to illuminate areas for comparison with these organizational categories.

Initially, the fact that there is no singular favourite character among the participants is an interesting point of intersection between the participants in the study and prior criticism of *The Lord of the Rings*. The way that these readers felt drawn to multiple characters reflects the way that Tolkien scholars have often proposed differing characters as the 'hero' of the text, or even combinations of characters that are heroic. Previous scholarship largely agrees that there

is no single hero in the work, but that several characters retain features that reflect heroism. Many scholars have investigated how different characters convey different types of heroism: mythic, modern, religious, romantic, and more. This theme in criticism will become apparent as we discuss scholarship in the analysis of participant responses in this chapter. This impulse to label many characters as heroic is also demonstrated by the participants in their capacity to see various characters as heroic and for different reasons.

4.2.2   Sam

The most frequently mentioned characteristic of Sam when discussing why participants placed him as their favourite was his loyalty. In fact, seven out of the eight participants who ranked Sam as their favourite mentioned his loyalty as one of their reasons for doing so. Sam's loyalty falls under the theoretical category of Relational Attributes because, as will be shown, this loyalty depends on Sam's relationship to the other characters, most often Frodo.

Of the participants who chose Sam as their favourite character, many try to summarize his portrayal in completely positive terms. Absolutist statements were employed frequently to give a sense of just how impressive Sam's devotion to other characters is. This tendency is evident in 17A's commentary of how Sam 'is just loyal to Frodo all the time and he just goes the full way with Frodo' and is 'completely devoted to Frodo'. It is also apparent in 14A's statement that 'everything he does is just for the benefit of others and especially Frodo'. These kinds of comments indicate that participants believe that the method which Sam uses to navigate relationships is devotion. This attribute of Sam is important to the young readers who rated him highly. In fact, all but one of these participants mentioned his loyalty as one of the major reasons for their decision.

There seems to be some disagreement among the participants about the impetus behind Sam's loyalty. Most participants assume that the loyalty is freely given and freely received. One participant, however, indicated that the relationship is more complex than that. 27A believed that 'Sam feels very like he's been burdened with protecting and helping Frodo'. If we pay attention to the word usage employed by this participant, it becomes evident that he interprets Sam's loyalty as influenced by a sense of obligation. This may indicate a more nuanced reading than some of the others, but this is not necessarily the case.

Some participants went even further in their discussion of Sam's loyalty, observing the impact that this trait has on Sam himself. 18A saw his relationship with Frodo as a positive influence, asserting that, over the course of the journey, 'Sam becomes even more loyal to Frodo and is able to use that as motivation to overcome his fears'. In contrast to this interpretation, though, one participant claims that Sam is 'always willing to do whatever Frodo needs, even if it comes at harm or damage to himself. He never puts himself first' (24A). This observation foreshadows that there could be a downside to Sam's unwavering loyalty. 14A concurred with this line of thinking, mentioning how Sam's loyalty leads him to do some things he wouldn't otherwise do: 'the fact that he didn't even go on the quest particularly willingly in the first place, he went because of his obligation to Frodo and because Gandalf coerced him into [it], kind of'. These reflections indicate a difference of interpretation among young readers when they consider why Sam is so loyal to Frodo. It also exposes the fact that they read this relationship as complex. They deeply consider why Sam has such unwavering fealty and weigh the consequences that such a relationship could have on himself and other characters.

The way that participants indicate how Sam's loyalty leads him into danger and into heroic action is an idea that finds reflection in Tolkien scholarship. Brian Rosebury claims that Tolkien uses 'an anti- "heroic" theme' in his texts (1992: 146). He demonstrates how several of Tolkien's heroes, such as Bilbo, are depictions of 'reluctant – in effect, conscripted – heroes' and how, even in *The Lord of the Rings*, 'only Gimli and Éomer could be said, at moments, to rejoice in battle' (Rosebury 1992: 146). This is a rejection of the heroic model of the Middle Ages, wherein battle was a celebrated means by which to gain honour. Instead, Rosebury argues that most of Tolkien's characters are anti-heroes 'in the pointed sense that their deeds of physical courage do not express their intrinsic characters (which are pacific and self-effacing) but are performed in spite of them. We admire them for their aversion to fighting, not their love of it' (1992: 147). This description of Bilbo and others as the unwilling participants in heroic deeds reflects the same insight as observations made by participant 18A above. The acts of courage and bravery depicted throughout the text are not a revelation of the true nature of the characters who performed them, instead they are often in conflict with the desires and wants of those characters.

A second characteristic of Sam that participants mentioned as part of the reason why they rated him highly also falls within the theoretical category of Relational Attributes. A few

participants indicated that Sam's mistrust of other characters endeared him to them. This mistrust mainly manifests itself in two of Sam's relationships: with Aragorn and with Gollum.

Two participants placed emphasis on the way that Sam's mistrust of Gollum was important to their reading of the character. 14A discussed how Sam's mistrust of Gollum is an important part of Sam's character; he remarked that Sam is always 'wary of Gollum' but is also able to 'still [listen] to Frodo' and this is important character development. 1A also noticed how Sam 'doubted Gollum'. She went on to expound how she 'kinda liked that' as a reader, and how she was unsure whether Gollum 'was gonna go good' and this uncertainty led her to appreciate the way that 'Sam mistrusted Gollum from the beginning' (1A). In fact, she indicated that the way 'Frodo let his guard down' is the reason that Sam and Frodo are ambushed by Shelob (1A). Sam's mistrust of Gollum seems to be one area in which these young readers notice character development. This attribute also shows up earlier in the story, when Sam must decide what he thinks about Aragorn.

Sam's mistrust of Aragorn also endears him to some of the participants in the study. When considering his interactions with Aragorn, 13A described how Sam's 'relationship with Aragorn has always charmed' her. She appreciated his 'immediate distrust of Strider' and how he ultimately comes to accept Aragorn because of the way Aragorn 'brings the Athelas to heal Frodo and how that just switches over immediately and there's nothing but respect for Aragorn after that' (13A). 13A mostly talked about this mistrust as an expression of the protective relationship that Sam has with Frodo. In a way, therefore, 13A interpreted this mistrust as supporting the idea of Sam's loyalty, which most participants talked about when they discussed why they rated Sam as their favourite character. The other participant who brought up Sam's mistrust of Aragorn as important did so for very different reasons.

Like 13A, 14A discussed how Sam's mistrust of Aragorn is significant, but it seems that he prefers to think of it as an indication of Sam's maturity or insight:

> I think his distrust of Aragorn at first was pretty well placed. I kind of, I enjoyed reading that he didn't immediately trust him. It took some getting to know him and it really took a lot of work on both, on Aragorn's part especially, to gain over Sam's trust. And I think that that was a good character development on Sam's part. (14A)

In a way, this aligns more with the way that participants discussed Sam's mistrust of Gollum. This depicts Sam's decisions about Aragorn as meaningful for what it indicates about Sam as a character, and thus aligns with readings that see his mistrust of Gollum as a form of character development.

Finally, participants who ranked Sam as their favourite were also likely to include some description of how Sam fulfils the role of a hero in the story. This naturally falls into the theoretical category of Narrative Function. The view expressed by many of these participants was perhaps best summarized by participant 13A. She noted how Sam 'is the humblest, most faithful, and the least equipped for adventure of' the Fellowship, but is ultimately 'the hero of the story'. This elevation of Sam to the role of the hero is not uncommon among those who rated him highly, nor is the recognition that this kind role was not what the readers anticipated from Sam when the story began.

There seems to be a good deal of agreement among participants on the way that Sam fulfils the role of the protagonist. 17A spoke plainly, saying: 'the whole quest depended on him because, if he hadn't been there, then Frodo would have probably gotten bludgeoned by Gollum and the quest would have failed'. This interpretation was also supported by participants 1A and 26A, who added their own observations as to why and how Sam is pivotal. 1A claimed that 'there are several times' when Sam's relationship to Frodo is 'very crucial to the story' and 26A proclaimed that 'without [Sam], the quest wouldn't have succeeded'. Such observations make it evident as to why this characteristic belongs in the Narrative Function theoretical category. These participants did not discuss Sam as the protagonist because of his relationships to other characters or his intrinsic goodness. Instead, they focused on the role that he fulfils within the quest. They emphasized that the quest itself would have failed if not for Sam.

Seeing Sam as the protagonist simply because of Narrative Function does not mean that the participants had a simplistic reading of Sam's character. As has already been shown, the participants in the study were willing to dig deep into the complex relationship between Sam and Frodo. Instead, it demonstrates that they are able to conceptualize complex ideas of narrative and give those weight when considering the role of a character within a story. An additional observation that makes this argument evident was made by participant 26A. She gave an important caveat for the perspective that Sam is the hero and what this means for his character and for Frodo's:

> I feel like there's, among people I know who have read Tolkien, there's a lot of consensus: 'Sam's the hero and Frodo was weak'. But I think that that's not right. I mean, Sam helps fulfil the quest, without him Frodo probably wouldn't have succeeded, but that doesn't mean that Frodo's any less brave for what he did. (26A)

This indicates that, even though participants primarily used considerations of Narrative Function to claim that Sam is the hero of the story, they also take into account theoretical categories of Personal Attributes and Relational Attributes when making their determination. This indicates quite a complex reading of the role that a character plays within a story.

As a group, the participants who rated Sam as their favourite character had reasons which fell into all three of the theoretical categories. They found his character appealing, they appreciated the way he interacted with other characters, and they saw him as fulfilling an important role within the story.

The way in which participants discussed Sam as the hero of the story reflected a similar understanding of the role and characterization of the hero that many critics espouse. This allows a comparison between these two data sources to be drawn using the organizational category of the hero. Edith Crowe's article 'The Many Faces of Heroism in Tolkien' has a few novel contributions to the concept of the hero in Tolkien's work. She makes the significant point that heroes in Tolkien's legendarium consistently refuse the mantle of authority. She claims that 'one theme stands out above all these, however, and that is the renunciation of power' (Crowe 1983: 8). She also emphasizes how Tolkien addresses pride throughout his work. The way that participants described Sam's loyalty to Frodo and the quest makes clear that they appreciate this attribute as a kind of duty and humility.

This perception of the ordinariness of the heroes throughout the text is also enforced by Richard L. Purtill's interpretation. In *J.R.R. Tolkien: Myth, Morality, and Religion* he claims that the true heroes in both *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* are the hobbit protagonists. In these heroes Purtill sees a rejection of the established norms of heroism:

> Both Bilbo and Frodo are examples of ordinary persons rising to heroism when it is demanded of them. The original motive of their heroism is loyalty and love of friends. Their realization of their own limitations, their common sense and humility, keeps them from the rashness that is the excess of the virtue of courage, the megalomania that is the downfall of some more conventionally heroic figures such as Boromir. (1984: 48)

Many scholars understand that Tolkien was trying to re-envision what heroism looks like in the twentieth century and how this new interpretation was necessarily different from previous understandings of heroism. Sam is an embodiment of this same impulse. At the end of the next section, we will examine how these considerations compare to the idea of heroism proposed by a majority of Tolkien scholarship.

4.2.3   Gandalf

The characteristic of Gandalf most frequently mentioned by participants who ranked him as their favourite character was his leadership or guidance. In fact, six of the seven participants who listed Gandalf as their favourite mentioned this as one of the reasons why. This naturally falls into the theoretical category of Relational Attributes because it is dictated by the way that he interacts with other characters.

Several participants pointed out the way that Gandalf leads the Fellowship on their mission. 25A summarized this perspective when he described Gandalf as 'able to coordinate them and put them on the straight and narrow pretty much to get them to the end… He is basically a leader, I think. I think that the rest of them, they all see him as a leader.' This demonstrates Gandalf's importance to the Fellowship and how this characteristic is certainly within the theoretical category of a Relational Attribute. Participants focused mainly on the way that Gandalf's leadership influences others and how he helps them complete their objective.

In the same way, 7A emphasized these two aspects of Gandalf's leadership when she described how 'he was a very good leader of the pack, of the Fellowship, because, he just knew what they should do and if they had listened to him more often, like when Pippin grabs the [Palantír] and looks into it, if they had just followed his directions none of that would have happened'. When considering this quality of Gandalf's character what seems most important to participants is the way that it influences other members of the Fellowship and, in turn, allows them to fulfil the goals that they have set for themselves.

One participant observed how Gandalf's leadership expands beyond the Fellowship. 3A reflected on how Gandalf 'guided the War of the Ring', claiming that Gandalf is 'the leader on the good side and has resisted the temptation of the Ring, [and] advises everybody well'. This incorporates the influence that Gandalf achieves on characters like Théoden and Denethor as well as those that are in the Fellowship. This observation is not made by other participants; this could be because they see his influence on the members of the Fellowship as more important or because the nature of the activity was such that participants would be more focused on the members of the Fellowship as they ranked all of them.

Participants who rated Gandalf as their favourite also often discussed another characteristic which would fall into the theoretical category of Relational Attributes: Gandalf's caring approach to other characters in the Fellowship. More than half of the participants who rated Gandalf highly either mentioned his caring personality specifically, or pointed to his self-sacrifice to save the rest of the Fellowship as one of their main reasons for liking him.

Answers on this characteristic range from the more general to the quite specific. For instance, 8A enjoyed how Gandalf 'cares for the other characters', while 7A recalled how Gandalf 'sacrifices himself in the beginning'. 7A went on to elaborate on the meaning of this gesture, elucidating how 'when [Gandalf] dies for them, I feel like that's pretty heroic...I guess he knew it was for a greater cause and that just goes to show that he loves all of them.' In this instance, 7A described Gandalf's self-sacrifice as a means of demonstrating his affection for the other members of the Fellowship. 19A agreed with this assessment, claiming that Gandalf's fall in Moria 'show[s] how selfless he is, and how he's willing to sacrifice himself for the greater good'. One participant reflected on how this demonstration of love by Gandalf improves his opinion of Gandalf: 22A 'enjoy[s] the fact that [Gandalf] falls fighting for the Fellowship and…he's quite good there'. This indicates the way in which this episode helps form the perception of several of the readers who rated Gandalf as their favourite character of the Fellowship. While the theoretical category of Relational Attributes seems to be important for participants who rated Gandalf as their favourite, many also considered the theoretical category of Personal Attributes to be important as well.

A final observation about Gandalf that was important to most participants who ranked him as their favourite member of the Fellowship was his knowledge. Most of the participants who ranked him highly think that this is a crucial part of Gandalf's character. These observations fall within the Personal Attribute theoretical category.

Most of the participants who favoured Gandalf described him as the most knowledgeable character in the Fellowship. For instance, 25A claimed that Gandalf is 'the major organizer of the entire Fellowship. He is the most knowledgeable of most of them'. This excerpt demonstrates the way in which participants often portrayed Gandalf's knowledge as something innate, a characteristic that belongs inextricably to him as a person. It also foreshadows, however, the way in which this knowledge helps him achieve the attribute of leadership or guidance that participants also see as essential when they think about Gandalf.

Of further importance is the way that participants occasionally tied this knowledge into Gandalf's mythical position. 8A's first thought about Gandalf was of how 'he knows so much'. He went on to elaborate how Gandalf 'just has so much knowledge on, you know, the world and…he constantly hints at other things' (8A). This participant indicates that Gandalf's knowledge seems to break the bounds of the story and to suggest that he has knowledge of other stories and legends that the reader does not see within *The Lord of the Rings*. The mythical nature of Gandalf's wisdom may be what convinced another participant of Gandalf's power as well; 7A went so far as to say that Gandalf seems 'all-knowing'. She felt like Gandalf:

> could have done this on his own except for the fact that he couldn't really bear so much power. I feel like he knew exactly what to do and he's just like the one who orchestrated it all from the very beginning. (7A)

Again, this participant described knowledge as something innate to Gandalf, and thus firmly situated in the theoretical category of Personal Attributes; however, the excerpt also demonstrates how this knowledge contributes to Gandalf's ability to act as a guide for other characters, and thus fulfil the above characteristic which is categorized within the theoretical category of Relational Attributes. Finally, it reinforces the concept that Gandalf has knowledge that the reader does not, and thus attains a status within the story that most of the other characters do not achieve.

The observation of Gandalf's wisdom was sometimes tied to statements about his age. Both 4A and 19A conflated these two characteristics: 4A described Gandalf as 'very old and very wise and he knows the best paths to take'. The function of such a conflation is to suggest that Gandalf attained his knowledge through his own efforts or to demonstrate how Gandalf has learned enough to be knowledgeable. Time would be an essential element in either process. Perhaps these participants could be said to see Gandalf as not just 'knowledgeable' but as 'venerable'. Such a word would help to imply that the age and wisdom are intertwined in the way that they convey significance to these readers.

The ways in which the observations of the participants who ranked Gandalf as their favourite character fit into the theoretical categories differs from the ways in which the observations of participants who ranked Sam as their favourite character can be categorized. Instead of an even distribution among all three theoretical categories, more importance seems to be placed on the Relational Attributes of Gandalf and almost no importance placed on his

Narrative Function. The emphasis on the Relationships of Gandalf would seem to agree with prior scholarship on the idea of heroism in Tolkien's work.

Previous scholarship has spent a great deal of time diagnosing how much Tolkien's heroic figures owe to literary predecessors, specifically in the Germanic literary tradition. One of the most influential scholars to explore this line of inquiry is Tom Shippey. In his monograph *The Road to Middle Earth*, Shippey discusses how Tolkien wanted to 're-create the ancient world of heroic legend for modern readers' and that the largest challenge in this process is that heroes 'are not acceptable anymore, and tended very strongly to be treated with irony' (2003: 71). Shippey goes on to contend that Tolkien's answer to this problem is Bilbo, the reluctant hero. Shippey picks up this thread between ancient traditions and Tolkien in his second monograph *J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century.* At one point he gives a short summary of how the names of the dwarves and Gandalf can all be found in a list from the *Völuspá* and Tolkien's process of revision which leads to the point where 'Gandalf has become "an old man *with a staff*"' (2002: 17, emphasis Shippey's). Shippey set the tone in finding inspiration for many of Tolkien's characters in earlier literature, and several other scholars would pick up this mantle.

For example, George Clark examines how Tolkien attempts to separate his concept of the mythic hero from the precursors found in early Germanic literature.[17] Clark traces this attempt through both Tolkien's fiction and his scholarly writings. He posits that 'Tolkien sought a true hero motivated by a heroic ideal consistent with his own religious and moral ideals, but he could not rid himself of his desire for the glorious heroes of old' (Clark 2000: 39). Therefore, instead of abandoning this traditional depiction, Tolkien uses it as a model for his own unique view of heroism. This background, however, does not arise for many young participants who are sometimes in their first exposure to Tolkien. Instead, the contention that Clark goes on to make has much more bearing on the reception of young readers.

Clark argues that Tolkien's blending of the traditional Germanic literary motifs with his own sensibilities and concerns leads him to produce something unique in the literary landscape. He contends that 'in *Hobbit* and in Bilbo Baggins, Tolkien creates a new heroism and a new hero' (Clark 2000: 43). He goes on to argue that *The Lord of the Rings* 'rejected

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[17] Two additional scholarly books that explore the connections between Tolkien's work and earlier texts from different angles are *Perilous Realms: Celtic and Norse in Tolkien's Middle-earth* (2005) by Marjorie Burns and *The Keys of Middle-earth: Discovering Medieval Literature Through the Fiction of J.R.R. Tolkien* (2005) edited by Stewart D. Lee and Elizabeth Solopova.

traditional heroism still more decisively' than *The Hobbit* because only part of the narrative is inspired by the traditional concept of heroes, while 'the other strand of that epic' demonstrates how 'the heroic struggle is internal and spiritual' (Clark 2000: 44). Thereby demonstrating how Tolkien shifts his perspective of what constitutes a hero between older and more contemporary ideals. This makes his story occupy a liminal space between the two.

The way that participants view Gandalf's wisdom as an intimate part of his personality and inextricable from his old age is reminiscent of characters from older stories. Shippey and Clark demonstrate how the idea of the wizened old man with a staff finds ample resonance with Germanic literature. It is important to note that a few participants acknowledged these literary influences on Tolkien when discussing the genre of *The Lord of the Rings* (see, for example, discussions of the epic genre, p. 121), but these considerations did not come up when discussing particular characters within the text. This is probably because the nature of the discussion focused more on personal reasons for selecting characters and there were no questions prompting participants to reflect on the literary precursors to such characters. Regardless, this does not mean that scholarship and participants disagree on the ways in which the characters that arise out of this process have an impact on Tolkien's storytelling. The idea of the hero that many scholars prepone seems to concur with the way that participants discuss Gandalf as the hero of the story.

This agreement is taken farther, to a more personal level, by another scholar. Alexander M. Bruce's article 'Maldon and Moria: Byrhtnoth, Gandalf, and Heroism in *The Lord of the Rings*' (2007) explores the connection between the scene where Gandalf falls to the Balrog in Moria to the Anglo-Saxon poem 'The Battle of Maldon' in an effort to determine how Tolkien responds to this analogue for the episode. Ultimately, this narrow examination helps Bruce to conclude that Tolkien rejects some of the aspects of Anglo-Saxon heroism, but adopts others when trying to depict what he feels is the ideal hero. This echoes the conclusions of Clark's analysis, but does so on a much closer scope in order to concentrate on details. This supports the prevailing view that Tolkien responds to the ideas of the hero present in many early Germanic texts, but does not simply transmit these tropes forward. He modifies them to fit his own historic and personal context.

Bruce's choice of this scene as a particularly influential and meaningful moment in understanding Gandalf, and thus discussing Tolkien's idea of heroism, is reflected in the number of participants who also used this scene in order to discuss why they chose Gandalf as

their favourite character. While Bruce uses this moment to depict the way in which Gandalf is a response to Germanic literary heritage, participants use it to indicate how Gandalf's caring nature makes him a stronger character. This relates Gandalf's wisdom to his kindness in a way that many participants' responses agreed with.

In her chapter entitled 'Men, Halflings, and Hero Worship', Marion Zimmer Bradley proposes that there are several significant heroes in the text. In addition to Aragorn and Frodo, she discusses Gandalf and Sam as heroes. Perhaps the summation of her analysis is her contention that 'Aragorn of course is the 'born hero' – son of a long line of kings, born to achieve great deeds in his time. Frodo is the one who has heroism thrust upon him, and to complete and fulfil the analogy we might say that Sam achieves heroism undesired and unrecognized' (Bradley 2004: 83-84). Instead of focusing on the heroic tradition that each character most closely aligns with, Bradley concentrates her analysis on the heroic attributes she discerns in the text. This leads to a close reading which yields some interesting overlap with the research participants.

Throughout her chapter, Bradley argues that love is 'the dominant emotion in *The Lord of the Rings*' (Bradley 2004: 76). She characterizes love as an integral part of the way that Tolkien portrays heroism and his characters within the Fellowship. This kind of observation is made by participants in their discussions of each of these three characters. Participants discuss Sam as unabashedly loyal to Frodo, they discuss Gandalf's sacrifice as a demonstration of the way that he cares for others, and they also, to preview the next character we will discuss, mention how Legolas creates close bonds of attachment to the other members of the Fellowship.

To return to Bradley, in addition to analysing how these characters act heroically, she also discusses how they represent heroes at the end of what she calls a 'Heroic Age'. It is Bradley's perspective that Sam, of all the heroes portrayed, is 'the only one of the characters who truly passes *out* of the Heroic Age and into the world of today' (2004: 91). She supports this claim by demonstrating how each of the other characters from the Fellowship decides to live within the role that fame provides them. In contrast to this desire, Sam rejects the idea of revelling in his fame and chooses 'between that early flame of true, single devotion which burns up the whole soul in a passion for heroic deeds and the quiet, manful, *necessary* compromise to live in a plain world and to do ordinary things' (Bradley 2004: 91, emphasis in original). Bradley emphasizes how Sam acts as a connection between the higher deeds

portrayed in the text and the more commonplace ideas of the Shire after the main action of the story has concluded. This shows how Sam bridges the space between the reader and the text. Interestingly, very little of Sam's actions after the quest of the Ring was discussed by participants. This may be because they deem that Sam's actions throughout the quest are more significant, or that they were not prompted to reflect on later parts of the story specifically.

A scholar whose argument aligns even more closely with the experience given by participants is Romauld Ian Lakowski. He gives several characters in his list of those that have heroic characteristics, including Sam and Gandalf. Significantly, he characterizes Sam as more of the 'everyman' hero than Frodo, noting how he is the hobbit who, more than any other, is raised from relative obscurity into the realm of heroic action. As for Gandalf, he 'is somewhat different from Aragorn and especially Frodo, in that he possesses superhuman powers like the heroes of classical myth and drama' (Lakowski 1981: 32). Lakowski sees Gandalf as a more archetypal hero when considering him in the context of older texts. Participants certainly see Gandalf as fulfilling the role of a mentor and Sam as an everyman.

4.3.4   Legolas

Unlike the previous characters that participants indicated as their favourite, participants who choose Legolas as their favourite character focus largely on the theoretical category of Personal Attributes. The first several observations that fall into this category are those that indicate how Legolas's fighting ability or archery skills are important in determining him as their favourite character. In fact, four out of six participants who rated Legolas highly mention this element.

Sometimes participants indicated that this was important on a very general level. This was the case with 2A. 2A mentioned that elves 'are cool' and when asked what makes elves cool, 2A responded that 'fighting with a bow and arrow' is the main attribute that determines their coolness. Other participants were more specific. 6A, for instance, reflected on how Legolas was 'an archer and an elf' and how being an archer is useful because 'you can shoot from far away so [enemies] can't come close'. Such observations suggest that it might be possible to categorize this attribute in either the Narrative Function or the Personal Attributes theoretical categories; however, other responses demonstrate the extent to which most participants appreciate this characteristic more for the way it falls into the theoretical category of Personal Attributes.

A few participants were personal with their responses to Legolas's fighting style, relating it to their own life or experiences in different ways. 11A described how he 'always liked the light and fast and attack-from-a-range characters'. This was a reference to video games that 11A participates in; he particularly mentioned that he enjoys playing the *LEGO Lord of the Rings* game. In a way, this observation established a personal preference about characters that is fulfilled by Legolas's specific attributes. Also in a personal context, 23A decided to put Legolas first 'mainly because he did the archery stuff, and I'm into archery and all that'. 23A practices archery and enjoys role-playing games. He described how he liked Legolas because of how much they have in common. Again, the participant communicates what is significant about Legolas's fighting style on a personal level.

An additional characteristic that was significant to the participants who rated Legolas highly and falls within the theoretical category of Personal Attributes is Legolas's wisdom. Half of these participants indicated that this trait was important when they thought about the character. Significantly, the types of observations made about wisdom for Legolas are very different from those made about Gandalf for the same characteristic.

One important distinction in the way that wisdom was discussed with regard to the two characters is that Legolas's wisdom was often described with parameters, whereas Gandalf's was characterized as boundless. For example, 15A mentioned that Legolas 'is wise, but he is a little bit reckless…at times'. This indicates that Legolas does not consistently maintain wisdom as a sort of character trait, but rather occasionally employs wisdom in certain circumstances. Legolas's wisdom was often described as a kind of practicality. This is reflected in 16A's comment that Legolas 'thinks a lot before he does something'. Again, Legolas's wisdom seems to be a skill that is only employed when it is needed, not an attribute that defines who he is. This practical nature is also reflected in an interesting comparison made by 23A. He claimed that Legolas is 'kind of like Spock, you know? Like very logical, and I like that' (23A). This observation bolsters how the kind of knowledge that Legolas possesses is both innate and largely practical in nature. It is also an interesting glimpse into the life experience of the participant, who related a character from a popular work of fantasy to a character from a popular work of science fiction. This underscores the personal response aspect of the observation itself. The fact that Legolas is old, at least by human standards, was not a significant contribution to the discussion of his wisdom.

It is evident that participants who ranked Legolas as their favourite character from the Fellowship pointed to an attribute that participants who ranked Gandalf as their favourite character of the Fellowship also valued. The way in which each group of participants discussed this attribute differs greatly, though, and therefore demonstrates how participant groups can place different value on similar attributes when it is manifested by different characters.

Finally, half of the participants who rated Legolas as their favourite member of the Fellowship find his caring attitude toward the other members of the Fellowship to be one of his defining features. This set of observations falls within the Relational Attributes theoretical category. Note how a second characteristic seen in Legolas aligns with those attributed to Gandalf as well. The observations about how this characteristic is exhibited by Legolas largely mirror the way it is exhibited by Gandalf.

For each group, this caring personality was most often described as taking place within the Fellowship. As one participant described:

> [Legolas] stays loyal to the Fellowship even though he knows that the future looks very grim to them, and that a lot of times they would most likely die. But he still goes with them. He helps them as much as he can. (16A)

As with Gandalf, Legolas demonstrates the level of consideration he has for the other members of the Fellowship by expressing devotion to the group. In a way, this observation is very similar to the idea of loyalty as described by participants who rated Sam as their favourite member of the Fellowship.

Even though most of these participants classify Legolas as a caring individual, there is a consensus that he is not as friendly with one particular member of the Fellowship early on: Gimli. This understanding is perhaps best depicted when 11A described how Legolas is 'very kind to most people in the group', with the caveat that 'for the first bit he is not very kind to Gimli since they did not trust each other, but later in the books they gained a friendship'. Most of the participants who indicated how kind Legolas is include an exception in which Gimli must earn this level of consideration over the course of the story. 15A put it in more general terms, indicating how Legolas was 'very caring about his friends once he gets close to them', the implication of course is that it takes some characters longer to get close to him than others.

In these discussions it became obvious that most participants were aware of the complicated history between Elves and Dwarves in Middle-earth. This could be attributed to

the close reading skills of the participants as they work their way through *The Lord of the Rings*, or to the fact that all the participants had read *The Hobbit*, and some had even read *The Silmarillion*, prior to participating in the study. In either case, it is clear that this consideration is a contributing factor in how they perceive some of the relationships among the Fellowship.

Once again, there is a contrast in the way that the observations of participants who chose Legolas as their favourite character can be categorized into the three theoretical categories when considered alongside the other participant responses. These participants focused mostly on the Personal Attributes of Legolas. As with the participants who chose Gandalf as their favourite character, the participants who chose Legolas as their favourite character did not spend much time focusing on Narrative Function. This means that Sam is the only character of the three whose role in the story seems to be significant to participants in making their decision. Unlike the participants who chose Gandalf as their favourite character, the participants who chose Legolas spent more time focusing on his Personal Attributes and less on his Relational Attributes. This relationship between the two theoretical categories is the inverse of the participants who rated Gandalf as their favourite character.

It is difficult to parse why participants chose to focus on different theoretical categories for each of these characters. It is possible that participants are drawn to particular aspects that would fit into the distinct theoretical categories, and therefore there is a selection bias when it comes to choosing their favourite character. On the other hand, it could be that participants who are drawn to each of these characters feel it necessary to appeal to one theoretical category over the other in an attempt to justify their preference. Therefore, it is not clear whether a preference for a particular kind of personality trait or an overall character comes first in the decision-making process. Regardless, it is still interesting to note the decisions that participants make when trying to rationalize their decision of character preference.

It is possible that participants only discuss Narrative Function with regard Sam because he is a character that fits more closely with the stereotypical life experience of young readers than do the other characters. It is also possible that participants choose to describe Gandalf as a guide and mentor because several of them see him as a parental figure. Finally, if participants saw Legolas in the role of a sibling, it would make sense for them to be enamoured with his abilities, skills, and adventurous nature.

More than any other character discussed, participants who chose Legolas as their favourite character mentioned his fighting ability as their major reason for doing so. This

tendency feels a little out of place in conversations focusing on the book, since the book does not describe fight scenes with much detail. To clarify, my observation here does not include discussions about interactions that happen while battles are ongoing. For instance, many participants mentioned enjoying the game that Legolas and Gimli play at Helm's Deep as they slay orcs. While such instances help to develop character, this type of scene is not what the participants who rated Legolas as their favourite focused on. They often discussed the way in which Legolas fights. This may indicate some influence of the films on these participants. With their much greater emphasis on fight scenes and their elevation of the role of Legolas's fighting ability, these adaptations could be influencing participants' decisions when they decide to place Legolas as their favourite character. Other proposals that come from this observation are the fact that playing video games, role-playing games, or table top games could also influence this kind of decision. If participants have a history of playing these kinds of games, then they may be more likely to favour an archer because they can imagine the fight scenes more explicitly than the descriptions provided in the text.

4.3.5   Conclusion

Just as the participants were unable to select a single favourite character, the extent to which scholars have been able to identify heroic traits in most of the protagonists of *The Lord of the Rings* indicates that the idea of heroism in Tolkien's work is not confined to a singular character, but rather that heroic elements are something to be thematically applied to most of his characters who are portrayed in a positive light. This hopefully means that this concept is easily recognizable, even if it is not fully recognized, in every protagonist.

In fact, if Lakowski's conclusion is to be believed, this idea of the hero finds a particular kind of resonance with readers in the modern era. He suggests that, while 'ours is an anti-heroic, irony-ridden age', that perhaps what has made Tolkien so popular is his ability 'to give expression to this need [for heroism] for our modern age' (Lakowski 1981: 34). Since his perspective is enabled by seeing the hobbits as reluctant heroes, it is possible that many of the young participants who like Sam would agree with the assertion. Sam's loyalty and love make him an unanticipated hero in the story. These are the attributes that drive him to take part in the quest to destroy the Ring and to care for Frodo.

Speaking more generally, such a diversity in the depiction of heroism is not unusual in fantasy literature. Indeed, in their definition for 'Heroes and Heroines', Clute and Grant note

that 'heroes and heroines are fairly essential to high fantasy and heroic fantasy' and then proceeded to give a list of ten different hero types often found in this kind of literature, which they claim 'is not exhaustive' (1996: 464). Therefore, an emphasis on and appreciation of the complexities in heroism aligns Tolkien with much of the fantasy genre. In fact, throughout *The Encyclopaedia of Fantasy*, Clute and Grant note how several characters from *The Lord of the Rings* can function as exemplars for different hero types. They cite Bilbo, Frodo, and Sam as characters who can be interpreted as the 'Brave Little Taylor' hero type, who 'is thrust into a role initially far too large' for them (1999: 136). They suggest that Pippin is an exemplar of 'The Person who Learns Better' hero type (1999: 567). They also cite Aragorn when discussing the 'Hidden Monarch' hero type (1999: 466). As we saw in the previous chapter, though, the participants from the study were not happy with the classification of *The Lord of the Rings* as a fantasy. They had various and complex interpretations of what kind of story the book contains, and so their interpretations of heroism are likely not constrained to these genre-specific types.

It is worth mentioning, at least tangentially, that several other characters have been proposed as a re-envisioning of heroic characteristics. Not least of such analyses is Steven Brett Carter's analysis of Faramir in 'Faramir and the Heroic Ideal of the Twentieth Century; Or, How Aragorn Died at the Somme'. Here, Carter proposes that Faramir 'exists as a means to establish a new definition of the heroic model for the twentieth century in contrast to the ancient heroic ideals which are dissolved in World War I' (2012: 89-90) and that he was 'constructed by Tolkien as a way to correct what he saw as flawed in the classical heroic tradition, especially when applied to what he had experienced at the Somme' (2012: 101). Carter is not the only one to suggest that Faramir represents a unique, even anachronistic, concept of heroism in Middle-earth. The approaches of several other scholars are mentioned above in the section dealing with the idea of war (p.142). However, it is worth noting here that Tolkien's conception of the hero is not constrained to an old Germanic ethos. Instead Tolkien sees that there is a modern answer to those types of hero which have a singularly individualized approach to warfare and violence.

Such analyses do not necessarily contradict the overall heroic model established by scholars focusing on the more central characters of the story. Instead, they contribute to the notion that Tolkien is trying to address the concept of the hero in such a way that he can recontextualize it to make sense in the modern world. These lesser characters, then, while perhaps heroic in a manner which differs from the major protagonists, demonstrate the same

process Tolkien uses to acknowledge the older heroic models but also re-envision them for a modern society.

Nor do these analyses contradict the findings of the present study, wherein participants were not constrained to talking about characters in the Fellowship, but they were not often prompted to do otherwise. Commentary on further characters are outside the scope of the present study, but do not invalidate it. In fact, as with Carter's discussion, they often serve to reinforce the same patterns exhibited in the current analysis.

Least Favourite Character from the Fellowship[18]

When discussing their least favourite characters from *The Lord of the Rings*, participant observations also fit into the theoretical categories of Personal Attributes, Relational Attributes, and Narrative Function. The two characters placed as the least favourite more than any others were Boromir and Gimli. Participant reflections on why they placed Boromir as their least favourite are the most balanced, and incorporated all three theoretical categories. Participants who placed Gimli as their least favourite focused mostly on Personal Attributes but also considered Narrative Function important. In the sections that follow, the way that participants discuss these characters is given in more detail, along with excerpts that fall into each theoretical category. The patterns and analysis of these theoretical categories are compared to the consensus view of Tolkien scholarship via the organizational category of morality.

Organizational Category: Morality

Tolkien's approach to morality is complex. By having an omniscient narrator, *The Lord of the Rings* avoids the overt moralizations typically associated with intrusive narrators like the one found in *The Hobbit*. This means that any coherent system of morality found within the text is informed by a detailed examination of character actions and the context in which those actions are performed. Therefore, in addition to some of the other overarching

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[18] Another interesting pattern that emerged in participants' rankings of the Fellowship characters is that Aragorn was inordinately likely to be rated as the second or third favourite character. This is an interesting phenomenon that I would like to unpack in a later project.

organizational categories that Tolkien addresses in Middle-earth, his story offers the opportunity to evaluate moral behaviours through characterization. This section will focus narrowly on the type and appearance of moral issues within the text and its reception by study participants.

Walter Scheps has argued that readers cannot expect to find an applicable moral system depicted in Tolkien's Middle-earth. In 'The Fairy-tale Morality of *The Lord of the Rings'* Scheps argues that the many critics who have sought to apply their own morality to Tolkien's work or to derive a moral statement from it are engaged in a futile effort. It is his contention that 'we can expect Middle-earth to be internally consistent, but we cannot expect it to conform to important human values' (Scheps 1975: 44). He goes on to support his case by noting that the complexity of Tolkien's work denies the ability to extricate snippets in order to justify moral statements, but he also provides the caveat that the morality seen in the text is not unprecedented in literary history. Here is his culminating statement:

> The very complexity and internal self-containment of Middle-earth make it virtually impossible to abstract any of it without seriously rupturing the whole, and the very alienness of the central characters – the hobbits – should indicate to us that the moral system which governs their world cannot, without serious consequences, be applied to our own. In many ways the system is identical to that of the fairy tale, but Tolkien has provided far more justification for it and has taken great pains to see to it that it remains sequestered in its own world. As Tolkien himself says in the foreword to *The Lord of the Rings* '… I cordially dislike allegory in all its manifestations, and always have done so since I grew old and wary enough to detect its presence. I much prefer history, true or feigned, with its varied applicability to the thoughts and experience of readers. I think that many confuse 'applicability' with 'allegory'; but one resides in the freedom of the reader, and the other in the purposed domination of the author' (I, xi). Or, in other words, 'Caveat lector'. (Scheps 1975: 55)

While Scheps's argument is passionate, it unfortunately seems to employ the same confusion between allegory and applicability that he cites Tolkien as condemning. To say that there are elements of morality within *The Lord of the Rings* that have bearing on the real world, or at least the way a reader can interpret events or actions in the real world, is not to insist that the text is an allegory. It is not a claim equating one particular act within the text with one particular act in the real world. Instead it is a way of seeing how the characters operate and make assumptions. This can then be applied thematically and non-specifically to the real world. To take up his own turn of phrase, 'caveat lector' indeed. Readers are the ones who ultimately evaluate the texts that they consume in order to determine meaning. This being the case, it is important to analyse the text from a perspective which considers the morals portrayed there.

Perhaps one of the most systematic approaches to morality in Middle-earth is Charles W. Nelson's 'The Sins of Middle-earth: Tolkien's Use of Medieval Allegory'. In this article, Nelson applies the concept of the seven deadly sins to various characters in Tolkien's work. Whether one agrees with his seven deadly sins motif or not, he makes a clear case for a pervasive moral philosophy within Tolkien's work. Nelson's main argument is that 'in one sense, then, *LR* may be a morality tale in which Tolkien's entertaining adventures teach serious moral lessons' (2000: 83-84). Although his thesis sounds like the article is an attempt to derive a singular moral from the work, instead Nelson employs a lengthy analysis to flesh out how Tolkien deals with each of the vices of the seven deadly sins in detail.

Nelson describes how each of the seven deadly sins is characterized by one of the races in Tolkien's work. Greed is represented by the dwarves. He describes how their desire for more mithril 'brought about their own destruction and downfall' (Nelson 2000: 85). Then, he describes how the vice of mankind in Middle-earth is pride. He includes both the race of Man and the group of wizards who seem to inhabit men's bodies in this category. His exemplars for this are Saruman, who 'entraps Gandalf at Orthanc, demanding cooperation in his plans to dominate Middle-earth', and Denethor's refusal to act as a true steward (Nelson 2000: 86). Next, and perhaps most unconvincingly in the article, he equates the elves with envy. He claims that their envy is manifest in their withdrawal from Middle-earth into protective enclaves. Nelson powerfully demonstrates how the Ents are representations of sloth. He describes how many of them 'have grown sleepy' and 'have taken to standing by themselves' (Nelson 2000: 90). As can probably be expected, the hobbits are equated with gluttony. This is demonstrated by their love of frequent and full meals and their round waistcoats. For lechery, Nelson claims that 'Tolkien gives this sin sketchy treatment' and only gives Grima Wormtongue as an example; however, he does include the significant observation that 'a major difference in Tolkien's treatment of this vice is that there is no repentance on the part of an offender' (2000: 92). Finally, Nelson addresses anger and claims that this is depicted by the goblins and orcs.

Once again, regardless of whether one accepts his framing device of the seven deadly sins, Nelson has demonstrated many moral concerns that are depicted or addressed throughout Tolkien's work. Although an approach that is as systematic as this one may not be necessary in order to understand the values portrayed in the text, it is beneficial in adding depth to the discussion.

While these systems for evaluating the morality of *The Lord of the Rings* are certainly outside the scope of the interviews with participants, the participants did have several important insights about major characters that were predicated on the idea of morality, and none more so than Boromir.

4.3.2   Boromir

When discussing why Boromir is their least favourite character, participants were most likely to discuss the connection between him and the Ring as a reason for seeing him unfavourably. In fact, more than two thirds of participants who listed Boromir as their least favourite discuss this relationship when trying to explain why. This falls within the theoretical category of Relational Attributes, but is a unique occurrence within the theoretical category because it focuses on the relationship between a character and an object rather than two or more characters.

Many of the participants who rated Boromir as their least favourite use the vocabulary of corruption and downfall when describing the way that the Ring interacts with Boromir. 5A claims that Boromir is 'corrupted by the Ring', and observes that 'he, many times, was about to take it'. Interestingly, this perceived relationship with the Ring allows participants to see Boromir's negative attributes without jeopardizing their positive perspective of his overall character. This is clear when they make comments like 8A's description of Boromir's relationship to the Ring. He claims that Boromir 'fell to the corruption the Ring', even though 'he still was a very valiant person'. In a way, then, this interpretation of the relationship is a deeper reading than a simple interpretation of friendship or animosity.

The kind of insights that this corrosive characterization allows were fleshed out a bit more by 13A. She noted that Boromir is 'corrupted so easily' by the Ring (13A). She demonstrated the complexity of her interpretation of the relationship when talking about Boromir's experience in Lothlórien: 'Galadriel looks at him and tells him exactly what they [the 'dark parts' of himself] are, and that they are a problem and that he needs to do something about it or he's going to be corrupted' (13A). This illuminates how young readers can diagnose the influence of the Ring on parts of Boromir's character without insisting that he is entirely evil or bad. Naturally, the extent to which the Ring has influence or the amount of agency exercised by either the Ring or Boromir differed from reader to reader.

One of the major areas of tension that became evident in discussion was related to which part of the Boromir/Ring pair participants talk about as dominant. 20A seemed to suggest that Boromir is in control the whole time. He claimed that Boromir 'really seems to want the Ring for not a good cause, for a long time. You see that later, he falls'. Inversely, 15A's word choice seemed to give more power, and perhaps agency, to the Ring than some of the other participants. She claimed that Boromir was her least favourite character because of his actions at the end of *Fellowship*, but clarified that 'the Ring was controlling him' at that point (15A). The struggle between the two counterpoints in this relationship was of great importance to the participants who rated Boromir as their least favourite character.

In fact, one of these readers took a somewhat fatalistic stance regarding the entire relationship. 25A insisted that 'even though, in the end, [Boromir] did have the best of intentions, it was…in his nature to fall victim to the Ring' (25A). This provided a contrast to statements like those made by 27A, who stated that Boromir 'wants the Ring for himself'. The fact that there was no consensus among this sample of readers as to the extent that the Ring has influence or agency in its relationship with Boromir indicates the complexity with which these young readers approach their interpretation of this relationship.

A few participants indicated what they thought Boromir's relationship with the Ring implies about his character. A couple of participants claimed that this relationship demonstrates Boromir's 'jealous' nature (11A and 27A). 1A claimed that Boromir's actions when he is trying to take the Ring from Frodo show that 'he could be vicious'. These observations fall in line with those who give Boromir a lot of agency in the relationship. These participants would probably disagree with Nelson's argument that Tolkien's dwarves were the exemplars of greed. Instead they see Boromir as exhibiting this very human trait.

One participant even suggested that the relationship between Boromir and the Ring operated on a larger scale. 17A interprets the difference between how Boromir and Aragorn approach the Ring using a thematic lens:

> [Boromir] is great warrior, but he is still liable to be weak, because that's what being a man is, I guess. In the book, we get this sense that the men in the books, except Aragorn, are weak. Not only because they can die, which is considered a gift, but also because they can't resist those temptations.

This takes the Relational Attribute and conflates it with the theoretical category of Narrative Function. This is a unique occurrence in the data, however. It is also important to point out that participants focused on Boromir's temptation by the Ring more than any other character's.

A few participants mentioned that Gandalf rejects the Ring, but did not discuss his temptation to use it. Also, while participants frequently discussed the way that Frodo was dominated by the Ring or gave in to the will of the Ring, they very seldom used the language of temptation in order to describe that relationship. This is interesting given the fact that both Frodo and Boromir in essence 'fail' because of the way that they give in to an unhealthy perspective of their relationship with the Ring. This would be an interesting area to dive into the interviews for a follow-up project.

Another significant overlap of this discussion is with the ongoing conversation within Tolkien scholarship concerning how much agency the Ring has. This point and the following discussion work well with Shippey's analysis of the Ring as an independent agent or psychic amplifier that was referenced in chapter three (p. 117). While some participants clearly believe that the Ring has a great deal of agency and is able to manipulate and dominate other characters, others see the item as a kind of token or symbol which externalizes the temptations that characters feel within themselves. Therefore, the complexity of interpretations among young readers mirrors the complexity of discourses found within Tolkien scholarship concerning the nature of the Ring. There was no consensus as to the portrayal of the Ring concerning its agency or nature.

The theoretical category of Relational Attributes was certainly the one most frequently mentioned by participants when discussing why they ranked Boromir lowest, but both other theoretical categories were mentioned during these discussions. They were each mentioned with similar frequency. Within the theoretical category of Personal Attributes, participants often cited Boromir's pride or selfishness as a contributing factor as to why they did not like him as much as the other characters of the Fellowship.

Several participants discussed Boromir's pride and how it influenced their perception of him. Some of these participants were direct in their description, such as when 5A called Boromir 'proud'. Others, though, were more discrete but arrived at the same point; for example, 15A described Boromir as 'just a little bit greedy. He seemed really, really full of himself, too', and 17A labelled Boromir as a character who sees that he is not destined to accomplish what he wants, but can't avoid 'overstepping those boundaries'. In each case, the participant saw Boromir as a character who lacks moderation or accurate self-assessment.

Perhaps one of the best excerpts that summarizes this perspective was given by 27A. He claimed that 'most of [Boromir's] life, that we see of him, he's arrogant and he wants the Ring for himself. He thinks he's better than all the others, and he thinks he knows better than

Gandalf' (27A). This demonstrates a lot about how the participant perceives Boromir's pride as a flaw of character, and one that negatively influences the relationships that he's able to achieve with the other characters in the Fellowship. It also demonstrates how there is some overlap between this flaw and his relationship with the Ring.

A couple of participants went even further and clarified that they disapprove of Boromir's pride even after considering the influence of the Ring. 10A called Boromir 'Just kind of like a jerk, and even without the temptation of the Ring he seems, like, overly proud, to the point of it being a little bit rude'. He then elaborated on how Boromir 'seems like he thinks that he's better than everybody else and that Gondor is better than anywhere else' (10A). 13A echoed this sentiment when she pointed out that she doesn't like Boromir even when she compensates for the influence of the Ring. She claimed that 'Boromir I probably wouldn't have enjoyed as much even if he hadn't been corrupted so easily. Boromir does have a lot of pride' (13A). Interestingly, this was one of the only participants to relate this idea with how she responded to the character directly, stating 'he's got that bit of pride and I never really bonded with him as I did with the other characters' (13A). So even though some participants demonstrated an overlap between their opinion of Boromir's personality and the relationship that he develops with the Ring, others were very careful to distinguish between the two. Once again what these responses demonstrate is the great diversity of opinion that exists among this sample of young readers when it comes to their reasons for disliking Boromir. Unlike some of the participants discussed earlier, these participants would probably agree with Nelson's characterization of men as the exemplars of pride throughout Tolkien's story.

When it comes to discussing why these participants rated Boromir as their least favourite character of the Fellowship, the theoretical category of Narrative Function was mentioned as often as the theoretical category of Personal Attributes. Several of these participants indicated that a contributing factor to their decision was the fact that Boromir does not contribute much to the story and indeed is not around very long.

Initially, it would seem this observation could fall within the theoretical category of Relational Attributes because of the way that some participants discussed the amount of time that Boromir is involved in the story. This is because they did not relate to Boromir at the narrative level, but instead at the character level. This kind of understanding is evident in the response of 1A, who indicated that Boromir doesn't have a good relationship with Frodo

because he 'only travelled with him for a few months'. It's also apparent in the response of 9A as she noted that Boromir is 'only a member of the Fellowship for a really short time.'

The prevailing view, however, certainly privileges the way in which Boromir's limited contribution affects the story rather than the Fellowship and the other characters around him. For instance, 8A stated that Boromir is 'the character I least care for, considering… how long he's in the story'. Perhaps this was easier for participants to admit because his lack of utility to the story is less a condemnation of him as it is a commentary on the prevalence of the other characters by comparison.

This allows participants to reflect on Boromir's lack of character development, as can be seen when 21A observed how Boromir 'died very, very quickly in the book so we don't know as much about him as we know about the others'. 10A and 27A acknowledged this same impulse when they claimed that 'I think I probably, maybe, would've had Boromir a little higher if he would've lived longer' (10A) and 'I think maybe he might've been a bit higher up if he had survived and... had a longer period of his good side showing' (27A) respectively. Therefore, the involvement Boromir has in the story seems as important to participant considerations as his characterization as prideful or arrogant. In the end, however, it is his relationship with the Ring that participants focus on the most in their evaluation of Boromir.

The way that participants discussed Boromir's relationship to the Ring and his character make him a prime example for discussing how their views overlap with scholarly discussion of morality in *The Lord of the Rings.* In 2005, Adam Rosman published an article illuminating a portion of *The Lord of the Rings* that should give readers pause and make them question the morality of the tale. In 'Gandalf as Torturer: The Ticking Bomb Terrorist and Due Process in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*', Rosman analyzes a scenario presented in the second chapter of the work. Gandalf claims that he 'put the fear of fire' on Gollum, and in so doing eventually 'wrung the true story out of him, bit by bit, together with much sniveling and snarling' (*FR*, I, ii, 57). He extrapolates this passage with a detailed analysis that concludes that there was no real purpose for Gandalf's actions in this scene. He summarizes that readers 'ought to conclude that Gandalf the Grey… was also, once, Gandalf the Torturer' because 'the wizard did not face a "ticking bomb" scenario either because the threat was not imminent or, more fundamentally, because he already knew enough to set the Fellowship into motion' (Rosman 2005: 42). In short, Gandalf did not need 'Gollum's involuntary aid'

(Rosman 2005: 42). This incident complicates an overly-simplistic reading of morality in the text.

Gandalf serves as one of the exemplars of righteousness in the fight against Sauron, yet this passage indicates that he is not above using violence against another conscious being if he deems it necessary. Rosman contends that 'it makes us all subtler analysts about the lines between good and evil and forces us…to think more carefully about how we may uphold our values as a society and still justifiably protect ourselves from catastrophic threat' (2005: 42). A very keen eye is necessary in order to be an astute reader of the morality presented within *The Lord of the Rings*. This kind of astuteness is exhibited by 13A's reading of Boromir's conundrum in Lothlórien mentioned above.

One answer to Rosman's article found in scholarship is Richard C. West's 'And She Named Her Own Name'. Here, West sees honesty as one of the virtues that Tolkien espouses most throughout his writings. He gives several examples from *The Hobbit* and the entire legendarium before turning his critical eye to the pivotal role of truthfulness in *The Lord of the Rings*. West correctly diagnoses how 'truthfulness is basic to the warp and woof, the underlying structure, of Tolkien's fictional world. The excepted ideal is to tell the truth and to keep one's word, and in general the characters do' (West 2005: 6). The protagonists are honest and keep their word, and antagonists break the bonds of trust. Perhaps the most notable exception to this observation is Boromir, who receives harsh punishment indeed when he breaks his word to protect Frodo.

In fact, this perspective is so ingrained in the culture of Middle-earth that the revelation of the One Ring hinges on an uncharacteristic falsehood. As West points out, it is Bilbo's dishonesty about his recovery of the Ring that leads Gandalf to feel compelled to research the object: 'Gandalf takes this uncharacteristic action by a usually truthful person so seriously that he feels it warrants the close investigation that propels the events of *The Lord of the Rings*' (2005: 6). Therefore, dishonesty is meant to be an abrogation of the natural order of Middle-earth. West also indicates that the development of this plot point indicates something about the author himself: 'Tolkien the author takes it so seriously that he feels that what might appear to some to be a small prevarication provides a credible motivation for Gandalf to act in this way' (2005: 6). He argues that this links the concept of this morality back to the author's own life experience and moral convictions, in that Tolkien's personal conception of morality puts great emphasis on trustworthiness.

To supplement West's contention, Rose A. Zimbardo expertly describes how selflessness is a tenet of morality in *The Lord of the Rings*. Her essay 'Moral Vision in in *The Lord of the Rings*', discusses the text as an embodiment of a medieval Romance as opposed to a tragedy. She claims that this is true because instead of characters attempting and failing to identify with a transcendent ideal, a tragedy, *The Lord of the Rings* depicts 'the absolute necessity of [man's] identification with the All' (Zimbardo 2004: 69). She contends that true heroic acts throughout the text are acts of sacrifice of the individual for the betterment of society. Zimbardo's culminating example is the temptation Sam experiences when he places the ring on his finger.

She argues that his vision demonstrates the will of domination consistent with the Ring, but preserves Sam's natural inclination to serve others as a gardener. It is this second aspect of his vision that preserves his goodness. She claims that, 'in Sam's momentary dream of power we are given a flash of comic insight into a human being's moral dilemma. In Sam's response, love for and faithful service to another creature like himself, we are given the resolution of that dilemma that the vision of romance affords' (Zimbardo 2004: 75). From Zimbardo's perspective, this establishes service to others, or selflessness, as one of the most meaningful concepts in *The Lord of the Rings*.

Honesty and selflessness are two of the attributes that Boromir lacks, according to the study participants. As noted above, they found him to be haughty and callous. These were some of the major reasons that he was assigned the spot of their least favourite character.

4.3.3   *Gimli*

Among participants who consider Gimli their least favourite character, there was focus mostly on the theoretical category of Personal Attributes, and Narrative Function also played a part in their considerations. A couple of these participants discussed how they did not like Gimli's attitude. This falls within the category of Personal Attributes.

The participants who did not like Gimli's attitude saw him as sullen or prone to complaining. 1A described Gimli as 'grouchy' and she dislikes how he 'complains all the time'. In much the same way, 7A indicated that she didn't like 'his attitude very much… he's sort of rude, and boister-y all the time... I feel like he's one of those kids who's sort of loud and obnoxious all the time'. For each of these participants, the way that Gimli responds to his

environment or other characters is distasteful. This consideration leads them to rate him lower than the other characters of the Fellowship.

Another participant made an observation that falls within the theoretical category of Personal Attributes, but this one takes a bit of time to unpack and is problematic. He described Gimli as a representative for an entire group of people (just as the same participant also described Legolas, Boromir, and Aragorn as representatives of entire groups of people) and made judgments about the individual based on his impressions of the group to which they belong. This is an impulse which is usually described with the word stereotyping. Neither this project nor anyone involved with it endorses such an approach to reading texts or indeed interacting with the world.

That said, 12B mentioned that he does not like Gimli because 'he is a dwarf, and I don't exactly like dwarves'. He went on to clarify that he likes dwarves 'more than orcs, maybe, but I don't especially like dwarves' (12B). When pressed for specifics about why he does not like dwarves, he responded 'I guess I'm just a bit prejudiced about dwarves' (12B). For the purposes of this study, this observation has been placed in the category of Personal Attributes because the racial identity of an individual is not something that they can control. The fact that race does not inherently have anything to do with the way that they choose to relate to the people around them precludes this characteristic from being categorized in the theoretical category of Relational Attributes, and the fact that it has very little to do with the story told throughout *The Lord of the Rings* makes it inapplicable to the theoretical category of Narrative Function.

As easy as it would be to turn the page on this problematic discussion, it does need to be addressed. First, allow me to add the caveat that the reader making these comments is inexperienced in comparison to an adult reader. This may mean that it is easier for some younger readers to make the move of assuming that an individual can stand as a proxy for an entire group to which they belong. Additionally, due to the constraints placed on the participant by the construction of and time allowed for the activity, it is possible that the comments given here do not accurately reflect the depth and breadth of the reader's interpretation. Regardless of these caveats, the comments as presented during the activity serve as a means to enter into an important conversation in Tolkien scholarship.

The way that race is depicted in Tolkien's work has become an important topic in current scholarship. With regard to the dwarves specifically, critics debate whether or not they

represent a stereotype of Jewish people. Perhaps the most current scholarly article that directly addresses the concept of race as it pertains to Tolkien's dwarves is '"Jewish" Dwarves: Tolkien and Anti-Semitic Stereotyping' by Renée Vink. This article is largely a response to an article by Rebecca Brackmann.[19] Vink uses a combination of close reading, manuscript history, authorial interviews, and source study to push back against Brackmann's argument. She ultimately concludes that

> In some respects, Dwarves resemble Jews. However, attempts to widen the analogy to greedy, cowardly Jewish Dwarves later promoted to fierce warriors who prefer the glitter of gold to its value because Tolkien got a bad conscience thanks to Hitler, falls flat. The analogy does not fit the development of his writings and it does not fit the other evidence. Brackmann turns the analogy into an allegory and thereby kills it. It should not be stretched beyond Tolkien's own words. There is no reason to assume that anti-Semitism or any form of Jewish stereotyping contributed to Tolkien's depiction of Dwarves. (Vink 2013: 142)

This article is most useful for the way that it contributes to the conversation of race as it regards Tolkien's authorial intent and the publication history of Tolkien's works. The article does not attempt to argue the personal interpretation of readers. In fact, in her conclusion Vink concedes that 'someone insisting on finding anti-Jewish stereotyping here will find it' only noting that 'the evidence seems rather thin all the same' (2013: 140-141). This analysis leaves the door open for readers to interpret elements of characters in ways that are problematic.

A more substantive contribution to the discussion of the concept of race and the work of J.R.R. Tolkien comes from Dimitra Fimi's monograph *Tolkien, Race and Cultural History: From Fairies to Hobbits*. Fimi provides an important oversight of the cultural background in which Tolkien grew up and later wrote his most influential works. She also provides further insight into Tolkien's personal history and provides some vignettes of a young Tolkien that are not very flattering with regard to the question of race. She goes on to contend that 'the glimpses we have into Tolkien's thoughts and ideas on race in later years, mainly through his letters and scholarly work, show a different historical context' (Fimi 2010: 135). This section of Fimi's monograph is helpful in precisely the same way as Vink's article. It gives more textual, historical, and cultural context to the writing of the work and the glimpse of a meaningful approach to authorial intent. Fimi then shifts her attention to Tolkien's texts about Middle-earth.

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[19] Brackmann's culminating argument is that 'What we have, finally, in Tolkien is a 20th century author confronted by the ways that his writing, perhaps not even entirely consciously, had drawn on antisemitic beliefs, and attempting to work through the issue in his subsequent books' (2010: 103).

Fimi examines several elements from his works in a way that problematizes the discussion of race. Initially, she observes that there seems to be a kind of hierarchy in Middle-earth where '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 came from a completely different background' (Fimi 2010: 150). She does, however, indicate that the Woses, the Wild Men of the Woods, do not fit into this hierarchy (although they do seem to participate in the trope of the 'noble savage'). Fimi also discusses how Tolkien depicts relationships that form across cultural boundaries.

She notes how 'Tolkien proposed the "mingled blood" of the Númenóreans as one of the reasons for their downfall. But in Tolkien's mythology there is a much more obvious example of the "mingling" of different "races" that does not lead to decline, but to wonderful offspring: the Half-elven' (Fimi 2010: 151). In a sense, these relationships provide a complicated picture of the 'racial' understanding of Tolkien's world, as some unions are depicted as negative where as others are shown in a positive light.

Fimi's third major contribution to the discussion is the way that Tolkien decides to depict orcs. She summarizes this section by claiming that 'Tolkien's portrayal of the orcs concentrates on unfamiliar characteristics (note Tolkien's comment that the Mongol characteristics are unlovely "to Europeans" rather than generally), stereotypical ideas of "degradation" often associated with the racial "other" and with the discourse of disability' (Fimi 2010: 157). This association of evil with the 'other' is one of the largest critiques levelled at Tolkien by modern critics, because it is a way in which he participated in a trend that many other writers exploited.

In summation, Fimi claims that 'the blending of all these different strands makes Middle-earth complex and unpredictable, a fantasy world that reproduces some of the concepts and prejudices of the "primary" world, while at the same time questioning, challenging and transforming others' (Fimi 2010: 159). It seems as though, just as with many of the other themes discussed throughout this project, Tolkien's works of Middle-earth defy a simple interpretation when it comes to the concept of race. There are clearly some elements that readers can interpret in a way that allows for a racialized reading, these elements remain problematic.

To return to the considerations of participants who rated Gimli as their least favourite character, the role that he plays in the story was a very important factor. A couple of

participants indicated that Gimli's insignificant role as the story progresses was the most important factor when deciding where to place Gimli. This falls squarely within the theoretical category of Narrative Function since it is a consideration of story development.

One way in which participants demonstrated Gimli's lack of contribution to the story is by comparing what he does throughout the story with the actions of other members of the Fellowship. Such analyses were undoubtedly biased since the activity encouraged participants to focus on the Fellowship. One participant who used such a framework is 14A. He reflected on the fact that Gimli 'doesn't really do as much in the Fellowship as other people. He's more of just someone who is there to fight occasionally and he helps in the Mines [of Moria] but he's never really very instrumental in a lot of the changes'. What stands out to this participant is how little Gimli contributes to the overall plot of the story when compared to the other members of the Fellowship.

This comparative framework is not the only approach used to support this perspective, however. 22A also recognized Gimli's scant contributions, but focused more on Gimli's character development to support his opinion. He claimed that 'Gimli develops throughout the story and that development is… often driven by other characters. Gimli never really has a spot in the limelight where he makes all of the decisions' (22A). He went on to suggest that Gimli's lack of agency directly influenced his rating, claiming that 'maybe if Gimli was shown to be a bit more independent and a bit more able to make his own decisions then maybe I would like him a bit more' (22A). In this instance, then, the participant focused on how little character development Gimli portrays throughout the course of the story through his own effort.

Interestingly, both participants who mentioned the theoretical category of Narrative Function as the main reason for ranking Gimli as their least favourite character were quick to point out that their decisions were not influenced by characteristics that would fit into the theoretical categories of Personal Attributes or Relational Attributes. In other words, they clarified that Gimli was not their least favourite because they disliked anything about him or any of his interactions. 14A began his response with the statement that 'I don't dislike Gimli; I think he's an interesting character' and 22A also clarified a similar stance at the beginning of his response: 'I do like Gimli. I don't dislike any of them'. As with those participants who indicated that Narrative Function was their reason for rating Boromir as their least favourite character, this could be easier for participants to use as a justification for rating Gimli lower

because it is easier for them to make this statement without making judgments about Gimli as a character.

4.3.4   Conclusion

As the preceding section demonstrates, any discussion on morality in *The Lord of the Rings* naturally has several points of intersection with Tolkien's personal religion. Some of these points of overlap have been important to discuss while on the topic of morality more specifically. I have addressed others in the previous chapter (p. 125). Critics have identified important elements of the text, such as 'notions of fellowship, kingship, providence, prophecy, prohibition, festivity, and eucatastrophe' as elements which 'belong to the warp and woof of Christian tradition' (Dowie 1974: 47). This analysis does not attempt to diagnose the influence of Tolkien's beliefs on his writing. Instead the narrower focus on the thematic significance of morality is important to establish a critical understanding for comparison with the research.

Perhaps the collection that attempts to address the concept of morality in Tolkien's work more than any other is *The Lord of the Rings and Philosophy: One Book to Rule Them All*. Unfortunately, this text does not consistently seek to engage with the larger conversations in Tolkien scholarship, but was written instead for the most general readership possible and relied mostly on contributions from philosophers who were Tolkien fans. As they claim, 'we've assembled a distinguished cast of seventeen erudite philosophers and other academics, (all of them devoted *Lord of the Rings* fans) and asked them to help out with some of the deeper philosophical questions raised by the books and the movies' (Bassham and Bronson 2003: 1). Therefore, some of their observations are woefully ignorant of previous scholarship, but many of their conclusions are beneficial in understanding how the general public could respond to the work without foreknowledge of the applicable criticism.

One such observation is presented by Eric Katz who demonstrates how one of the major motivating factors of the text is temptation. He observed that 'all of the characters who encounter the Ring are given a choice; all are tempted to wield the Ring, and some find within themselves the power to reject it' (Katz 2003: 19). He demonstrates that free will is essential in fighting this temptation and argues that pure characters would not undergo temptation, thus demonstrating the complexity of Tolkien's characterization. This aligns well with many of the participants' observations about Boromir. They saw him as tempted, or even corrupted by the

Ring. It is also true of the participants' interpretations of relationships among the Fellowship as intricate and complex.

An additional observation of this kind is found in Gregory Bassham's chapter. He indicates that Tolkien uses the hobbits and elves to depict 'strong, healthy communities' and claims that Tolkien 'becomes our philosophical guide, pointing us to ways of living and thinking and perceiving that can help us lead richer, more joy-filled lives' (Bassham 2003: 60), thus illustrating how Tolkien endorses community as an essential component for human happiness. While this may seem tangential, it is the inverse of this logic that results in several participants rating Boromir and Gimli unfavourably. They either see Boromir as undermining the community of the Fellowship or Gimli as not contributing much to the Fellowship.

Jorge J.E. Garcia's chapter also depicts community as a pivotal idea in Tolkien's work. He contends that 'happiness is achievable only in a social context and its key is love… For humans as well as for hobbits, happiness requires fellowship with others' (Garcia 2003: 71). He goes further, to indicate that 'love expresses itself in loyalty and sharing, not in possession' (Garcia 2003: 71). Garcia breaks down the concept of community and fellowship into its key components of loyalty and sharing. It is the transgression of this sense of sharing, the greed of Boromir that makes him less likable for many participants. Interestingly, it is this same impulse that humanizes Boromir and, as will be seen in the next section, makes him relatable for participants.

Perhaps the most concise summation of these various moral observations is presented by Douglas K. Blount. He indicates that individuals need strength which 'manifests itself most clearly not in the exercise of power but rather in the willingness to give it up' (Blount 2003: 98), and that 'the portrait that Tolkien presents to us, then, is one of community, humility, love, and sacrifice' (Blount 2003: 97). These cumulative observations help to secure several key concepts of the moral values espoused throughout the text. This contention also resonates well in the interviews from participants. While it is Sam's selfless love of Frodo that makes participants love him, it is Boromir's self-serving grab for the Ring that makes participants dislike him.

4.4 **Most Relatable Member of the Fellowship**

4.4.1 Introduction

Unlike the ratings where participants indicated their favourite character from the Fellowship, the ratings where participants indicated the character that they most relate to did not show statistical significance. Table 2 indicates the number of times that study participants rated each character as the most relatable member of the Fellowship. For each time that a participant rated a character as the sole most relatable character of the Fellowship, they were awarded a full point. For each time that a character was rated as one of a couple or a few characters that are most relatable, the character was awarded a half-point. Using this data set, I calculated the statistical significance of the distribution of votes using a chi-squared test.[20] This test indicated that the distribution of votes for each character was not statistically significant.

Character	Number of Participants
Aragorn	3
Boromir	5
Frodo	1
Gandalf	2
Gimli	0
Legolas	2
Merry	3
Pippin	4
Sam	5.5

Table 3 Number of times participants indicated each character of the Fellowship as the most relatable.

What this indicates is that the distribution of rankings for these characters does not differ enough from an expected average distribution (which would be 2.833 participants per character) that they are statistically significant, and therefore do not reject the null hypothesis. In this instance, the null hypothesis is that each character would receive approximately the same number of votes for relatability.

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[20] For further explanation of the chi-squared test, see footnote on p.150.

As with other data presented in this analysis, this lack of significance cannot be extrapolated to the larger population of young readers of *The Lord of the Rings*. In other words, just because there is no statistical significance in the distribution of the 25.5 votes collected in this study, does not mean that there is no statistical significance in the way that all young readers of the story would vote. A much larger study would have to be undertaken in order to determine this.

As this is a qualitative study, this lack of statistical significance does not mean that there is nothing of interest in the rationale given by participants as to why they chose particular characters as the most relatable. What follows is an investigation into the reasons that participants give for rating certain characters as the most relatable among the Fellowship.

This question was only asked to twenty-five participants, as it was added after the first few interviews. As mentioned above, a couple of participants mentioned more than one character, but this only occurred twice: one participant naming both Merry and Pippin and another participant mentioning Merry, Pippin, and Sam. The remainder of this section focuses on the three characters that participants rated as the most relatable: Sam, Boromir, and Pippin. The goal is to understand what kind of considerations led participants to rate these characters so highly. The same three theoretical categories have been used in analysis of discussions around relatability as were used in favourability discussion analysis: Personal Attributes, Relational Attributes, and Narrative Function.

4.4.2   Sam

The participants who ranked Sam as the most relatable character often focused on Relational Attributes and Personal Attributes. A majority of the participants who ranked Sam as the most relatable character discussed how they did so because of the way that he is always helpful and loyal to other characters. This demonstrates how the most significant consideration for these participants is probably Sam's Relational Attributes.

This perspective is perhaps best summed up by 21A, when he describes Sam as 'very loyal and... willing to step up when he's needed.' Several participants relate to this through their own life experience: 20A talks about how he 'can dedicate [him]self to a challenge.' For a little more exposition on this point, 25A claims 'I'd prefer to help people and if in any need, carry them through [something]'. It seems, therefore, that many of the participants see

themselves as similar to Sam in that they often play a participatory role in helping others but are not the focus of larger events. This transitions well into the next aspect of Sam's character that several participants mentioned.

A majority of the participants who rank Sam as the most relatable character also reveal that the fact that he is small and often overlooked is an important factor in their considerations. This characteristic also fits within the theoretical category of Personal Attributes. The best summary of this perspective comes from participant 29A. When explaining why he relates the most to Sam, Merry, and Pippin, he claims:

> Mostly in school, and a lot in life, I'm never really the centre of attention like Frodo [is], being the Ring Bearer. It's always all the other kids who are all popular and athletic. [Sam, Merry, and Pippin] are the ones who are still really good characters, but they're off to the sides being important and are not really front and centre. And once again they're Hobbits, they're small. They never really used a sword before and... you wouldn't really think of them as something to run away from or fight at all. They're gardeners and... they're a very peaceful race.
>
> That's kind of like me. I'm not a fighter... I think I can relate to them more than the others because they're small and unassuming and they're not really in the spotlight, but yet they can still be heroes. So I can relate to them more than I can, I think, the others. (29A)

This way of relating to Sam because he is small or overlooked finds ample support among participants. Even though 1A likes how Sam is always trying to be helpful, she notices how 'some of the time, [Sam] just sort of feels, like, forgotten about'. Again, this reflection goes back to the participant's life experiences. 20A's comment about dedication mentioned above is prefaced by the caveat that he is 'not really a leader that much'. 25A's statement also has a broader context that blends the previous theoretical category with this one. His larger observation is how, 'I don't really see myself as someone who would take such a huge responsibility. I feel like I'd prefer to help people and if in any need, carry them through it. Instead of just trying to take a ton of responsibility on for myself'. It is significant to note, therefore, that almost all the participants who discussed Sam's loyalty and how that relates to their own lives do so within a context that recognizes how they often feel decentralized or even marginalized when it comes to important aspects or larger concerns.[21]

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[21] For full disclosure, I should mention that there were a couple of participants who rated Sam as the most relatable character, but their responses presented very general feedback which cannot be categorized well. This is largely the fault of the researcher, as these responses occurred earlier in the research process and probing questions were not employed as effectively as they were later on to flesh out the ideas presented in these general statements. Both reflections, however, indicate how Sam is relatable partially because he is one of the

4.4.3   Boromir

The participants who indicated that Boromir is the most relatable character also discussed the theoretical categories of Personal Attributes and Relational Attributes, with most focusing on the theoretical category of Personal Attributes. In fact, more than half of those who rated Boromir as the most relatable character described his humanity and his flawed nature as the reason for doing so. This falls squarely within the theoretical category of Personal Attributes.

The best summary of this stance is proffered by 26A. She states that Boromir is 'the most like human'. She goes on to explain how Boromir is 'trying to be a good man, and he's trying to help his people as best he can... He fails at the end, but that's not necessarily what's important. What matters is that he tried and he fought, and he's worried about his family and his people. He seems like the most human of the characters' (26A). For 26A, the ability to understand Boromir's motivation and interpret it in a positive light, as well as the appreciation of the fact that Boromir struggles against his impulse to take the Ring are important in this humanizing tendency.

Seeing the humanity in Boromir makes some of these readers feel like he is closer to their own experience. 17A expounds upon this connection, discussing how readers are 'not like the elves or the hobbits, that kind of perfect beings' because those characters 'have no temptations''. Participants see how Boromir's flaws make him more like the people they know. It is notable that more participants indicate the flawed or 'fallen' nature of Boromir rather than the positive aspects of his character, such as bravery, when making these comparisons.

Taken to its most personalized extreme, this perspective of Boromir leads a few participants to compare themselves directly with him. 8A suggests that 'I probably would've done the exact same... if I was in his position.' In the same light, 17A claims 'I guess I'm another man which means I'm liable to succumb to the same weaknesses and temptations as

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participants' favourite characters. 17A claims that 'Ideally, I would want to identify with Sam because: one, I really like the lifestyle of the hobbits. And, two, I really like Sam as a character, so I would want to identify with Sam, I think'. 24A states that 'Obviously I want to say Sam because he's obviously my favourite but I have been really, really trying lately to be innately good in that way and to just bring as much good into the world as I can. Yeah, I mean, I guess I would say Sam'.

men'. Once again, the negative aspects of Boromir's character are what readers seem to identify as particularly human or realistic.

A couple of participants indicate that they rank Boromir as the most relatable character because of his relationships. This falls within the theoretical category of Relational Attributes. Interestingly, for both participants it is the relationships that Boromir has with his family that are most important. 18A relates to the concept of family pressure that he sees in Boromir's story. He sees this pressure 'driving him to do something that he knows isn't what he should be doing'. He shares how he has 'felt that pressure from people I care about to do things that I know aren't best for me, so I just feel like I understand him' (18A). This provides a vital insight into the way that the reader identifies specific elements within Boromir's story that coincide with his own experience.

In much the same way, 28A finds an even more specific relationship to relate to in Boromir's story. He specifically focuses on the relationship between Boromir and Faramir, and then broadens his perspective to include most of Boromir's interactions:

> [Boromir] and Faramir, they're the best of friends and they both kind of compete. Obviously, Boromir is more favoured by Denethor and Faramir is the captain of Ithilien or the Ithilien Legions... I think in some aspects within academics there's a part of Boromir, and the Boromir-Faramir brotherly rivalry, that I see. (28A)

28A sees his rivalry with his brother in areas like school grades as similar to the relationship that he assumes exists between Boromir and Faramir. Once again it is Boromir's family ties that are important for the reader, and these elements of his story find resonance in the personal life of the participant. 28A goes even further, though, describing how he can also relate to the way Boromir feels when he is among the Fellowship: 'I think if I was placed in a group with all of these magnificent people…I think I would sort of feel ostracized, like maybe I'm not good enough' and how this could ultimately lead to 'that jealousy' that Boromir exhibits (28A).

4.4.4 Pippin

Participants who claimed that they relate best to Pippin indicated that the most important factor when they weighed this consideration was his lack of ability or experience throughout the story. This falls within the theoretical category of Personal Attributes. The long quote from 29A that was included in the discussion of Sam as the most relatable character also

applied to Pippin. Being clumsy, unprepared, and overlooked all play into the portrayal of Pippin that these participants relate to.

5A and 10A are quick to identify Pippin as 'not that good at physical activity' and 'clumsy' respectively. Nevertheless, they see redeeming qualities in his portrayal. One sees that 'he was creative' (5A), and the other appreciates how he is 'loyal to his friends' (10A). Perhaps this dual perspective is best summarized by 15A who says that both Merry and Pippin 'just kind of got roped into something' and they 'just went along with it [and] did the best they could'. In a pithier remark, 19A claims to be like Pippin 'because I'm not like heroic or awesome or anything, I just sit there and complain about how hungry I am'. This perspective of Pippin as a character who is completely unprepared for the challenges ahead and yet someone who persists seems to be important for every participant who indicated that he was the most relatable.

This tendency reflects well on one of the researcher's hypotheses going into this project: that young readers would relate to the hobbits well because they act like and are placed in the position of developing individuals. This prediction has overlap with the scholarship of hobbits as children, discussed in chapter one (p. 43), and I discuss it in more detail in the final chapter (p. 235).

4.4.5   Conclusion

The fact that two hobbits are among the top three most relatable characters is probably not surprising. In fact, Lakowski argues that 'most readers of *The Lord of the Rings* identify strongly with the hobbits for natural reasons' (1981: 22). This is perhaps even less surprising because the sample is of young readers. At the same time, the fact that a human is among the top three is also not very surprising.

The fact that Sam's fidelity and his humble position are the main reasons why participants see him as their favourite character, and as the most relatable agrees with most of Tolkien scholarship. Bradley's chapter 'Men, Halflings, and Hero Worship' discussed above gives some insight into this discussion (p.161).

Perhaps it is worth noting that Tolkien himself considered Sam to be an important hero in *The Lord of the Rings*. In a 1951 letter to Milton Waldman, Tolkien uses the phrase 'the

chief hero' when discussing the way that the relationship between Sam and Rosie contrasts with the relationship between Aragorn and Arwen. The sentence goes as follows:

> I think the simple 'rustic' love of Sam and his Rosie (nowhere elaborated) is *absolutely essential* to the study of his (the chief hero's) character, and to the theme of the relation of ordinary life (breathing, eating, working, begetting) and quests, sacrifice, causes and the 'longing for Elves', and sheer beauty. (*Letters*: 161)

The penchant for readers and scholars to relate to hobbits is well attested throughout the scholarship cited in this chapter. The dialogue that remains available for exploration centres around reasons why this is the case. I will explore this dialogue in the conclusion to this chapter, as well as in the final chapter of the thesis.

The seemingly contradictory position of Boromir as both the least favourite and second most relatable character is also in keeping with what is found in Tolkien scholarship. Many scholars have discussed how Boromir's flaws make him the most 'human' or 'believable' character. As Petty notes in *Tolkien in the Land of Heroes*:

> He may be arrogant, but his courage is genuine. True, he can't resist the temptation of the Ring, but as a mortal man, Tolkien didn't expect him to; Boromir is allowed redemption through his brave defense of his hobbit companions. (2003: 87)

Boromir is not the most heroic or noble character from the Fellowship, but both scholars and participants are willing to give him the benefit of the doubt because of how they are able to understand his motivations.

It seems that young readers are apt to read most of the characters in the Fellowship in a sympathetic light. That is, when considering the actions or thoughts of these characters, participants use their own life experiences as a lens to try to understand the character's motivation. This has implications on why many participants see Boromir as relatable, but also why they are willing to see the hobbits, elves, dwarves, or other peoples as human-like. Most participants see shared experiences with many groups, regardless of the individual character's background.

4.5   Conclusion

This analysis has several implications for discussing young readers' receptions of *The Lord of the Rings*. The act of determining what is important when participants decide who their favourite or least favourite characters of the Fellowship are demonstrates a sophistication in the considerations that young readers weigh when trying to make a decision of this nature.

This would indicate that young readers are capable of complex readings and of prioritizing different aspects of a character in order to arrive at an ultimate decision. Furthermore, it indicates that there is a diversity in the way that young readers approach a text like *The Lord of the Rings*. It may even suggest that this kind of diversity is inherent in the reading process of young readers. This would align well with previous scholarship on the way the young readers interact with texts (p. 51). Apart from these considerations, however, it has more practical implications for the way that scholars discuss heroes and protagonists in *The Lord of the Rings*, and perhaps in fantasy literature in general.

The discussion with participants about which characters are their favourite helps to illuminate how they perceive several of the main characters of *The Lord of the Rings*. Their observations can be classified using the theoretical categories of Relational Attributes, Personal Attributes, and Narrative Function. By examining the conversation using these three theoretical categories, some comparisons can be made between the ways that participants view several of the main characters of the story and discussions of character attributes, types, and arcs that have been written about in Tolkien scholarship. Likewise, categorizing the discussions of participants about their least favourite characters into the same theoretical categories helps to demonstrate areas of continuity between the thoughts of participants and prior Tolkien scholarship. Finally, examining the discussions of participants about the most relatable characters using these three theoretical categories also indicates some agreement between prior Tolkien scholarship in the reception of these characters by young readers of *The Lord of the Rings*.

Unlike the previous chapter, which demonstrates how young readers do not conform to several of the preconceptions that Tolkien studies would seek to impose on the text in terms of genre (p. 147), this chapter shows that young participants largely tend to agree with the major patterns found within Tolkien scholarship when it comes to discussion of characters within the story. While their readings may not go beyond the book in the way that scholarship would, their readings of specific instances and actions within the text are just as complex as those of many adult readers. Therefore, while this chapter largely indicates that in several aspects the perception of young readers matches the consensus views of Tolkien scholarship, it also indicates that young readers bring more complexity and diversity to their understanding of the text then might be assumed by Tolkien scholars.

On a final note, I wanted to mention that the idea of the 'reluctant hero', while not a completely modern phenomenon has seen a marked resurgence in the past century with the elevation of pessimism, irony, and the anti-hero in the popular consciousness (e.g. Han Solo from *Star Wars*, Ender from *Ender's Game*, and Case from *Neuromancer*). As Deborah C. Rogers notes, 'One of the notable features of twentieth century literature is the antihero; Northrop Frye's iconic literary mode has taken over our everyday lives. Everyclod is at the center of our vision, which has become cloddish' (1975: 72). This means that considering the hobbits as reluctant heroes helps to situate them, as scholars often desire, within the twentieth century context in which Tolkien was writing.

In a way, young readers invalidate this impulse. By interpreting the hobbits as characters like themselves, they indicate how readers often find such characters to be very personable, approachable, and significant in their reading of the story. This makes sense, given the prior scholarship which addresses the ways in which the hobbits are childlike (p. 43). This indicates how a reader, being situated in the modern period, can interact on a much more personal level with a character who reflects modern concerns than with characters who reflect more medieval or premodern concerns.

Such a case becomes increasingly evident when one considers the film adaptations of the text. Peter Jackson changes several characters in a way that makes them less self-assured and more approachable. What this does is make these characters more personable for a modern viewership. If we look at characters like Aragorn, Gandalf, Legolas, and Gimli, all of whom went through these kinds of changes during the adaptation process, this trend looks valid. On an anecdotal level, I have heard many fans of the movies say that they relate best to Aragorn, Gandalf, or Legolas out of all the members of the Fellowship, I've seldom heard a reader claim that they relate best to these characters. The interpretations of young readers catalogued in this study would appear to agree with this casual observation. While thirteen participants claimed that one of these four characters was their favourite, only seven found one of them to be the most relatable character. Inversely, characters like Pippin, Merry, Sam, and Boromir come out looking very well when one compares the results of relatability to favourability. While only one-third of participants claimed that one of these characters was their favourite, more than half found one of them to be the most relatable.

Throughout this chapter I have relied on a frame which focuses on the 'favourite' and 'least favourite" characters of *The Lord of the Rings*, as rated by participants in the study. This

framing was necessary based on the activity that participants completed during the interview. The insights from this activity, however, lead to an important conversation surrounding words like 'hero' and 'protagonist'. There are points at which characters that fall in either the category of favourite or least favourite are discussed as having characteristics that would make the characters seem heroic. At other times, though to a lesser extent, these discussions included considerations of what made the character a good protagonist for the story. I have attempted, therefore, to constrain my analysis in such a way that uses heroic terminology when discussing character traits and acknowledges the role of the character as a protagonist when discussing narrative function and not blur the lines of this distinction. It is clear that the terms 'favourite', 'hero', and 'protagonist' are not synonymous or interchangeable in the minds of participants, nor in the minds of the researcher or supervisors. Any confusion to this extent which remains in the analysis is solely on the part of the researcher in presentation.

Chapter Five

Visualizing Imaginary Worlds

5.1   Introduction

This chapter uses the same labelling conventions as the previous chapter. Therefore, I will use the term 'theoretical categories' to refer to trends in the respondents' answers (these were compiled after the interviews took place) and the term 'organizational categories' to refer to themes in Tolkien scholarship (these were developed prior to the interviews). The comparison of these two groupings is the most significant area for insight in this chapter.

When discussing settings from *The Lord of the Rings*, participants made observations that I have categorized into four theoretical categories. I have titled these theoretical categories 'Content of Picture', 'Aesthetic/Feel of Picture or Setting', 'Influence of Other Media' and 'Comparison to Other Pictures'. The first theoretical category, Content of Picture, includes all observations that deal with what is visible within the picture. The second theoretical category, Aesthetic/Feel of Picture or Setting, includes all comments of how a picture or setting makes the participant feel or evaluations they make of the picture. The third theoretical category, Influence of Other Media, contains all observations about how a film, video game, board game, or other elements influenced the participant's decision. The final theoretical category, Comparison to Other Pictures, contains all comments which compare or contrast the chosen picture to the other pictures in the photo elicitation activity. The observations were categorized inclusively, meaning that they were placed in any category that could be applied to the observation, even if this resulted in the observation residing in more than one category.

Because this activity resulted in such a diverse data set, it became necessary to establish two sub-categories within the theoretical category of Content of Picture. I have titled these two sub-categories 'Nature' and 'Habitation'. The first sub-category, Nature, includes all observations about the non-man-made or environmental elements contained within a picture. Therefore, observations pertaining to things like grass, trees, the sky, flowers, and hills all fall into this sub-category. The second sub-category, Habitation, includes all observations of the elements contained within a picture that suggest that there are humanoid creatures in the

setting. As a result, observations concerning things like farming, paths, houses, and people all fall into this sub-category.

There are two settings which showed widespread agreement: the Shire and Lothlórien. For each of these settings, more than two thirds of participants chose the same picture in the Primary Set. The discussions of these two settings are used to find trends among participant responses, then these trends are compared to prior Tolkien scholarship using the organizational category that I have titled 'nature'.

Throughout this chapter, I have tried to provide the most pertinent pictures in the text of the chapter; for additional clarity, I have also provided a complete listing of all images and groupings used in the photo elicitation activity in Appendix C.

5.1.1 Organizational Category: Nature

Across all of Tolkien's fiction we find detailed and captivating presentations of nature and natural phenomena. Delivered through the lens of fantasy and raised to a higher power, nature is the heartbeat of Tolkien's tales and verse: the luminous landscapes of the Elves and the majestic wilderness of uncultivated lands, the fauna and flora of fantasy and the enchanted depictions of the familiar all gather in force to breathe a waking wonder across the pages of his work. (Campbell 2014: 443)

This is how Liam Campbell concludes the chapter 'Nature' from Stuart D. Lee's *A Companion to J.R.R. Tolkien*. It is a very apt overview of the importance that most scholars place on nature in Tolkien's writing. As this section will discuss, though, there is a certain amount of disagreement on what this level of attention given to nature suggests to readers.

Many scholars who address the theme of nature in Tolkien's work support the opinion that Tolkien addressed nature so thoroughly because he wanted to convey a secondary world that was believable to his readers. One of the earliest articles in this line of thinking is 'The Ecology of Middle-earth' by Marcella Juhren. Juhren does not spend much time trying to situate Tolkien within a political movement or to claim him as a 'green' author. Instead, the focus of the article is on attempting to create a realistic ecology of the secondary world. That does not mean to say that Juhren ignores Tolkien's possible motivations. She claims that there are two reasons why Tolkien invests so much time in his descriptions of nature: 'For one thing, I believe he thought it a solid foundation on which to create Fantasy…Another reason why Tolkien gave so faithful a portrayal of our ordinary Earth, may simply have been that he likes it for itself, and finds it full of interest' (Juhren 1970: 4).

According to Juhren, therefore, giving an intricate level of detail allows the reader to invest more seriously in the work. This makes the world in which the story is situated seem more realistic and fosters the kind of secondary belief that Tolkien wanted his readers to achieve. Furthermore, it is possible that Tolkien simply wanted to put his personal joy of nature into his writing. There is certainly ample evidence that Tolkien loved nature and that this perspective influenced his writing: 'in all my works I take the part of trees as against all their enemies' (*Letters*: 419-420). Therefore, both of these assumptions are fairly safe when considering the motivations Tolkien had for writing about nature in such great detail; however, authorial intent is not the only important consideration when looking at the themes in a work. The way that these themes have resonated with readers and scholars after publication is also of great interest. In order to investigate how young readers interpret the concept of nature throughout *The Lord of the Rings*, this chapter uses nature as an organizational category to compare the trends of Tolkien scholarship with the trends in the theoretical categories derived from participant responses.

5.2   The Shire

The way that participants discussed their mental image of the Shire has important points of intersection with Tolkien criticism. This is especially true when considering how critics have discussed interactions between characters and nature and nature and the machine. Therefore, using nature as an organizational category illuminates the complex relationship between the reception of young readers and the trends of Tolkien criticism.

5.2.1   Theoretical Category: Content of Picture

When deciding which picture to select from the Shire Primary Set, most participants mentioned characteristics that belong in the nature sub-category of the Content of Picture theoretical category.[22] We will examine these responses in the context of Image 1.0.2 because this will cover most of the responses. The most common observations relate to the hills from

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[22] Of the thirty participants in the study, twenty-three chose Image 1.0.2 from the Shire Primary Set. The second most selected picture from the Shire Primary set was Image 1.0.1, selected by seven participants. This result is statistically significant, where chi square is 2.63267E-09.

the picture. More than three-fourths of the participants who selected Image 1.0.2 from the Shire Primary Set discussed the way that hills are represented, or should be represented, within the picture. Most of the participants who mentioned hills when they talked about this picture said that they like the number of hills that are in the image, but would probably prefer a few more. A good summary of this perspective was given by 12A, when she suggested that 'when I think of the Shire, I always think of bright green countryside and hills and water and lots and lots of trees'. This concurs with 15A's mental picture of the Shire. She claimed that the Shire doesn't have 'many tall trees' and that it is 'kind of flat, but maybe a couple rolling hills' (15A). Many participants described something along these lines when they reflected on Image 1.0.2.

Fig. 5 Photo elicitation image 1.0.2, Titled "Shire—Primary Set—Meadow"

Interestingly, all eighteen of the participants who mentioned hills being an important factor in their mental image of the Shire also said that they would add even more hills to the picture. 27A is a good example. He suggested that he 'would put some small hills kind of spread out over it' (27A). Many of these participants indicated that hills are an essential element to their conception of the Shire because this is where the hobbits would dwell. As 21A suggested, 'I imagine it having slightly more hills and stuff, because they would need places to dig their homes into'. This sentiment was echoed by many participants: 'I think it is a bit flat, so maybe a few subtle, gentle hills. Not really tall, but just a little bit, and throw in some hobbit holes' (9A). As these exemplars demonstrate, many of these participants indicated the need to add a natural feature within the picture, but this was largely motivated by the perception of the necessity for this natural feature to exist in order for the hobbits to build dwellings in them. While this complicates the classification of these observations in the nature

sub-category as opposed to the habitation sub-category, many of the participants did not specifically say that they would like to add hills because of the hobbits living in the Shire, and therefore placing these observations in the nature sub-category is more inclusive in this regard.

It would be tempting to incorporate a discussion of world-building or sub-creation in the context of these responses by participants. Unfortunately, however, the way that these young readers offered their insights did not lend itself well to such a discussion. This is probably due to the nature of the activity, in that participants were reflecting on preestablished settings and stories instead of reflecting on the story-making process. Therefore, there is certainly a sense that the participants see the hobbits as living in hills because they live a hilly area, and is not necessarily the idea that a hilly area is constructed to meet the needs of a population that lives in hills. In other words, the kind of descriptions found in the activity suggest a naturalistic explanation for why hobbits are hole dwellers rather than a narrative explanation for why there are hills in the Shire to meet the needs of hobbits.

Moving into the Shire Meadow Subset, four participants mentioned hills when they discuss Image 1.2.2. One participant gave an indication that it is possible to 'see some hills off in the distance' even though, overall, the landscape depicted is 'kind of flat' (19A). The rest of the participants who mentioned hills do so in the context of adding them to the picture (this includes participants 5A and 12A). Participant 12A went even further, claiming that 'I would replace the cities with hills, and it should have hobbit holes built into it'. So in a sense this final comment crosses over into the habitation sub-category. This mirrors the same trend for discussing hills that was visible in the Primary Set.

The importance of hills is also discernible in participants' observations regarding Image 1.2.3. Participants reflected on the way that Image 1.2.3 depicts hills and green grass. Approximately half of the participants that chose this picture discussed each of these elements as a significant influence on the decision. Four participants mentioned hills in their discussion of this picture, two of them indicated how they appreciated that there seems to be more hills in this image than in other images, and two said that they would add more hills to the picture. 3A described how this picture 'is more hilly… has more trees and has more up and down in the terrain' than Image 1.0.2, and means this to be a positive attribute. In the same way, 29A claimed that Image 1.2.3 'seems the most hilly' of the four pictures in the Shire Meadow Subset, and mentioned how this is an important attribute because 'Hobbit holes need to be

built into the ground'. Participants 8A and 15A both discussed how they would prefer to have more hills in the picture.

Another important characteristic that was frequently mentioned and belongs in the nature sub-category of the Content of Picture theoretical category is the depiction of the sky in Image 1.0.2. Again, about half of the participants who selected this image discussed how this element was significant in their decision-making process. Most of the commentary provided on this characteristic was simply to identify it in the picture and note its importance. The feedback presented by participants 2A, 4A, 5A, 9A, 10A, 12B, 13A, 15A, 18A, 21A, and 24A all falls into this category. One participant, however, provided a little bit more information concerning how he approaches this element within the picture. 17A gave a more nuanced opinion about the way he imagines the sky appearing in the Shire. He claimed that he appreciates 'the clear skies and the seemingly calm wind' visible in the picture; however, he went on to suggest that 'It's hard for me because you always imagine the Shire as this fertile land where all the inhabitants do is eat, and drink, and party, and all that. I simply can't imagine the Shire being windy, or rainy, or stormy' (17A). Here there is a recognition that in order for the Shire to be ideal for farming, some precipitation would be highly likely. At the same time, though, the participant acknowledged that they never imagine rain in the Shire. This leads to the realization that at least one of the participants acknowledged that weather is necessarily diverse in areas with good farmland, but that this consideration has never influenced their mental image of the Shire. Instead they picture an idealized setting with plentiful crops in an environment that never rains. This perspective fits quite well with the pastoral lens with which Tolkien scholarship has often read the Shire. Interestingly, this consideration is less pronounced when participants make their choices in the Shire Meadow Subset. Instead, participants focus more on plant life to make their selection.

Five participants specifically mentioned flowers when discussing why they chose Image 1.2.2 from the Shire Meadow Subset. Some of these participants simply identified that the flowers are in the picture (participants 5A and 18A fall into this category), while others had a bit more to say about the flowers in the picture. 27A discussed how 'the sunflowers, and also the colour of the sunflowers' are 'bright' and this likely was what 'makes [him] think of the Shire and Hobbiton and Hobbits'. 24A expressed many of the same sentiments: the fact that the picture is 'so bright' gave her the feeling of a setting that is 'upbeat' and expressed how 'looking at it makes [her] happy'. She went on to describe how, in her mind, 'in the Shire everything, even in December for some reason, would be blooming and beautiful and green

and bright and happy-looking'.[23] These last two excerpts anticipate the next theme which arose in the discussions as well.

Fig. 6 Photo elicitation image 1.2.2, Titled "Shire—Meadow Set—Flowers"

Four participants mentioned how the bright colours of the flowers in Image 1.2.2 helped them choose this image as opposed to the others in the Shire Meadow Subset. In addition to the comments made by 24A and 27A in the preceding paragraph, there are a couple of other participants who also reflected on the colours of the flowers and how these interact with participants' mental images of the Shire. 10A described how 'the bright colours…gives a sense of happiness' to the image that aligns with the way that he pictures the Shire. 12A agreed, exclaiming that this aspect 'makes me think of bright, cheery colours. The sorts that hobbits like'!

The cheerful attitude that 12A and other participants project onto images of nature reflects prior scholarship on the relationship between children and nature. In a 2011 study which asked children ages 6-11 to draw and write about their relationship to nature, researchers determined that 'children had a positive deep-seated appreciation, as described by the words like or love, for nature grounded in their experiences with nature primarily through play' (Kalvaitis and Monhardt 2012: 220). They go on to contend that 'the overwhelming positive tone (only 3% of children used a singularly negative tone in their drawings, while 54% used a positive tone) indicates that overall the relationship between children and nature is a beneficial one' (Kalvaitis and Monhardt 2012: 221). The positive perspective that their

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[23] There is one detractor from this general impulse. 19A notes how 'there are a lot of plants' in Image 1.2.2, and how he 'would take away all the flowers and add in grass'. He prefers the grass in Image 1.0.2 to the flowers depicted here.

participants demonstrate coincides with the overwhelming majority of participants in the present study who hold a similar perspective.

Similarly, the most commonly mentioned element of Image 1.2.3 is the way the trees are portrayed in the picture. Six out of the seven participants who chose this picture discussed how significant the depiction of the trees was to their decision. Several simply acknowledge that the trees were a significant influence on their choice (remarks in this regard came from 2A, 4A, and 29A). Others, however, provided a little more insight when describing how or why the trees depicted here were significant to their choice. 8A described how the Shire 'would be mostly open, but there would be little patches of trees kind of everywhere that's not cultivated'. This perspective would seem to indicate that there should be more trees in the picture; this view is shared by participant 3A who claimed that he would like to see more trees in the picture, because to him the Shire 'has more trees and has more up and down in the terrain'. The most extensive commentary in this regard was provided by participant 15A.

Fig. 7 Photo elicitation image 1.2.3, Titled "Shire—Meadow Set—Green"

In describing her mental image of the Shire, she discussed how the setting would have 'little clusters of trees that are ... Some of them are together, and then some of the taller trees a little bit in the distance' She emphasized how 'the trees are important' to the way that she imagines the Shire because 'they're a sign of life'. She culminated her insights with the following statement:

> I think that [the trees are] also important because they also give it more of a lively kind of air. Like it's not just this rolling meadow, that's kind of boring and doesn't have a lot of landmarks. It's got these little groups of trees that are sticking up all over the place. (15A)

Interestingly, 15A seemed to interpret the trees in this picture in a way similar to how other participants interpreted the sunflowers in Image 1.2.2. In each case what the plant life signified to the participant was the vitality of the setting as a whole.

The idea that the nature that surrounds the community is indicative of the wholesomeness of that group is the focus of an article by E.L Risden. His 'Middle-earth and the Waste Land: Greenwood, Apocalypse, and Post-War Resolution' compares Tolkien's popular writings and T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, and provides some very poignant commentary concerning nature in Tolkien's work. He argues:

> Both *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* foreground the green landscape…its beauties and dangers and its potential loss… The forests, along with vibrant towns and spectacularly architectural cities, evidence a sound heart in a living, breathing Age; their destruction, or the replacement by the rise and fall of blasted or infernal landscapes, marks end-times that we may not assume precede new, redemptive ages for Middle-earth and its peoples. (Risden 2014: 61)

This passage vividly describes how the landscape in Tolkien serves as a reflection of the attributes and character of the people who interact with the land for some scholars. As Risden observes a couple paragraphs later: 'evil corrupts the land as it corrupts human hearts, and it leaves behind reminders of ages past' (Risden 2014: 61). Not only does nature serve to inspire secondary belief in the reader, it also has the important thematic characteristic of representing the internal corruption of characters or the immorality with which they approach the land.

While there is a trend in participant discussion which equates the verdant nature of the Shire with the way that hobbits live harmoniously with the land, there is no indication that they necessarily hold the inverse to also be true. In a sense, participants observe in a positive light the same impulse in *The Lord of the Rings* that Risden frames in a negative light. Each discusses the ways that the interaction between characters and the land has a demonstrable impact on the land itself. Because they talk about these influences differently, however, this could indicate that they agree on principle and not on practice. In other words, we cannot assume that participants would view a desolate landscape as indicative of a corrupt treatment of the land because they have not explicitly stated so. We can assume that they understand that the way that individuals and communities treat nature influences the way that nature is portrayed throughout the text.

A particular emphasis in Tolkien criticism that has bearing on this portrayal of nature as an indicator of societal quality is that which examines the interaction between the natural world and those elements that have been developed by human-like characters. In a letter to

Milton Waldman, Tolkien uses the term 'the Machine' to refer to 'all use of external plans or devices (apparatus) instead of development of the inherent inner powers or talents – or even the use of these talents with the corrupted motive of dominating: bulldozing the real world, or coercing other wills' (*Letters*: 145-146). This is perhaps why scholars have adopted the term 'the machine' as a kind of shorthand to refer thematically to all of the inventions of humanoid characters within the story that conflict with the natural environment. Simon Malpas's chapter 'Home' from the collection *Reading The Lord of the Rings: New Writings on Tolkien's Classic* contains some important elements to contribute to the theme of nature and the machine. While the major focus of his article is on illuminating how the concept of home is used throughout the text, he spends a good portion of his arguments discussing how technology, and the drive toward modernization that it represents, is portrayed as a disruptive force throughout the story.

Malpas indicates that 'this thoroughly modern conflict between technology-driven expansion and the threatened harm of an organic community lies at the heart of *The Lord of the Rings*' (2005: 87). The prime example he gives of this key element from the text is one that has been discussed in dozens of analyses. He indicates how the conflict between Treebeard and Saruman 'encapsulates a key struggle in the novel… Between the oppressive power of technological development… And communities of the "natural" world" (Malpas 2005: 88). He goes on to explain how this tension between the advancements of the mechanized world and the desire to preserve an idealized sense of it is in conflict throughout the text. This illustrates how the concept of machinery is negatively portrayed against the ideals of nature which are affirmed throughout *The Lord of the Rings*. Even though this is a solid argument, the conclusion that Malpas reaches is only one of several possible interpretations. As will be discussed in the conclusion to this section, other scholars have sought to contextualize or reconcile the nature/machine relationship in *The Lord of the Rings*. It is enough at this point to note how none of the participants indicated an awareness of this tension when discussing the Shire.

In many ways, this discussion brings to mind Raymond Williams's *The Country and the City*. Here, Williams critiques the way that pastoral writing often ignores the human and technological intervention required to achieve it. He also illuminates how authors create 'celebrations of rural order' in their art as 'a magical recreation of what can be seen as a natural bounty and then a willing charity: both serving to ratify and bless the country landowner, or, by a characteristic reification, his house' (Williams 1973: 32). Unfortunately, such authors often achieve this magical simplicity, this 'magical extraction of the curse of

labor', by the 'simple extraction of the existence of laborers' (Williams 1973: 32). These authors leave out the men and women who work with animals:

> and drive them to the house and kill them and prepare them for meat; who trapped the pheasants and partridges and catch the fish; who planned and manure and prune and harvest the fruit trees: these are not present; their work is all done for them by a natural order. (Williams 1973: 32)

The hyper-realized simplicity of these pastoral scenes overlooks the human labour required to make them. In much the same way, Tolkien's fantasy is able to only tangentially mention the actual work of the labouring class. This allows readers to participate in this kind of reductionist/idealized vision of country or rural life.

Another frequently discussed characteristic also falls within the theoretical category of Content of Picture, but belongs in the habitation sub-category. About half of the participants who chose Image 1.0.2 said that the idea of farming was part of their mental image of the Shire. A particularly good example of this concept comes from 1A. She described how 'many hobbits are farmers. And that definitely looks like farm land'. She went on to suggest that 'farming is the first thing I think of' when she thinks about 'things the hobbits would do' (1A).

A few of the participants who pointed to the idea of farmland being significant to their interpretation of the Shire felt the need to point out that this idea has its roots in the books. A couple of these participants gave very specific examples:

> In *The Lord of the Rings*, it repeatedly mentions…pastures and, I forgot what that guy's name, but the farmer where Frodo…used to pick mushrooms. (3A)

> In the books it talks a lot about various farmers and the farmland around Hobbiton, like Farmer Maggot. (27A)

In addition to these two participants, another participant gave a generalized conclusion that they were able to arrive at based on facts that they were given from the book: 'It said in the book that hobbits like eating things, and that…long flat stretch of grass would suggest a place for growing crops' (12A).

One interesting trail of thought exhibited by participants who discuss farming and its importance to the Shire is how a couple of them attach meaning to this idyllic countryside with England itself. 14A claimed that 'it makes me feel like it's more of the countryside, more of a kind of British countryside or something'. Echoing this sentiment, 28A decided that Image 1.0.2 is 'more like the countryside of England… the farmland surrounding the Shire'. I should point out that neither of these participants are from Britain or England specifically. This being the case, they are evidently using the terms 'British countryside' and 'countryside of England'

to be synonymous. This is probably not how someone from England or the UK more generally would use the terms. In fact, none of the participants who reside in the UK made a statement to this effect. While there may be an important distinction between the two when we are talking about national identities and Tolkien as an author, I am unconvinced that there is a distinction between these two phrases in the minds of the participants that offered them.

Taken together, these trends in participant discussions of Image 1.0.2 relate well to Tolkien scholarship using the organizational category of nature and the machine. In his monograph *Defending Middle-earth*, Patrick Curry presents his interpretation of Tolkien's view of nature. While he does not situate Tolkien within a 'green movement' he does attempt to find a system into which Tolkien's views would fit. He claims that:

> much of Tolkien's attitude to trees reflects a quite different and much older perspective, namely, *woodsmanship*: a sensitive and sustainable use of nature, not for profit but for life, which entails not the conquest of an objectified nature but an ongoing relationship with various subjectivities, many of them nonhuman. There will be conflicts, of course, just as there are among humans. But the ultimate sense – which is obvious in all of Tolkien's work – is of a world that is *shared*; and far from confused, that insight is profoundly realistic. (Curry 2004: 156, emphasis in original)

Curry's interpretation, then, is one that seeks to reaffirm the complexity of Tolkien's understanding of the real world and the ways in which humans must use their power wisely. Furthermore, Curry demonstrates how this understanding of the intricate relationship between humans and their environment bolsters his claims about Tolkien's realism because the author does not portray a simplistic or naïve version of human/nature interaction. In essence, much of this argument derives from the concept of stewardship. One could paraphrase Curry's argument by saying that Tolkien encourages responsible stewardship of the natural resources of the world, but he does not forsake the understanding that humans must interact, and even use, parts of the natural world for their own preservation. Participants described the ways in which hobbits use land to meet their needs, and yet preserve its beauty. This trend in participant discussions is also seen in discussions of the Shire Subset images, as well as in discussions of Lothlórien, as we will analyse later.

Stewart D. Lee recently edited a reconstructed interview of Tolkien in *Tolkien Studies*. The interview is an expanded version of the one presented as "Tolkien in Oxford" for BBC in 1968. In it, there are several comments from Tolkien that corroborate Curry's interpretation. For instance, Tolkien claims that 'cutting timber' is 'a sad thing, tragic, but that's only one of the tragic necessities of the world' (Lee 2018: 161). This quote also foreshadows the

discussion of Flieger below. It presents the understanding that wood must be consumed to provide for humans/human-like creatures, but that there is always loss associated with this consumption.

To return to participant discussion, farming was also significant when participants made decisions in the Shire Meadow Subset. Several participants mentioned how farming is a significant concept when deciding which picture to choose in this Subset. 10A gave a good representative comment for how the idea of farming led participants to choose Image 1.2.2. He suggested:

> The sunflower field reminds me [of the Shire] because the hobbits farm a whole lot. They're very rich in the food that they have, they have vast fields…I get the sense that a lot of them are like farmers and they work in the outdoors a lot and I kind of get that from the picture. I mean somebody went and planted all those sunflower seeds. (10A)

This perception was echoed by participants such as 17A, who connected his observations to some more specific instances from the text. He reflected on how the picture 'reminds me of the chapter with Farmer Maggot. Even though he didn't have sunflowers, he had other crops, it reminds me how the surroundings would look like'.[24] A few participants specifically discussed how farming, and a sense of working with and cultivating land, feels appropriate when they consider how they imagine hobbits. 28A provided insightful commentary on the picture in this regard. He first observed how Image 1.2.2 is different from the other images in the Shire Meadow Subset in that 'as opposed to the other pictures, which kind of look more like wilderness, I think this one sort of shows care and, I think, devotion to cultivating nature' (27A). So this attribute of cultivation is one that he used to choose this image as opposed all the others, but he went further. He described how that 'devotion to cultivating nature' is something that 'really characterizes part of the hobbits' nature which is farming, kind of' (27A). In a more abbreviated way, 18A provided a similar commentary when she observed that, in Image 1.2.2, 'you can tell that it's been cultivated and cared for and that's just a very hobbit-like thing… kind of what the hobbits do is farm and grow things'. These observations reflect the same idea of woodsmanship that arose in discussions of Image 1.0.2. Curry, however, is not the only scholar to address Tolkien's complex portrayals of how characters interact with nature.

Flieger examines these complexities in her article 'Taking the Part of Trees: Eco-Conflict in Middle-earth' and demonstrates that Tolkien's perspective on nature 'is

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[24] 27A also specifically mentions this instance: 'when it talks about them going through Farmer Maggot's field, I always imagine them having to push through lots of tall crops'.

complicated, contradictory, and deserves more careful scrutiny than it has received up to now' (2000: 147). She rigorously attempts to demonstrate the complexity of Tolkien's understanding of the interaction between humans and the natural world by intertwining multiple relationships and characterizations which seem to contradict one another throughout *The Lord of the Rings*.

Ultimately, Flieger identifies the crux of the problem when trying to simplify the theme of nature in Tolkien's work. She believes that Tolkien's work is so complex that it must, of necessity, mirror the inconsistency of the real world. After all, as she observes:

> The problem of how to live on earth without changing it, of how to answer growing human needs without sacrificing to them some portion of the natural environment, is unsolvable. If we live and work and eat and build, even if we plant and prune and tend and cherish, it is inevitable that we alter nature, and in that alteration it is also inevitable that some of the things we would wish to preserve will be irretrievably lost. (Flieger 2000: 157)

Therefore, this unsolvable problem of the primary world finds expression in Tolkien's secondary world as a number of very complicated perspectives. These perspectives are not always in agreement, and they are not always mutually exclusive. With regard to the Shire, most participants seemed to espouse the idea that the hobbits coexist well with their natural environment. This lack of conflict or tension was apparent when participants discussed how they felt about the Shire or Image 1.2.2.

5.2.2   Theoretical Category: Aesthetic/Feel of Picture or Setting

So far, all of the key factors discussed which influenced participants' decisions of which picture to choose belong to the Content of Picture theoretical category. Another theoretical category helpful to classify observations from participants is the Aesthetic/Feel of Picture or Setting theoretical category. Nearly half of the participants who chose Image 1.0.2 mentioned something to do with the way the picture or setting made them feel.

For many of the participants who chose Image 1.0.2, the safety and peacefulness of the Shire is an important aspect of their mental image of the setting. 10A discussed how the Shire 'seems like a place where everything would feel safe' and the Hobbits would find 'no danger' within its borders. 13A described how this feeling could influence the aesthetic of the Shire, suggesting that 'it's really tame, it's not like the forest where there's kind of a sense of danger because you can't see everything quite as well as you can in an open field'. A few participants

point out the way that this safety enables the hobbits to disregard the trouble or hardships occurring outside of their borders. 4A made the statement 'I just always picture the Shire as a nice little heavenly place, nothing wrong with it…They don't really care about what's happening in the outside world'. This lack of concern with the doings of the outside world is often depicted by participants as leading to a sense of peacefulness. 18A characterised the Shire as 'peaceful and natural', while 29A combined several of the elements discussed here, claiming that the Shire is 'just a peaceful, average, run-of-the-mill, out-of-the-way, little happy place… it's the happiest, most cheerful place, and so unassuming'.

Some participants also considered the feel of homeliness or cosiness of the Shire to be an important aspect of their mental image. 5A claimed that the first things that come to mind when considering the Shire are 'hobbits and comfort' and 14A considered the picture, and the Shire, 'pastoral'. 10A gave perhaps the most inclusive description: 'It's like homely and small and nice, and it looks great and everybody knows each other and is just an all-around good place to be… Probably also the feeling of belonging. It's just… to me gives a warm, fuzzy feeling'. 1A used this this aspect of the Shire to differentiate it from the settings where humans, dwarves, and elves dwell: 'like these other places look like they're beautiful but in a mystical way and that's not hobbits. That's definitely not hobbits. This looks like a more cosy sort of setting.'

Reflections like this bring to mind the work of Jerry Griswold's *Feeling Like a Kid: Childhood and Children's Literature*. Griswold discusses how children's books, and in fact childhood itself, often contain five themes: Snugness, Scariness, Smallness, Lightness, Aliveness. These reflections in particular are similar to the way that he discusses the idea of Snugness. In his analysis, Griswold claims that 'snugness is a remedy sought for the existential discomfort with expansiveness, and the snug place is an enclosed locale where that vulnerability is exchanged for feelings of comfort and security' (2006: 29). This overlaps with the feelings of security and homeliness described by participants.

Furthermore, Griswold's analysis describes why this sense of snugness might be important in a story. He claims that 'from this safe center the feelings of basic trust and well-being can be extended to the world at large' (Griswold 2006: 30). This may be why this feeling is an important part of young readers' conception of the Shire. Feeling secure in this setting enables them to take in the troubling information they are presented, and also invest in the world of Middle-earth before the major events of the story take place. This would agree

with Wayne Hammond, who claims that 'if Tolkien had hurried Frodo and his companion into adventure… We would not appreciate so well the arcadia that Frodo is willing to give up for the sake of his people – and for its own sake' (1987: 31).

To return to a previously discussed study, Kalvaitis and Monhardt describe the importance that nature seems to have for young readers on a relational level:

> The participating children did not see themselves as separate from nature. Children described in their narratives their relationship with nature in terms of 'friendship', and they often felt 'related' to nature just as much as they are to their families: 'nature is home just as much as my house or room'. (Kalvaitis and Monhardt 2012: 221).

This indicates that, in addition to the structures of the Shire being easily recognizable, as indicated by Hammond, the naturalness of the setting is also significant when considering how young readers become attached to the setting. This will also be an important consideration to keep in mind when discussing Lothlórien in the next section.

Unlike the responses for the Shire Primary Set, the Aesthetic/Feel of Picture or Setting thematic category appears to play a much more significant role for participants who chose Image 1.2.2. More than half of these participants described how this thematic category played a part in their choice. In essence, many of these comments boil down to the argument that 5A made: 'The Shire's supposed to be a peaceful, happy place, and flowers would help with that'. 24A elaborated on this sentiment:

> It's so bright. Again, coming back to upbeat, looking at it makes me happy. Sunflowers are the bright happy flower… I feel like in the Shire everything, even in December for some reason, would be blooming and beautiful and green and bright and happy-looking... It just is such a happy place to me.

This excerpt demonstrates how the flowers help with the aesthetic of cheerfulness and happiness that many participants associate with the Shire. The sentiments are echoed by participants 10A and 27A, as they mentioned how the flowers radiate 'kind of a happy feeling' because of 'the bright colours' (10A) and how this aligns with the hobbits who are 'bright and cheerful people' (27A). Even though 19A concurred with this characterization of the hobbits, claiming that the Shire is 'lively and there's… hobbits, always moving around and always something going on', he never connected this observation back to the flowers depicted in Image 1.2.2.[25]

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[25] One participant's comment on the aesthetics of Image 1.2.2 doesn't contribute to this interpretation of cheerfulness and brightness from the sunflowers. 17A concurs that the Shire is a nice setting, but clarifies his understanding of what this means by comparing it to his conception of the medieval town: 'Even though it's

Again, this relates favourably to the way that Kalvaitis and Monhardt describe the 'overwhelming positive tone' of the responses of young participants in their study (Kalvaitis and Monhardt 2012: 221). These responses could indicate that participants who put more emphasis in the Aesthetic/Feel of Picture or Setting thematic category were more likely to choose Image 1.2.2, or that when choosing among the images included in the Shire Meadow Subset, this thematic category became more useful for participants. This latter consideration would seem to be true, since the same kinds of observations were used for many of the pictures in the subset.

5.2.3   Conclusion

The way that participants discussed the Shire intersect with several strands within Tolkien scholarship, especially those concerned with nature. On the whole, participants seem to agree with the lines of inquiry followed by Curry, Flieger, and Risden. They demonstrate an understanding of how the way that the characters treat their natural environment indicates something about the characters themselves and has an influence on how vibrant and plentiful the landscape is.

The final critic already incorporated into this analysis is Malpas. While his chapter leads to interesting discussions about the idea of the machine and how it relates to nature in Tolkien's work, his characterization of technology should not be taken as a general mandate for the way that all progress is perceived by Tolkien or depicted in his works. This caution is perhaps best stated by Gwenyth Hood. She summarizes the vast overgeneralization that critics are often prey to: 'Tolkien is often lightly accused of having a romantic view of nature, in that he portrays the natural environment as an embodiment of goodness, while technology is evil' (Hood 1993: 6). She goes on to redress this mistake, emphasizing the complexity in Tolkien's writing about nature and technology. She proposes that 'Tolkien's portrayal of natural environments and the ways in which rational creatures interact with them is quite complex' and that any 'critique of modern science and technology, if there is one, is much more finely nuanced' than is often argued (Hood 1993: 6). While Tolkien depicts technology, or the

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basically the countryside, I would imagine the Shire's still pretty clean because in some games, books, and all of that, you get the feeling that these medieval towns are they're dirty and plagued with the seas and all that. I wouldn't imagine the Shire like that. I would imagine the Shire as a pretty clean, nice place to be in. Not like a typical medieval town'.

machine, in a negative light and upholds the beauty and goodness of nature, the portrayal throughout his texts is not a stagnant one.

Her examples of various relationships provide a large spectrum of interaction between technology and nature. She discusses how Elves are depicted as the closest characters to nature, but the legendarium demonstrates their technological prowess through items like magic rings, elven cloaks, and foods like lembas. She also problematizes the simplistic view of nature as wholly good by discussing Old Man Willow in the Old Forrest. One of Hood's most pithy observations is that, 'when nature has numinous powers, both good and evil can draw upon those powers in their magic' (1993: 8). There are various relationships between the two elements that present a spectrum of interaction and appreciation.

Through the discussions of the Shire, participants demonstrate an understanding of the complex relationship between the need for humanoids to consume natural goods while at the same time preserving their environment. In this sense, they agree more with Hood's stance, and Curry's stance, than the analysis offered by Malpas. Intriguingly, the complexity of their view of this relationship does not influence their mental images of the Shire. Many participants suggested the ability to maintain an idealized view of the setting as a whole even though very complex relationships are maintained within the Shire.

5.3   Lothlórien

Most scholarship which analyses the concept of nature in *The Lord of the Rings* has focused on the portrayal of trees and what implications this may have for Tolkien's readers. When participants discussed their mental image of Lothlórien, their observations tended to focus on natural elements within the setting. This emphasis, combined with the fact that the most prevailing natural features discussed were trees and leaves, creates a large area of overlap between their observations and Tolkien scholarship that should be examined.

5.3.1   Theoretical Category: Content of Picture

The characteristics mentioned most often when deciding which picture to choose from the Lothlórien Primary Set belong in the nature sub-category of the Content of Picture theoretical category. The most commonly made observations relate to the leaf colour from the picture. Many of these participants simply indicated the leaf colour without elaborating why

this colour was significant. There were a few participants, though, whose responses gave an indication of their thought process in choosing golden leaves.

Fig. 8 Photo elicitation image 5.0.2, Titled "Lothlórien—Primary Set—Trees"

Some of these participants pointed to sections in the book or descriptions that they remember as a justification for their choice of Image 5.0.2 from the Lothlórien Primary Set. 13A recalled: 'They're golden, Lothlórien is the Golden Wood. In spring it's all gold. That's very important to Tolkien, and very important to me as well'. She was not the only one to make an appeal like this, 18A also remembered the forest being called the 'Golden Wood', to which she amended that the picture 'has, obviously, the right colour scheme'.

There are three interesting contributions to make to this discussion. The first important observation is that only four participants demonstrated a recognition that Lothlórien only has golden leaves during certain parts of the year. As 22A noted, 'it's not always golden leaves in spring and summer…in spring and summer its green leaves'. 25A also noted the significance of the golden leaves indicating a certain time of year when he said 'again it's yellow, it's fall' about Image 5.0.2. Two other participants noted how they would prefer to see green leaves in the picture rather than yellow leaves: 12A and 17A both would like to change the leaf colour to 'a greener colour'.

Another interesting contribution to this conversation is the fact that some participants indicated that Tolkien's word 'gold' is used in a metaphorical sense to describe the colour of the leaves, while others saw it used in a more literal sense. This is also true of the bark of the trees of Lothlórien which is described as 'silver' by Tolkien. Since this realization was made more evident in the discussion of bark, I will hold off analysis until then. The third important

element about the way the participants picture the leaves of Lothlórien has to do with how homogenous they imagine the leaves to be. These observations came up mostly in the discussions of Image 5.2.1, so it will also be addressed later.

Fig. 9 Photo elicitation image 5.2.1, Titled "Lothlórien—Trees Subset—Golden Trees"

Most participants mentioned how the golden leaves were a significant contributor in their decision between the images in the Lothlórien Tree Subset. As with many comments by the participants, several of these observations were simply identification of the element within the picture. Some participants contributed a little bit more to the discussion of why golden leaves were important to their mental image of the setting. Let's first look at the participants who chose Image 5.2.1. When asked how important the golden leaves are to her, 15A described how the golden leaves are 'the first most important' element when she thinks of the setting. She elaborated that 'I always think of the golden leaves, 'cause I remember that that was mentioned in the book, that the leaves were golden on the trees'. This level of importance, however, differed from one participant to the next. 14A suggested that they choose Image 5.2.1 because 'it has the yellow leaves again, which are not necessarily that important, but does kind of remind me of that area'. There are, therefore, some participants who believe that the leaves on the trees were important but that aspects other than their golden colour were more significant in making the decision to choose Image 5.2.1.

Again, there seemed to be some disagreement about the coloration of the leaves and whether or not Tolkien's use of the word 'gold' is meant to be literal or metaphorical. Most of the participants described the leaves in the picture as golden and described how this relates to their idea of Lothlórien. Two, however, called the leaves in the picture 'yellow', and never

mentioned the idea of gold when referring to the setting. A final participant recognized that the leaves in the picture are yellow, but suggested that the image would look more like the way that they envision Lothlórien 'if it had gold leaves and silver bark' (12B). This shows once again the diversity of interpretation that young readers have when they are presented with descriptions that could be taken as either literal or metaphorical. As discussed below (p. 217), this interpretation may have an overlap with discussions of genre, metaphor, and secondary belief.

For a few of these participants, I thought to ask a follow-up question by comparing Image 5.2.1 to Image 5.2.4. The golden leaves depicted in Image 5.2.1 were fairly uniform in colour, whereas Image 5.2.4 had a lot more diversity with the reds and browns typically associated with fall foliage. I asked five participants whether they thought the golden leaves of Lothlórien were closer to those in the image they had selected or in Image 5.2.4. My desire was to see how diverse their mental image of the golden leaves was. Of these five participants, three reflected on the fact that they considered the leaf colour in Lothlórien to be fairly uniform, and two imagined room for diversity.

The most blunt response to this question was proffered by participant 8A, who believes that the leaves 'would all be very similar in colour'. 14A gave a bit more depth when considering this question:

> The way that I imagined Lothlórien, I always imagine it's a very unified experience for those who went there, and so I would imagine more of a singular colour: such as buildings or whatever the colour of the season is. Because I also imagined kind of a less diverse area because of the type of trees. Like I remember it was mentioned that there is always one very specific type of tree in Lothlórien, and so I would imagine that there wasn't much room for a leaf colour diversity.

She not only discussed how the uniformity of the leaf colour in Lothlórien is an important aspect, but elaborated on how this conception is thematically consistent with the rest of her interpretation of the setting. In much the same way, participant 25A discussed how a unified leaf colour is thematically consistent with their understanding of how Lothlórien acts as a place of refuge for a people that is in decline:

> I think that it better depicts this than the other yellow picture in the bottom right [Image 5.2.4] because the red seems like, again it's turning to brown it's already dying, whereas I think that the elves will, just as slow as they depict their time, that they'll just slowly fade from the world and the elves again just fade into legend, instead of just dying off immediately and being a traumatic event.

So while 14A saw the uniformity of the leaves specifically as important, 25A focuses more on the fact that there are not leaves in his mental image of Lothlórien that look dead. One is the theme of uniformity in the other is a theme of decline but not death.

There are two participants who disagreed with the previously stated position when asked about leaf diversity in Lothlórien. Both 9A and 19A see plenty of room for 'more than one leaf colour' in their mental image of Lothlórien (19A). Interestingly, 22A spontaneously offered feedback that contributes to this question while reflecting on Image 5.2.1. He said that 'although there are golden leaves' in the picture, he also appreciates that 'there are these greener growths' (22A). Therefore, he also shares this opinion that there is some diversity in the leaf colour of Lothlórien.

The preceding paragraphs may initially seem like a foray into a somewhat obscure tangent of interpretation: leaf colour in the woods of Lothlórien. The discussions about this minute detail, however, lend themselves to some larger observations about the way that young readers interpret *The Lord of the Rings*. As already discussed, whether readers interpret some descriptors as literal or metaphorical conveys something about the way that they read the story as a whole. In much the same way, whether readers find diversity in their mental image of the leaves or not illuminates larger concerns about the text for each reader. Those who envision unity among the leaves often equate this to some thematic element that they see as prevalent at this point in the story: the twilight of the elves or the unified experience of the Fellowship.

Fig. 10 Photo elicitation image 5.2.2, Titled "Lothlórien—Trees Subset—Green Trees"

Leaf colour was also a trend in discussions with participants who chose Image 5.2.2. Interestingly, only one participant explicitly stated a preference for the green colour in Image

5.2.2. 17A claimed that 'the green is pretty accurate'. All the other participants who mentioned the colour of the leaves said that they would prefer it to be different. 27A mentioned how he would 'change the colour of the trees', but does not specify the colour he would change them to. Two other participants were more specific: 3A and 18A both preferred the golden colour, with 3A going so far as to say that, for this reason, he preferred Image 5.0.2. This indicates that the participants who chose Image 5.2.2 considered many of the same characteristics important as those that chose Image 5.2.1. In both cases the participants thought that the condition and colour of the trees and leaves depicted in the image were pivotal considerations.

Another aspect of the images that participants commonly discussed is the way that the trees are depicted in the pictures. Again, several of these reflections were constrained to only mentioning that the trees are an important element when participants deliberated on which picture to choose, but these were fewer in number than they were for the leaf observations.

Of the participants who chose Image 5.0.2, several mentioned how they appreciated the height of the trees in particular. Like how 20A reflected on how the trees are 'tall, but not too tall' or how 13A had the impression that these trees 'look like they could go up forever'. The concentration of the trees also played an important role for several participants: 22A mentioned how he likes 'the density and the thickness of this forest'.

A few participants related the size and condition of the trees with their function in providing shelter and cover for the elves. 18A mentioned how this influences her perception of the height of the trees. She claimed:

> The trees are super tall, and you could picture elves up in there… living in a place that has these weird shadows and tall trees, and you can't really see the end of the forest, that's kind of like what I picture… The trees would probably be a little bit thicker, so that they could hold like platforms and things in them. (18A)

21A echoed this when he said that he pictures trees 'big enough to actually have a platform almost on top of it like it mentions in the book'. A few participants even saw the trees in Image 5.0.2 as having silver bark. 5A bluntly claimed that the picture has 'silver trees' and 4A observed 'silver bark'. Perhaps the most in-depth discussion of this, however, came from participant 28A. He described how 'this bark that was very unique, the silver bark, and I think that picture most resembles [that]'. As with the 'golden' description of the leaves, the metallic descriptor of the bark of the trees in Lothlórien, 'silver', leads to some dispute as to whether this is a figurative or literal indication of colour.

An example of one participant who sees the descriptor as figurative is participant 8A, who, when asked what they would change about Image 5.0.2, claimed that he would 'make the trees a bit straighter and then have the bark being white'. In this instance the participant has clearly read the descriptor as metaphorical in that the white is semi-reflective of light. Another participant, 4A, very clearly sees this descriptor as literal. She claimed that she would 'change the bark of the trees to be silver'. When asked what she means by the word 'silver' she clarified 'like a shiny silver necklace' (4A). So there is a large diversity of opinion as to what this descriptor means. Such a discrepancy in opinion naturally brings up questions of genre, suspension of disbelief, and symbolism. Perhaps some readers are more apt to see 'silver' as a *metaphorical* descriptor because they're more willing to invest in Middle-earth as a realistic setting, thereby creating secondary belief in a fantastic story. Inversely, perhaps some readers are more apt to see 'silver' as a *literal* descriptor because they are more willing to invest in Middle-earth as a fantastic setting and don't rely on the realism of the setting itself to help them create their secondary belief. This would be a fascinating area for follow-up study, especially regarding Tolkien's own ideas from *OFS*.

The depiction of the trees is also an important attribute when participants discuss their decision in the Lothlórien Trees Subset. Several of the participants who chose Image 5.2.1 directly spoke about the way that the trees are portrayed. Participants employed a great diversity of adjectives when describing how they perceive the trees, such as: 'beautiful' (12A), 'strong, tall-looking' (28A), and 'dense' (22A). A few participants mentioned specific elements of the trees that they like; for example, 15A liked how the trees had a 'thick trunk'. Other participants, however, said that they would change the trees in some way. 23A directly contradicted 15A when he said that he would like to 'make the trees a little bit bigger' because 'they look a little skinny'.

Once again, the idea of whether or not the metallic words used to describe the trees became important in these discussions. Some participants believe that the term 'silver' used to describe the trees in the books is indicative of trees that are white or grey, whereas other participants see the term as literally referring to metallic silver tree trunks. As I mentioned in the discussion of the golden leaves above, 12B wanted to change this image and would like it better if 'it had gold leaves and silver bark', indicating that he believes that these descriptors are literal. On the other hand, 8A appreciates the fact that in this picture 'the trees are…well, they're not white, they're grey, which is pretty close'. This indicates that he understands the term 'silver' used in the books to refer to some whitish colour. 4A split the difference when

she claimed to like the picture because 'the bark of the trees looks like a greyish silver to me'. Thus bridging the gap between literal and metaphorical. As noted above, this trend of readers interpreting words as variously literal or metaphorical has some implications for the ideas of genre, metaphor, and secondary belief in the discussion of young readers.

An interesting contribution that was made by a few participants was to comment on the height of the branches or leaves depicted in the picture. For instance, 15A claimed that 'I always picture the branches as being kind of high up' and added the specifics that 'maybe the branches start like five or six feet up the tree instead of close to the ground'. This same impulse was mirrored by 4A and 13A. 13A gave a bit more detail: 'I feel like it's a little bit cluttered as it is, and I think that the trees of Lórien stretch up and they're just vast and you're not going to bump your head on branches in Lothlórien because it's magic and it's tamed as it should be, in a natural way, I guess'. She even went on to suggest that the appearance of the trees would reflect a certain kind of relationship that nature has to the elves who live in Lothlórien: 'so if the elves don't want to bump their heads on the trees, the trees will grow to accommodate for that' (13A). In many ways, this discussion recalls the previous analysis about the Shire, in which scholarship by Curry and Flieger overlapped with the ways that participants saw the hobbits as working among but not consuming too much of their natural environment. Several participants indicated that the way that the elves live with their natural environment is very similar to the way that the hobbits live with theirs. For instance, 13A called Rivendell 'the Shire for elves' when trying to describe how warm and inviting the setting is. Of Lothlórien, she claimed that the feel is a bit different, but that nature again plays a significant role in her impression.

The other picture that participants chose from the Lothlórien Trees Subset is Image 5.2.2. As with the participants who chose Image 5.2.1, trees seems to be an emphasis for those participants who preferred Image 5.2.2. All of the participants who selected this picture talked about how the way that the trees are depicted was an important part of their deliberations. This idea fits within the nature sub-category of the Content of Picture theoretical category.

Three participants commented on the height of the trees being an important factor without adding much further information (17A, 18A, and 26A). Two other participants presented more discussion on the topic. 27A appreciated the height of the trees, but mentioned that part of the reason for this is that he likes the way this creates a certain ambiance: 'the trees are covering up lots of the sky space, which I would have thought it was quite dark in the area

where Lothlórien was. That's how I've always thought of it' (27A). So, in a way, 27A's response overlaps with the Aesthetic/Feel of Picture or Setting theoretical category.

Using a different approach entirely, 3A reflected on the fact that his personal experiences have influenced his perception of the trees of Lothlórien:

> The height of the trees and the overhead canopy, and there being fairly, not very much undergrowth. I think the other one [Image 5.0.2] was closer to my, what I envisioned… I guess something, like, a tall aspen. Those ... I'm probably being biased with aspen. Those have gold leaves in fall. So, but they have smoothish bark. Not just typical brown bark. They are whitish in hue. (3A)

It is not surprising that readers engage their prior experience to help them engage with a text. In fact, it may be more surprising that biographical reflections such as this are so rare among participants.

With so many observations about the portrayal of trees, it is a good idea to revisit the observations made by Tolkien scholars. In his presentation 'Trees, Chainsaws, and Visions of Paradise', Tom Shippey contends that 'the world is the wood, the shadowland, where one so easily gets lost' (2002: 6). This indicates that the forest is often used as a place of danger for characters who will have to make choices in order to find their way through. In the conclusion of his speech, Shippey claims that:

> Tolkien knew that his love of trees was not always shared. But he thought that the urge to get out of the wood and reach the stars was, if not universal, at least strongly shared… He himself wanted to see the stars, but also to stay within the wood, and his fiction powerfully expresses both desires. (2002: 10).

This speech imbues the use of the forest in *The Lord of the Rings* with attributes that are ripe for reader engagement, and exhibit authorial intent. Notably, Shippey sees the thematic elements of the woods and starlight as related. This is significant when reflecting upon the way that Tolkien viewed the elves as associated with the stars. This contributes to the conversation below (p.220), in which participants related the elves more closely to sunlight in the forest of Lothlórien.

Another scholar who builds on this thematic approach to the concept of nature in Tolkien's work is Carol Jeffs in the article 'The Forest'. The scholar claims that 'in using the forest as a symbol of strangeness and danger, Tolkien is drawing on a well established tradition in story-telling' (Jeffs 1985: 33). She sees the forest in *The Lord of the Rings* in much the same way that it is portrayed in many fairy tales. The significant contribution that this perspective gives for the present study, is that it allows Jeffs to demonstrate how this danger

forces the hobbits through a process that will result in their maturity: 'all four of the forests in both *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* seem to contribute towards the maturation of the hobbits in particular' (Jeffs 1985: 35). This demonstrates how the hobbits are portrayed as novices at the beginning of the book, but through their experiences they grow to a place where they accept more responsibility and accountability for their actions and the world around them.

This article by Jeffs provides some interesting food for thought in relation to the way that participants discussed the woods of Lothlórien. Initially, most participants would probably disagree with the characterization that the woods are used explicitly as a source of danger. Note how none of the descriptions given by participants indicate that they feel the woods to be a place of danger or conflict for the members of the Fellowship. As we will see, many of the participants only discussed the way in which the woods were beautiful or vivacious or an indication of life within the setting. Only a few of them discussed any amount of danger or sorrow in Lothlórien. (see the discussion of 27A's responses below).

The second contention from the article, however, would probably receive a lot of agreement from young readers. Many of them do see the influence that the natural environment has on the characters in helping them cope with difficult circumstances and even to grow more mature as the story progresses. These conversations cannot conclusively state that none of the participants agree with the assertions from Jeffs's article since the participants were not directly asked whether the forest was a place of conflict or maturation; however, the lack of any observations which would support this contention is significant.

The final popularly discussed attribute in the nature sub-category is the way that the sunshine or light is represented in the pictures. This is particularly true when participants discussed the images in the Lothlórien Tree Subset. Several who chose Image 5.2.1 mentioned this characteristic of the picture. Many participants mentioned the sunlight coming through the trees in passing, but others gave a bit more detail. 28A provided some indication of the importance that the sunlight has to him when he called it 'the deciding factor' in his decision. 14A agreed with this assessment, indicating that the sunlight 'filtering through the trees' is very important to the way that he pictures the setting. He elaborated:

> One of the things I imagined in Lothlórien that would be important is a lot of the interaction the sun and the moon have with the area. I always imagine the elves as being very in tune with nature, and in tune with the seasons, and in tune with the sun and the moon. I think they would've liked to have a lot of sun exposure and moon exposure underneath the cover of the trees.

This indicates how the sunshine plays an important thematic role to some of the participants. This isn't the only way in which participants saw the light as significant. Interestingly, participants focused primarily on sunlight in their discussions. This may see a bit unexpected because of the way that Tolkien himself typically associates elves with starlight.[26] While I at first believed this to be an influence of the pictures which the participants had to choose from (almost all of which depict a scene in daylight), I decided to re-examine the chapters that describe Lothlórien in *The Fellowship of the Ring* to see how divergent the interpretation would be from the textual evidence.

This reminded me that there are more than twenty direct mentions of the sun or sunlight between Legolas's recitation of the song of Nimrodel and the end of the chapter 'Farewell to Lórien'. I will include a few notable examples for reference. When they wake in the woods after spending their first night on a flet, this is how the scene is described: 'Day came pale from the East. As the light grew it filtered through the yellow leaves of the mallorn, and it seemed to the hobbits that the early sun of a cool summer's morning was shining' (I, ii, 6, p.346). When the Fellowship have their blindfolds removed in Cerin Amroth, Sam describes how his impression of the elves here is different than it was before:

> Sam was now standing beside [Frodo], looking round with a puzzled expression, and rubbing his eyes as if he was not sure that he was awake. `It's sunlight and bright day, right enough,' he said. `I thought that Elves were all for moon and stars: but this is more elvish than anything I ever heard tell of. I feel as if I was *inside* a song. if you take my meaning.' (I, ii, 6, p.351)

Their time in the city is marked in days, and these days are signified by long periods of daylight with only occasional interruptions of precipitation: 'They remained some days in Lothlórien, so far as they could tell or remember. All the while that they dwelt there the sun shone clear, save for a gentle rain that fell at times, and passed away leaving all things fresh and clean' (I, ii, 6, p.358). It seems, therefore, that their time in Lothlórien is rife with descriptions of sunlight. This probably indicates that my initial interpretation of the participant responses put too much emphasis on the influences of the pictures, and not enough on the influence of the text in helping to form young readers' perceptions of the setting.

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[26] This is evident in several passages. One great example comes from one of Tolkien's letters dated 14 October 1958. In this letter he explains that it is 'Difficult to distinguish "star" and "elf", since they are derivatives of the same basic element EL "star" ; as the first element in compounds el- may mean (or at least symbolize) either. As a separate word "'star" was *ĕlĕn, plural *elenī in primitive Elvish. The Elves were called eledā/elenā "an Elf" (High-elven Elda) because they were found by the Vala Oromë in a valley under the star-light; and they remained always lovers of the stars.' (*Letters*: 281).

A couple of participants indicated how the sunlight influences their perception of how the setting feels. These observations cross over somewhat into the theoretical category of Aesthetic/Feel of the Picture or Setting. Of particular interest is the insight given by participant 13A: 'The orange that's giving you a sense of warmth and ease is there and the light coming through the trees is making it less human and more magical and elven'. This demonstrates how the sunlight overlaps with some of the aesthetic considerations that participants have already pointed to when describing Image 5.0.2.

The only attribute of the picture that was present in discussions which falls under the habitation sub-category was the accommodations that participants would prefer to include within an image. These observations occurred in almost half of the discussions with participants who selected Image 5.0.2. Participants typically mentioned wanting to add some form of 'platform' or 'flet'/'talon' to picture in order to illustrate 'a place for the elves to live' (23A). Interestingly, one participant took a more metaphorical approach to this problem and suggested adding some kind of 'bird nests or squirrel nests' as a way of representing 'how the elves were one with nature, and that they lived among the trees' (25A). This indicates, much like the discussions of the hobbits in the Shire, how participants view the elves as a group that lives in a harmonious relationship with the nature that surrounds them.

5.3.2   Theoretical Category: Aesthetic/Feel of Picture or Setting

Another prevalent theoretical category that occurred in these discussions was that of Aesthetic/Feel of Picture or Setting. There is a lot of diversity in the way that participants described the aesthetic of the pictures and Lothlórien. Three attributes came up several times within these discussions that belong in this category: otherworldliness, beauty, and peacefulness. Many of the ideas that were presented when participants reflected on the Lothlórien Primary Set remained consistent when they talk about the Lothlórien Trees Subset.

When deliberating on the Lothlórien Primary Set, a few participants discussed the way that Lothlórien feels like an otherworldly place to them. 13A described the setting as 'magical' and appreciates its 'otherworldliness, while 18A focused more on the picture itself. 18A observed how Image 5.0.2 'looks very foresty and elfy and mystical' to her, and equated that with the forested nature of the image, describing how 'just living in a place that has these weird shadows and tall trees, and you can't really see the end of the forest, that's kind of like what I picture it'. 9A echoed the observations about both the setting itself and the image,

stating that 'Lothlórien is a place where it really feels like you're in a different world' and this 'picture is a bit more like that' than the other images. Participant 8A revisited the idea of otherworldliness when he described how he likes Image 5.2.1 from the Lothlórien Trees Subset because of 'how fantastical it is… it looks like…something from fantasy'.

A few participants specifically mentioned the beauty of Lothlórien or their chosen picture in the Lothlórien Primary Set. In fact, all three of these participantsfocused more on Image 5.0.2 than the setting itself when discussing beauty. 6A and 20A reverted to the golden leaves, describing how 'the leaves are really beautiful' and 'the trees are golden and they are just pretty beautiful' respectively. 3A gave a little more detail, describing how the beauty of the picture 'would be in the tall trees and the peacefulness', going on to clarify that part of the beauty is that there are 'not very many man-made things' in the image. This echoes many of the considerations that were raised in the discussion of the farmland of the Shire. 28A picked up the aspect of beauty when he reflected how Lothlórien 'looks really beautiful… I think it was an idyllic temperature all year around' in his discussion of the Lothlórien Trees Subset.

Finally, some participants spoke directly about the sense of peace that they feel about Lothlórien or Image 5.0.2. As shown in the previous paragraph, 3A found the peacefulness of Lothlórien beautiful. 19A felt that the trees of Lothlórien make the setting 'kind of shady and peaceful'. 14A found the idea of peacefulness very important to the way he pictures Lothlórien. So much so that he indicated that it is one of the key reasons he chose Image 5.0.2: 'I think also the fact that Lothlórien is always described as very peaceful and quiet and to me that picture gives me the most… the biggest impression of a place that's quiet' (14A). The final participant who discussed Lothlórien's peacefulness incorporated this perspective with larger concerns of the story. 14A was consistent in his reflection on the setting as a peaceful place when he compared this picture with Image 5.2.2 from the Lothlórien Trees Subset: 'Again, like the last one, it has a lot of the same peaceful qualities that I associate with Lothlórien'. In fact, this aesthetic stayed fairly consistent for most of the participants who recognized it in the Lothlórien Primary Set.

These observations recall the Le Guin essay 'The Staring Eye' discussed in chapter one (p. 27). Lothlórien acts as a release from the tension-filled scenarios of Moria and the Great River. The Fellowship finds a quick reprieve in this homely place which acts as a break from the action of the quest and allows the reader to catch their breath and regain their footing before returning to the main action of the plot.

When discussing the idea of peacefulness in the Lothlórien Trees Subset, 25A made some connections between this peacefulness and the role that it plays in the developing action for the Fellowship within the plot. He claimed that this aesthetic is significant in the story, remembering how Lothlórien is 'the place where [the Fellowship is] able to really comb over their grief of losing Gandalf' and how it is 'really the place that they can decompress and really consider their losses' (25A). This indicates how he sees the peacefulness of Lothlórien as being an important aspect of both the setting itself, the narrative arc of the story, and the depiction of the characters of the Fellowship. In some ways, this observation is reminiscent of Flieger's discussion of how characters rely on nature in order to sustain themselves (p.207). Interestingly, though, the way that the setting helps preserve characters in this sense does not require consumption of natural elements of the environment. Instead it is a consolation provided to characters because they find an environment which can ease the pain that they feel.

This idea also finds resonance with Tolkien's *On Fairy Stories*. Tolkien claims that one of the most genuine forms of consolation that fairy-stories can provide is an appeal to 'the oldest and deepest desire, the Great Escape: the Escape from Death' (*OFS*: 74). In a sense, the woods of Lothlórien provide the consolation of a fairy-story to the Fellowship after the death of their leader. Lothlórien is one of two settings in the story where the faerie element is strongest. Indeed, when one considers Tolkien's claim that 'The Human-stories of the elves are doubtless full of the Escape from Deathlessness' and that 'few lessons are taught more clearly in them than the burden of that kind of immortality, or rather endless serial living' it becomes even more apparent that this setting presents a liminal space between fantasy and true faerie (*OFS*: 75). Lothlórien, then, provides two forms of consolation: first, it provides the Fellowship respite from the goal of their quest. Additionally, it demonstrates that the kind of immortality that the Fellowship would wish for Gandalf would not be as unproblematic as grief would have them believe.

In addition to these considerations, there were some significant observations made that were specific to Image 5.2.1. 23A's observation that the picture is 'very nature-y though, which does remind me of Lothlórien… It's a little bit like Rivendell, you know…secretive' echoed some of the sentiments mentioned in the discussion of the Lothlórien Primary Set, but pushed the observations of fewer man-made elements in the environment into a different direction, that of secrecy. 8A explored an almost entirely new direction when he mentioned that he would make the picture 'not darker, but like a bit more sombre, sad'. Here we arrive at

a discussion that reveals how a couple of participants would probably agree with Jeffs's assertion that the woods are not an entirely happy place within the story. It is important to note, however, that neither of these participants mentioned the woods as a place of conflict or necessary character development. Instead, they see the woods as characterized by attributes which match those of the inhabitants that live there: the elves. In one case they see the tendency for the elves to sequester themselves from the rest of the world as an influence on the natural environment, and in the other they see the sadness of the elves in their mental image of the woods.

Another interesting observation that arose from these conversations came from participant 22A. He discussed how the beauty of this setting becomes the backdrop for a new confrontation between Frodo and Gollum. This led him to reflect on the way that this juxtaposition gives a deeper meaning to the setting:

> It's in the setting of this peaceful, golden woods, sleeping atop one of these beautiful trees, that Frodo really has his first close encounter with Gollum. It's sort of these two completely different things. Almost [right?] for each other and how in this place of protection he was able to see something which is pretty evil really. (22A)

This is the only time that any participant discusses conflict within the woods of Lothlórien to any real extent. As with the previous two participants, there needs to be a clarification here that the way that the participant describes the conflict does not exactly align with scholarship. While Jeffs indicates that the forest is a place that enables the kind of conflict that leads to maturation because of its very nature, this participant is careful to emphasize how it is the juxtaposition between the conflict and the beauty of the forest that is striking. This interpretation could be said to align more closely with Shippey's view that 'the literary functions of the wood are, then, first of all to get lost in, and second, to find your way out of' (2002: 4). With his citations of Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream* and Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, Shippey evidently includes interpersonal conflict in his sense of 'getting lost' in the wood. A distinction of this interpretation and that of 22A is that Shippey presents no juxtaposition between the beauty of the wood and the confrontations that can happen therein.

There are also several important contributions to this discussion made by participants who chose Image 5.2.2 from the Lothlórien Trees Subset. There seems to be a consensus among these participants that Lothlórien is shrouded in secrecy.[27] 18A indicated that she

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[27] One participant, 26A, did not mention the secretive aspects of Lothlórien. Instead of seeing the setting as dark and mysterious, she characterized the setting as a 'gentle and safe space' (26A).

prefers this image because 'there's kind of that mystery going on. It's darker and stuff like that'. 27A agreed with this assessment and provided a rationale for his perspective. He claimed that 'I always thought it interesting about the magical barrier around Lothlórien that seems to change time inside Lothlórien. I would think that it would be a pretty big and deep, dark forest to have those magical boundaries' (27A). 17A also supported the idea of a forest shrouded in mystery, but more because of its inhabitants than its magical properties: 'you don't really see anything in the distance, but you can feel you're being watched by the elves… I would say yeah. You can feel the tension in the air of the creatures observing you as you walk through it'. These observations lend themselves well to conversations of how the elves live in a harmonious relationship with nature.

There is textual evidence to support interpretations of this variety. For instance, the possible danger of the woods is present when Boromir states his misgivings about Lothlórien very early on. One instance of this is when they're first entering the woods and Boromir claims that he would prefer to take 'a plain Road, though it led through a hedge of swords' (I, ii, 6, p.338). He goes on to claim that in Gondor 'it is said that few come out who once go in; and of that few none have escaped unscathed' (I, ii, 6, p.338). For evidence to support the secret nature of the woods, one need look no further than the scene where the members of the Fellowship must be blindfolded in order to proceed deeper into the realm (I, ii, 6, p.347). In this scene, Haldir clarifies the need for a blindfold is part of the law of the land and that, while Gimli will need to be blindfolded before the rest of the Fellowship, they will all eventually need to be blindfolded before approaching the city. This necessity is ultimately waived by Galadriel and Celeborn. So there is ample textual evidence to support a view of Lothlórien as a secretive or dangerous place.

Fig. 11 Photo elicitation image 5.0.3, Titled "Lothlórien—Primary Set—Water"

5.3.3   Theoretical Category: Comparison to Other Pictures

The theoretical category of Comparison to Other Pictures is presented only twice throughout these discussions. Of particular interest is the way that one participant discussed why he dismissed Image 5.0.3. 14A focused on the negative attributes of the images he did not pick in order to justify his ultimate choice. He claimed that:

> The bottom left [Image 5.0.3], it has a pond… that looks more cultivated to me just because of the more man-made nature of that. I always thought of it as wild and with the elves kind of living in harmony with nature: as living in it without kind of disturbing it. The bottom left picture doesn't necessarily fit my image of that.

This reflection echoes some of the statements by other participants and how it depicts the elves as finding a harmonious way to balance their love of nature and their need to survive. This delicate balance of survival and stewardship recalls the conversation about woodsmanship in Curry's analysis discussed in the Shire section above (p.205). This reflection also compares favourably with the scholarship of Shippey and Jeffs. Both of these scholars characterize the woods as a place of unpredictability and untamedness.

5.3.4   Conclusion

I did not want to leave the setting of Lothlórien behind without addressing an essay that focuses particularly on this setting in order to present a persuasive ecological argument based on *The Lord of the Rings*. I wanted to highlight Gabriel Ertsgaard's '"Leaves of Gold There Grew": Lothlórien, Postcolonialism, and Ecology'. I include this article because it is much more politically inclined than most other examples I use. Ertsgaard convincingly argues for a more involved and sustainable approach to nature using Tolkien's work as an exemplar. He observes how 'the "enchantment" of conservationism has historically been entangled with the "magic" of colonialism' (Ertsgaard 2015: 224). He diagnoses how 'Tolkien's Elves retreat into their own enchanted nature realms, like Lothlórien, and largely detach themselves from the other races of Middle-earth' (Ertsgaard 2015: 224). The chapter equates this with the human tendencies that surround conservationism. As has already been discussed, participants certainly identify the natural environment of Lothlórien with traits and characteristics indicative of what Ertsgaard calls 'enchantment' above. In other words, participants readily indicate the preservative impulse that the elves personify towards nature. Many participants also appreciate the 'magic' and secretiveness that characterize the inhabitants of the woods, and thereby Lothlórien itself. This is not to say that the participants within the study would

approve of the conclusion that Ertsgaard draws from these observations, but it does validate the symbolic elements that the scholar draws upon.

Ertsgaard goes on to associate the quest of the Ring itself, as well as the major theme of self-sacrifice, with a healthy perspective that humans should adopt in order to help them form a more successful conservationism. He states that *The Lord of the Rings* is 'filled with characters who understand that their own actions are necessary but not sufficient to save Middle-earth' and contends that this demonstrates how 'only through the surrender of power, the surrender of imperial fantasies, can we learn the self-restraint necessary to live sustainably' (Ertsgaard 2015: 226). This is a highly politicized interpretation of Tolkien's ecological themes and it shows the kind of reading which is possible from Tolkien's work. Again the analysis shows overlap with the kinds of observations that participants are able to make about the story. As discussed in the previous chapter, many participants appreciate how the characters of the Fellowship are intrinsically dependent on one another to fulfil their quest. They also appreciate how several members of the Fellowship are willing to reach out and support each other over the course of the story. While they may not interpret the plot of the story as a commentary on conservation efforts, once again they seem to agree with many of the symbolic elements that the scholar uses to make his argument.

Regardless of whether participants would agree with Ertsgaard's particular conclusion, the previous section allows us to see a trend in the interpretations of young readers which has some bearing on the present discussion. The participants seem to make a value-judgment on conservationism. They value the kinds of relationship between humans/humanlike creatures and nature that Tolkien portrays in the cases of the hobbits and the elves.

Though much more political than most in its argument, Erstgaard's chapter is not the only source to indicate that there is a significant overlap between the depiction of nature throughout *The Lord of the Rings* and the main plot of the text. Nor is he the only one to heavily rely upon the Lothlórien passages to do so. Schaafsma's 'Wonderous Vision: Transformation of the Hero in Fantasy through Encounter with the Other' demonstrates how nature has a thematic purpose to show character development as the story progresses:

> In Lórien, Frodo sees for the first time the magical, numinous aspect of the world around him. He sees objects in nature as separate from himself and as possessing an intrinsic, irreducible value…The insight that Frodo achieves in Lórien is essential for the hero of fantasy; he must recognize that the world is not his for the taking, that nature has a value apart from its use. (1986: 66)

Tolkien employs nature to show a maturity of knowledge and understanding that Frodo has gained over the course of his journey so far. Furthermore, the critic indicates that this type of understanding is a pivotal element for the fantasy genre as a whole, which typically emphasizes the concept of stewardship or conservation of natural spaces.

As mentioned earlier, many participants appreciate the fact that several members of the Fellowship undergo a process of maturation and understand that a pivotal part in this process is played by wooded areas; for example, 21A remarked how the relationship between Merry and Pippin grew in Fangorn. He stated how the 'relationship that they already had built up there' (21A). While it is true that none of the participants describe the exact maturation process indicated by Schaafsma, they do demonstrate an understanding of the importance of nature as a self-contained entity. In other words, their observations validate the existence of the woods apart from any influence that it has on characters. Their observations about the inherent qualities of the natural world would lend themselves well to an analysis of the sort that the scholar proposes. A final consideration that weighs on how participants might relate to Schaafsma's contention is the fact that, as discussed in the chapter concerning genre, many participants do not classify, or exclusively classify, *The Lord of the Rings* as a work of fantasy. As such, they may not share the same terminology or appreciation of genre conventions that Schaasma is working with.

5.4   Conclusion

The observations of young readers provide several trends that have significant overlap with Tolkien criticism. Through conversations about the Shire and Lothlórien, it becomes clear that young readers discern and appreciate the way that Tolkien depicts the relationship between humanoid characters and the natural environment. The way in which the populations in both of these areas live in harmony with their surroundings is an attribute that these readers admire. Furthermore, they appreciate how areas of wilderness are capable of helping characters mature over the course of the journey, but don't necessarily see these areas as places where danger is inherent.

One important trend of scholarship on Tolkien's depiction of trees focuses on the way that the author attributes different levels of consciousness to different trees throughout his

books. In her article 'The Unique Representation of Trees in *The Lord of the Rings*', Cynthia M. Cohen discusses how Tolkien's approach to his depiction of trees is unique considering the literary context in which he was writing. She diagnoses four different levels of consciousness that are possible in the depiction of trees and throughout the course of her article demonstrates how Tolkien expertly employees each of these levels to great effect. The conclusions that she is able to draw out from such a close and systematic analysis are striking.

Cohen illuminates how the trees of Middle-earth hope to provide recovery, escape, and consolation for readers. She claims that: 'as readers tend not to perceive the differentiation of trees, Ents, and Huorns that is explored in this article, the general impression readers have of trees in *The Lord of the Rings* is that they can defend themselves' (Cohen 2009: 119). She claims that the dichotomy between this ability in the secondary world and the inability of trees to defend themselves in the primary world provides readers with the sense of escape and consolation. Second, she claims that 'Tolkien's use of tree-like beings with human-like characteristics and culture reminds us that, in the primary world, people are the only real defense that trees have against most of the modern threats that they face' (Cohen 2009: 119). This provides readers with a sense of recovery because it enables them 'to see trees – which, for many of [them], have become all too familiar – in a vivid, new light' (Cohen 2009: 119). This should, according to Cohen, lead to a newfound appreciation of trees and nature more generally.

Cohen's final contention is that Tolkien's use of trees in this manner calls his readers to respond in the primary world. She argues that 'portraying trees as something worth fighting for and asserting the connections that exist between humans and trees, Tolkien compels his readers to become responsible for preserving and protecting the trees in their own lives' (Cohen 2009: 119). Cohen ascribes a pointed and purposeful meaning to Tolkien's use of nature here. In so doing, Cohen joins a long line of scholars who have portrayed Tolkien's work as gravely concerned with nature in the primary world and as wishing to convey this concern in such a way so as to inspire readers to take action.

Flieger also examines Tolkien's complex portrayal of trees, though on a more individualized basis than the previous study. In 'How Trees Behave – Or Do They?', she closely examines the different sentient trees that Tolkien portrays throughout *The Lord of the Rings* in order to determine what Tolkien's concept of the 'tree-fairy' is. Summing up her observations, she concludes that 'it's pretty clear that when Tolkien says "tree-fairy" he is not

thinking of a pretty girl in a flimsy tunic. He is thinking of something rough and rugged that conveys the height and weight and breadth and durability of a tree, that captures the essence of a tree, that gives a tree its soul' (Flieger 2013: 31). She suggests that Tolkien has a particular, profoundly unique idea when it comes to these trees.

Flieger goes on to demonstrate how this portrayal of such characters reflects the overall appreciation that Tolkien wants to engender in his readers for fantasy literature:

> I suggest that this gravity, this seriousness, is what Tolkien felt when he was writing, and what he intended his readers to understand in both his fiction and his scholarship…What Tolkien was trying to convey was something both supernatural and spiritual that he felt was important for the world to know. His tree-fairy and his tree-characters are archaic yet tenacious, ancient yet curiously vital manifestations of a mythic world of sentient nature. This is a world that is…aware of itself and us, not only watching us but interacting with us and affecting us, if we only knew it. (2013: 32)

Flieger sees Tolkien's approach to nature as an avenue for understanding his concept of sub-creation and his appreciation for literature and fantasy. She sees the trees as thematically engaged in furthering Tolkien's mission of making fantasy appeal to an older audience.

Since the current study focused more on the settings where humanoid beings dwelt in Middle-earth, it did not particularly lend itself to these kinds of observations from participants. It is hard to incorporate conversations about sentient trees without including the Old Forest or Fangorn Forest. There were times, though, that participants did incorporate observations about these more natural settings and the ways that characters related to the more characterized trees found there. These observations were especially prevalent when participants reflected on what they thought of Merry and Pippin and the time that they spent in Fangorn Forest.

A couple of major trends in participant discussions of the interactions that occur during these passages is perhaps exemplified best by a statement from 10A. He noted that Merry and Pippin 'are the ones that convince the Ents to go and destroy Isengard…because Isengard is destroying their friends.' There are two important elements of this observation that show up in several conversations: the nature of the interaction between the hobbits and Treebeard and/or the other Ents is dynamic, and the Ents have an emotional attachment to the trees that surround them. 5A, 9A, and 29A all discussed how these two hobbits develop a relationship with Treebeard. 17A went even further, claiming that the relationship that Merry and Pippin develop with the Ents and use to convince them to become involved in battle was pivotal to the story: 'I would say that that was one of the most important actions of Merry and Pippin

because, if they hadn't stormed Isengard, then, possibly, Saruman's forces could have regrouped and then taken Minas Tirith by storm or something like that, so that was prevented' (17A).

Other observations from participants that contribute to this conversation are relatively few, but are still significant. At one point during the conversation, participant 1A felt the need to clarify her meaning about Merry and Pippin's side-plot in Rohan. She stated that they were 'off on this adventure with trees and orcs. Well they're not trees, they're Ents. Yes, they are trees, but they're also Ents' (1A). This observation says a lot about the way that she interprets the categorization of, and thus relationship between, Ents and trees. In essence, this observation confers the understanding that Ents are trees, but a certain type of trees that have some distinguishing characteristics that other trees do not have. Another important observation was made by participant 15A who commented on her appreciation of the small glimpse into the language of the Ents that is given in the text: 'Especially when [Pippin is] talking to the Ents. [There is] this whole interior monologue about Old Entish and how it took them five hours to say good morning' (15A). This participant, therefore, understands that there is a history and background to the Ents that is only partially conveyed throughout the story.

One scholar whose work may apply well to participant observations of this nature is Eleanor R. Simpson. In her article 'The Evolution of J.R.R. Tolkien's Portrayal of Nature: Foreshadowing Anti-Speciesm', she takes a different approach to the concept of the natural world in Tolkien's writings than other scholars. Instead of focusing on trees and other plants, her major argument seeks to contextualize Tolkien within a movement to promote anti-speciesism. Her major claim is that 'examining Tolkien's evolution of thought regarding the natural world, from his writing of *The Hobbit* to *The Lord of the Rings*, will show a general pattern of progressively more complex treatment of animals, trees, and rocks' (Simpson 2017: 71). From such an examination, she contends that 'Tolkien's arrival at a multifaceted depiction of the natural world parallels the ideals of Critical Animal Theory, which seek to represent the natural world as independent and intrinsically valuable' (Simpson 2017: 71). Over the course of her article, Simpson validates the notion that Tolkien's storytelling becomes more complex and intricate, especially with regards to plants and animals.

In her conclusion, Simpson equates this elevation of the natural world with Tolkien's drive to promote what he considers to be one of the essential purposes of a fairy-story: 'recovery'. She contends that his changing level of complexity forces readers to re-examine

their relationship to the natural world and to appreciate aspects of it which they had previously taken for granted. She argues that 'Tolkien is able to touch on such a wide range of primary world issues due to his dedication to creating a consistent secondary world' (Simpson 2017: 88). And that this motivation to depict the world which is relatable to readers drives him to include considerations of the role of nature as it pertains to man. Thus, she believes that 'Tolkien's creative direction with *The Lord of the Rings* indicates an engagement with the ideas of anti-speciesism during their early emergence' (Simpson 2017: 88). Simpson's conclusion does not go as far as Cohen's. She does not contend that there is any intent to persuade the reader to a particular perspective regarding nature. Instead, she contends that the way that nature is depicted within Tolkien's work could be consistently aligned with an eco-friendly movement which became prominent a few decades later.

In a way, the framework of anti-speciesism that Simpson lays out is one that many of these young readers could be influenced by without an awareness of its impact on them. As noted above, the current cultural climate is one characterized by an increasing awareness of the need for and appreciation of conservation. Therefore, a perspective that incorporates Tolkien's work into this larger attitude that is so prevalent in popular culture would probably agree with the way that participants' perceptions of eco-friendly movements has been shaped over time. It would not be surprising, therefore, for young participants to interpret the work in a way which aligns with such a framework. From the gathered observations, it is clear that several participants appreciate how the Ents are an example of the kind of complex depiction of nature that Tolkien uses to give a multifaceted perspective on the natural world.

Another essay which contributes significantly to this discussion of nature in Tolkien's work is 'On the Trees of Middle-earth – J.R.R. Tolkien's Mythical Creations' by Magdalena Mączyńska. She expertly contextualizes the conversation of nature within the larger context of mythology and also analyses the tension between nature and technology. She claims that, to Tolkien, machines represented 'only havoc and destruction; according to him, their widespread use (or rather misuse) portended the emergence of an inhumane world' (Mączyńska 2015: 135). Tolkien's dislike for machines led to their unfavourable depiction as part of Orthanc or as siege engines attacking Minas Tirith. Mączyńska goes further, claiming: 'The Professor's fascination with nature has rendered intricate depictions of trees as fully-fledged characters. Trees endowed with exceptional features are no longer passive but actively shape the fate of Middle-earth' (2015: 135). Tolkien gives trees a certain amount of agency, which is a significant development. Finally, she contends that 'Middle-earth proves to be a

place where trees… have gained a unique voice and a place of their own in the order of beings' (Mączyńska 2015: 136). Trees are given more than just agency. They have a place among the sentient beings and can express their perspective of world events.

Participants would likely agree with the arguments that Tolkien's trees are individual characters in their own right and that they do have a sense of agency throughout the course of the text that contributes significantly to the plot. When it comes to the view of technology that Mączyńska presents, though, the observations of participants when discussing the Shire indicate that they may not be as willing to share this belief with the critic. Instead they tend to agree more with the scholarship of Curry and Flieger discussed above (p.205).

For young readers of Tolkien's work there are several concepts intertwined with the tension in interactions between characters and nature and nature and the machine. These intersect in significant ways with prior Tolkien scholarship which has proposed a range of interpretations, from the ideal of Christian stewardship of the natural world to propositions that could be touted by various green movements. Additionally, Tolkien's effusive description of natural settings plays a vital role in his world building endeavour. Ultimately, Tolkien's multifaceted portrayal of nature and his ever-present concern with the interaction between man and nature leads one back to Juhren's original argument that perhaps Tolkien included so much of nature in his work because he had an affinity for it himself. The remainder of this analysis using nature as an organizational category illuminates the complex relationship between the reception of young readers and the trends of Tolkien criticism.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

6.1   Expectations Prior to Study

6.1.1   Survey

For the sake of transparency, it is important to divulge researcher expectations prior to engaging in the research. Doing so allows the researcher to illustrate where and how the results of the study differ from these initial expectations. It will also help to expose any bias that may have occurred throughout the research process.

With regard to the survey, the expectations for this portion of the research are perhaps easier to describe when compared to the other two methods. Since one of the limiting factors for participating in the research study itself was having read *The Lord of the Rings*, it was anticipated that all participants would have read the text at least once. This indeed turned out to be true, but of course the intake procedures for the study ensured that this would be accurate.

Based on the pilot study conducted the year prior to beginning this project, it was expected that most participants would probably already have read *The Hobbit* as well, and very few participants would have read any other texts by Tolkien. Also, it would seem to be a common occurrence for participants to have read the books more than once. These expectations were not as accurate as anticipated. It is true that all of the participants had read *The Hobbit*, and that more than two thirds of them had read the books more than once; however, more than half the participants report having read *The Silmarillion* and half of the participants reported having read other books by J.R.R. Tolkien, which was a larger percentage than the researcher anticipated.

The probable answers for the thematic and genre questions, as well as the questions concerning the favourite and least favourite parts of the text, were much harder to predict. The researcher surmised that perhaps participants would engage more with those aspects of the text that appealed to the prevailing psychological concerns associated with their age (e.g. teenagers and the formation of an independent identity) and that this engagement could lead them to choose thematic elements and genres associated with those concerns. Unfortunately, this

expectation is hard to assess when considering the results of the study. It is true that many of the participants indicated that the story was a quest, and while this genre aligns well with the concerns of their age group, most of the participants used discrete plot elements to support their decision. This makes it difficult to parse whether those plot elements are aligned with their concern about identity or whether there were other overriding considerations.

6.1.2   Diamond Ranking

At the outset, there were very few indications as to which characters young readers might gravitate toward during the Diamond Ranking activity. In the few pilot interviews that I conducted using the diamond ranking activity, there was a large variety in the order in which participants placed the characters in the formation. The two most consistent placements were: Sam was typically assigned a place in the top three positions of the diamond, and Boromir was typically placed in the bottom three. Additionally, Legolas and Gimli often occupied one of the middle seven positions in the diamond formation.[28]

Several of these trends held true to the end of the study. Sam was rated the highest of all characters and Boromir was rated the lowest. While it is true that Legolas and Gimli frequently occupied the middle spaces, this is also true for most of the other characters from the Fellowship. One trend that developed and was completely unanticipated was that Aragorn was consistently placed in the second row of the formation. The researcher is unsure why this placement occurred with such regularity, and it would be an intriguing avenue for further research. The fact that these placements remain consistent has important implications concerning the perspective of children and how these align with Tolkien scholarship. It could indicate that younger readers agree that Sam is an important heroic figure for the text. This aligns well with the many scholars who tout Tolkien's 1951 letter to Milton Waldman as supporting Sam as the story's main hero (*Letters*: 143-161). In this sense, the response of young readers seems to concur with the primary thrust of Tolkien scholarship.

Inversely, the way that young readers interpret Boromir is not as congenial to the interpretation proffered by Tolkien scholars. His consistent placement in the bottom portion of the diamond indicates that younger readers do not like Boromir and often mistrust him. Broader Tolkien scholarship typically characterizes Boromir as the most relatable character of

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[28] My own ranking goes in the following order, from top to bottom: Gandalf; Pippin and Aragorn; Sam, Merry, and Gimli; Frodo and Legolas; Boromir. I give this here as a means of disclosing my own tendencies.

the Fellowship because he is flawed. While many of the participants would agree with Boromir being a relatable character, it is evident that younger readers tend to be more black-and-white in their approach to his character and see him as less ambiguous and more evil. In conclusion, this activity demonstrates how young readers both agree with and break from the traditional understandings of *The Lord of the Rings* which most scholars propose.

6.1.3   Photo Elicitation

Once again, the limited number of pilot interviews means that the anticipated outcomes of the Photo Elicitation interviews were few. It was easier to say what participants would likely disregard in their examination of the settings than what they would ultimately decide upon as the best representation of their mental images. For instance, no participant in the pilot interview chose the Mountain or River images from the Shire Primary Set (Images 1.0.3 and 1.0.4). Likewise, no participants chose the Crossroads Village image in the Bree Primary Set (Image 2.0.2) or the Pit or Mountain images in the Moria Primary Set (Images 4.0.1 and 4.0.2). Participants had only ever chosen the Small Village Without Water image from the Rivendell Primary Set (Image 3.0.1) and have never chosen the Water or Rock images from the Rivendell Primary Set (Images 5.0.3 and 5.0.4).[29]

These results led the researcher to propose that participants would not associate rocky or watery images with the Shire, Rivendell, or Lothlórien. Many of these hypotheses were accurate, but some were disproven. For instance, only one participant chose Image 1.0.3 or 1.0.4 from the Shire Primary Set, and only six chose Image 5.0.3 or 5.0.4 from the Lothlórien Primary Set. These trends tend to agree with most of the scholarship on Tolkien's use of setting and imagery. Although each of these settings has a river that the characters interact with, they are often characterized as borders that the characters must cross in order to enter or leave the land. This seems to have the effect of making rivers a less central element of the settings proper to the young readers from the pilot. The rocky imagery is less commonly mentioned with regard to these settings, and both scholarship and young readers seem to take that aspect into account when forming their responses

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[29] My own image preferences are as follows: Shire: (1.2.3); Bree: (2.3.2); Rivendell: (3.1.2); Moria: (4.3.2); and Lothlórien: (5.2.1). Once again, I include this as a means of disclosing my own tendencies.

These expectations were inaccurate with regard to Bree, and Moria, and only partially accurate about Rivendell. Image 2.0.2 ended up being the second most popular image for participants in the Bree Primary Set and Images 4.0.1 and 4.0.2 from the Moria Primary Set were equally popular with the other two images of the set. Finally, while Image 3.0.1 was a popular image from the Rivendell Primary Set, it was only the second most popular image behind Image 3.0.2. In this regards, these differences make sense within the context stated in the previous paragraph. Moria and Rivendell are much more associated with rock and water than any of the other settings within the text.

I should note that, as a result of the pilot studies, an additional question was added to this activity which asked participants to imagine what they would add to the images they selected in the Primary Set and Subset in order to make it more similar to the setting being discussed. The hope was that such a question would encourage some reflection on the distinction between fantasy and reality. This seems to have been a very beneficial change for the final analysis, because this is where many of the participants felt most free to elaborate on their thoughts and opinions about the setting.

6.2 Narrow Conclusions from Study

6.2.1 Genre

The study found that young readers who participated in the research were hesitant to categorize *The Lord of the Rings* in a way that would constrain its potential for interpretation. Instead, most participants chose the genre from the list that they felt was the most inclusive. In their explanations and justifications, participants were very quick to point out how the story incorporated elements and themes from multiple genres. This indicates that young readers may not accept pre-established delineations between genres. Even more significantly, it shows that theories of genre that centre on, or essentialize *The Lord of the Rings*, such as Brian Attebery's concept of the fuzzy set of fantasy literature with *The Lord of the Rings* at its core, may not accurately reflect the understanding of young readers.

Because genre is an academic construct, or an editorial convention, readers do not have an innate sense of the definitions or boundaries of these classifications. In order to apply the accepted labels, then, they must be taught how others apply them. In a way, this leads to an

understanding that the prescriptivist way that genre labels are sometimes applied can do a disservice to books and readers. They are only useful in as much as readers are already familiar with the way the genre term is being used and to the extent that they agree with the way the term is employed.

6.2.2 Character

As participants ranked the characters of the Fellowship from their favourite to their least favourite, several important trends developed. The first important trend is that the personal attributes of the characters were the predominant determining factor when participants chose their favourite characters. The second trend is that participants often justified their placement of their least favourite character by using the rationale of narrative function or interpersonal attributes. The final significant trend is that the relatability of a character did not correspond to how well that character performed in the favourability activity (e.g. Boromir was rated as highly relatable, yet as the least favourite). This last trend needs to be examined in greater detail. There is a persistent stereotype which suggests that young readers are only capable of enjoying a story if they can identify with or relate to the main character (e.g. Alsup 2015). The results of this study suggest that there is no direct correspondence between favourability and relatability of individual characters for these young readers.

Therefore, one could argue that while it may be true that some young readers are drawn to stories with characters which are relatable, other young readers enjoy stories which focus on characters with whom they don't consciously identify. This is an indication that young readers are able to achieve a high level of engagement with a character who is dissimilar to them. The way that participants dislike Boromir as a character but are drawn in to an engagement with his character because of his flaws is an exemplar of such a relationship.

6.2.3 Setting

As the photo elicitation interview, and in fact all of the activities included in the study, demonstrates, there is no single interpretation that encompasses the reading experience of every young reader. Instead, the researcher who wades into the field of reception is left to try to sustainably describe a great variety of interpretations and a multitude of responses that

agree, disagree, conflict, overlap, coincide with, mutually exclude, and/or resist one another. As the analysis in chapter five shows, there are a few considerations that seem to be important for many young readers who participated in the study. Young readers generally are receptive to and appreciative of the relationship between society and nature that is portrayed by the inhabitants of the Shire and Lothlórien. Additionally, they are cognizant of the role that areas of wilderness can play in the maturation process of characters.

6.3   Broader Implications and Area for Further Study

Toward the end of the first chapter, several studies were presented which focused on the way that young readers approached and interpreted fantasy literature generally. It is only fitting in the conclusion of the current project to reflect on how the results of this study interact with the ideas put forth by those other works. The current study has demonstrated that there is wide variety in the interpretations offered by young readers of *The Lord of the Rings*. This concurs with Hunt's contention that children are unique individuals and sweeping generalizations cannot accurately encompass the responses of each young reader. While this is certainly true, there are a few trends which developed over the course of the study which demonstrate overlap with previous literature.

The first part of the current study that demonstrates overlap with previous scholarship is the impressive reading history of the study participants. While participants were not directly asked about the importance of *The Lord of the Rings* in their literary journey, it is clear from their self-reported reading histories that the story was worth revisiting for more than two thirds of the participants. Additionally, all but two of the study participants said they enjoyed the book 'more than most books' or 'more than any other book' and half of the participants had also read either *The Silmarillion* or another book written by J.R.R. Tolkien. These points of data suggest that, just like the participants in the article by Dempster *et al*. (2016), the study participants invest a lot of time and mental energy in fantastic literature.

Another important area of overlap is with the work of Whitney, Vozzola, and Hoffman (2005). Their research indicates that children could have difficulty interpreting morally-ambiguous characters in a positive manner. This seems to hold true with the character of Boromir from *The Lord of the Rings*. A majority of the participants saw this character in a

negative light because he establishes conflict with the main character. This being said, it is interesting to note that he is also rated as one of the most relatable characters by the study participants. This may indicate that, while young readers do not see morally complex characters in a positive light, they are still able to appreciate the realism that such a character presents. Therefore, the current project supports part of the claims made by Whitney, Vozzola, and Hoffman, but also complicates these claims by indicating that young readers can identify with morally-complex characters.

Finally, the current study has overlap with the article by Corriveau *et al*. (2009) in that it demonstrates how young readers do not have difficulty distinguishing between fantastic and real narrative elements. While the article focuses on the discernment that young readers exhibit regarding characters, the current study is able to demonstrate this comparison with regard to setting. In the photo elicitation interview process, the young readers maintained a level of separation in their discussion that exhibited how they understood that the photos being used to symbolically represent the setting from the story were incapable of actually being a representation of the setting because it was not real.

6.4   Final Thoughts

As outlined in this conclusion, this project has many implications for the future of Tolkien scholarship and literary criticism more generally. It addresses many concerns and contentions argued by scholars in the literary field. Research that directly interacts with readers to understand their interpretations of the text confronts and forces us to re-examine the assumptions of literary scholars and critics because it demonstrates how theories and assumptions about young readers are often inaccurate when compared with the lived experience of actual young readers.

By examining the ideas that young readers have about genre, this project provides commentary on the larger field of fantasy literature, as well as the impulse to confine texts to easily-defined genres. By analysing young readers' responses to characterization, this project confronts the assumption that children will have a less complex or developed reading of characters. Finally, by discussing young readers' interpretations of setting, this project validates the environmental and ecological concerns of this young readership.

This study demonstrates the disconnect between much of the scholarly conversation about fantasy literature and the lived experiences of young readers. It gives voice to a population that is underrepresented in scholarly conversations, and it champions the idea of more inclusive and diverse critical discussions. It accomplishes these goals by using interviews with young readers, which is an approach that has never been implemented in Tolkien studies.

These young readers inspire critics to keep their minds open to new possibilities and connections. These possibilities may be ignored when scholars are too quick to assign the story to a single genre, when they do not take into account the full range of interpretations of characterization by readers, or when they underestimate the natural or fantastic elements of a story like *The Lord of the Rings*. Ignoring these possibilities can also occur when critics make assumptions about interpretations that are not based on data gathered from reader response, or when these sets of data exclude young readers.

Instead of finding ways to limit our perspective and clean up the lines surrounding the *The Lord of the Rings*, this study encourages critics and scholars to revel in the messiness that complex storytelling can achieve. The young readers who participated in this study invite critics to celebrate the various influences, overlaps, transmissions, and transmutations that they find in this story and in many others. In order to do so, critics should consider incorporating as many voices as possible in an attempt to understand the variability and multiplicity of responses to the text. This project is just the first step in incorporating new voices into discussions about *The Lord of the Rings*, but it is a vital step, which may well prove to be the foundation upon which a new kind of Tolkien criticism can be built.

Appendix A:

Survey

<u>Demographic Information:</u>

1. Are you male or female?

      Male   Female   Prefer not to answer

2. How old are you?

      Under 8 years old

      8-12 years old

      13-15 years old

      16-18 years old

      Over 18 years old

3. What grade are you in?

      6th grade or lower

      7th or 8th grade

      9th or 10th grade

      11th or 12th grade

      High school graduate

4. What city, state/region (if applicable), and country do you live in?

<u>Questionnaire:</u>

1. What part of *The Lord of the Rings* do you remember the best? Can you say why?

2. Did any part of *The Lord of the Rings* disappoint you? Can you say why?

3. Which books by J.R.R Tolkien's have you read? (check each option that applies)

_____*The Hobbit*

_____*Fellowship of the Ring*

_____*The Two Towers*

_____*The Return of the King*

_____*The Silmarillion*

_____Other

_____None

4. How many times have you read *The Lord of the Rings*?

_____Read More Than Once

_____Read All the Books Once

_____Read Some of the Books

_____Still Reading for the First Time

_____Haven't Read Them Before

5. How much did you enjoy *The Lord of the Rings*?

_____More than any other book

_____More than most books

_____About the same as most books

_____Less than most books

_____Less than any other book

6. What kind of story do you see *The Lord of the Rings* as?

_____

_____

_____

7. Which of the following words comes closest to describing the kind of story *The Lord of the Rings* is to you (check only one):

_____Allegory   _____Myth/Legend
_____Epic   _____Science Fiction
_____Fairytale   _____Spiritual journey
_____Fantasy   _____Threatened homeland
_____Game-world   _____War story
_____Good vs evil   _____None of these
_____Quest

8.   What made you decide to choose the word you chose in the previous question?

9.   Here are some themes you sometimes find in stories. Did you notice any of these themes in *The Lord of the Rings*? (check all that you noticed)

Kindness	Friendship
Hard Work	Generosity
Loyalty	Respect
Courage	Goodness
Honesty	Fairness
Obedience	Tolerance/acceptance

10.   Which ONE (1) theme that you checked in the last question seemed the most important?

11.   Have you ever watched the *Lord of the Rings* movies before?

_____Watched More Than Once

_____Watched All the Movies Once

_____Watched Some of the Movies

_____Still Watching for the First Time

_____Haven't Watched Them Before

12.   Have you ever played a *Lord of the Rings* video game before? (check ONE (1) option)

_____Play Often

_____Played More Than Once

_____Played Once

_____Never Played

_____I do not know any *Lord of the Rings* video games

(End Survey)

<center>**Appendix B:**</center>

<center>**Character and Setting Descriptions**</center>

<center>**Character Description Sheet**</center>

Aragorn
The hobbits meet Aragorn in Bree, where he is known by the name Strider and has the reputation of being a Ranger. He helps the hobbits travel to Rivendell, and there it is revealed that his name is Aragorn and he has an important family tree. He stays with the Fellowship, even leading them after Moria. After the group breaks up, Aragorn leads Legolas and Gimli on a chase to catch the orcs who have taken Merry and Pippin. The three have to fight at Helm's Deep before they meet up with the hobbits at Isengard. Later, Aragorn takes the Paths of the Dead to reach Gondor with support and goes on to be crowned the King of Gondor.

Boromir
Boromir is a man from Gondor. He joins the Fellowship at Rivendell and he wants them to go back to his homeland and use the Ring to help defeat Sauron. In Lothlórien he is tempted by Galadriel, but he will not share what the temptation was. Boromir tries to take the Ring from Frodo, but he fails. He dies trying to save Merry and Pippin from the orcs that take them.

Frodo
The main character of the story, Frodo is the hobbit who inherits the Ring from Bilbo. Gandalf warns Frodo about the ring and sends him on a quest that takes him out of the Shire for the first time in his life. He gets a stab wound from a Ringwraith at Weathertop and is healed in Rivendell. After the fellowship breaks, Sam and Frodo go to Mordor on their own to try to destroy the Ring.

Gandalf
Gandalf is a wizard who visits the hobbits in the Shire and sends Frodo on the quest. He meets up with the hobbits and Aragorn in Rivendell and decides to join the Fellowship. He leads the group until he faces the Balrog in Moria and falls. Later, he meets Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli in Fangorn Forest and leads them to help the men of Rohan. After they catch up to Merry and Pippin, Gandalf and Pippin ride to Gondor and help defend the city when it is attached by the forces of Sauron. Gandalf stays with the hobbits on their return journey until they reach the borders of the Shire. He meets them again at the Grey Havens.

Gimli
Gimli is a dwarf from the Lonely Mountain. He joins the Fellowship at Rivendell and he is helpful when the group goes into Moria. After the group breaks up, Aragorn leads Legolas and Gimli on a chase to catch the orcs who have taken Merry and Pippin. The three have to fight at Helm's Deep before they meet up with the hobbits at Isengard. Gimli and Legolas follow Aragorn through the Paths of the Dead and help fight the forces of Sauron outside of Gondor. On the return journey, the two leave the Fellowship when it comes to Fangorn Forest.

Legolas
Legolas is an elf from Mirkwood. He joins the Fellowship at Rivendell and is helpful when the group needs a far-seeing archer. After the group breaks up, Aragorn leads Legolas and Gimli on a chase to catch the orcs who have taken Merry and Pippin. The three have to fight at Helm's Deep before they meet up with the hobbits at Isengard. Gimli and Legolas follow Aragorn through the Paths of the Dead and help fight the forces of Sauron outside of Gondor. On the return journey, the two leave the Fellowship when it comes to Fangorn Forest.

Merry
Merry is also a hobbit. He meets Frodo, Sam, and Pippin near Buckleberry Ferry, near the end of their trip across the Shire. At Crickholllow Merry tells his friends that he will go with them to Rivendell. He stays with them past Rivendell, and he and Pippin are separated from Frodo and Sam when orcs carry them away across Rohan. Pippin and Merry are the two characters who convince Treebeard and the Ents to go to war. Later, Merry takes a vow to serve Théoden and will ride to Gondor with the Rohirrim. In the battle he helps Éowyn defeat the leader of the Nazgul.

Pippin
Pippin is hobbit, too. He joins Frodo and Sam on their walking trip across the Shire. At Crickholllow Pippin tells his friends that he will go with them to Rivendell. He stays with them past Rivendell, and is only separated from them when orcs carry him away across Rohan. Pippin and Merry are the two characters who convince Treebeard and the Ents to go to war. Later, Pippin will ride with Gandalf to Gondor, where he pledges service to Denethor.

Sam
Sam is Frodo's gardener at the beginning of the story, and is a hobbit. He overhears Gandalf when he warns Frodo about the Ring, and is sent on the quest with Frodo. He refuses to leave Frodo several times along the journey, including after the fellowship breaks. He decides that he will go with Frodo into Mordor to help him destroy the Ring. After the journey is over, Sam becomes the mayor of Hobbiton.

Setting Description Sheet
Shire
This is where story begins, in the north-west of Middle-earth, and is where most hobbits live. Bilbo and Frodo Baggins live in in the middle part of the Shire, in a town called Hobbiton. Frodo leaves Bag End, his home, and travels all the way to Crickholllow, a smaller home on the other side of the Brandywine River, before he and his friends leave the Shire by going through the Old Forest.

Bree
This is the first town where the Frodo and his friends meet humans. Bree is home to both men and hobbits. The group comes to Bree after their adventures in the Old Forest and the Barrow Downs. They spend the night at the Prancing Pony, an inn run by a man named Barliman Butterbur. The hobbits make a big scene in the common room of the inn, and later meet Strider and get news from Gandalf.

Rivendell
Rivendell is the home of Elrond, a half-elf, and is one of the few places where elves still live. It is where Frodo, Aragorn, and the other hobbits rest before continuing their journey. Frodo heals from his stab wound thanks to Elrond. The hobbits meet Bilbo here and he gives Frodo his old sword Sting. It is also where there is a big meeting to decide what to do with the Ring and where Gimli, Legolas, Boromir, and Gandalf join the Fellowship of the Ring.

Moria
Moria was a huge city and stronghold for the Dwarves under the Misty Mountains. The dwarves dug too deep, though, and accidentally woke a Balrog and had to leave. When the Fellowship arrives at Moria, they must wind their way through the large underground area and escape from the Watcher in the Water, the orcs, and the Balrog.

Lothlórien
This is the home of the Lady Galadriel and Celeborn. It is where the Fellowship rests after they escape from Moria and where they grieve Gandalf's death. Galadriel gives them gifts to help them on their journey and she lets Frodo and Sam see visions in her fountain

Appendix C:

Photo Elicitation Images

Shire (1)

Shire: Primary Set (1.0)

Shire--Primary Set--Forest (1.0.1)

Shire--Primary Set--Meadow (1.0.2)

Shire--Primary Set--Mountain (1.0.3)

Shire--Primary Set--River (1.0.4)

Shire: Forest Subset (1.1)

Shire--Forest Subset--Red Trees (1.1.1)

Shire--Forest Subset--Gnarly Tree (1.1.2)

Shire--Forest Subset--Straight Trees (1.1.3)

Shire--Forest Subset--Brown Trees (1.1.4)

Shire: Meadow Subset (1.2)

Shire--Meadow Subset--Arid (1.2.1)

Shire--Meadow Subset--Flowers (1.2.2)

Shire--Meadow Subset--Green (1.2.3)

Shire--Meadow Subset--Brown (1.2.4)

Shire: Mountain Subset (1.3)

Shire--Mountain Subset--Water & Trees (1.3.1)

Shire--Mountain Subset--Water & Snow (1.3.2)

Shire--Mountain Subset--Green Trees (1.3.3)

Shire--Mountain Subset--Brown Trees (1.3.4)

Shire: River Subset (1.4)

Shire--River Subset--Mountains (1.4.1)

Shire--River Subset--Marsh(1.4.2)

Shire--River Subset--Coastline (1.4.3)

Shire--River Subset--Rocky Forest (1.4.4)

Bree (2)

Bree: Primary Set (2.0)

Bree--Primary Set--Inn (2.0.1)

Bree--Primary Set--Crossroads (2.0.2)

Bree--Primary Set--Hill (2.0.3)

Bree--Primary Set--Indoor (2.0.4)

Bree: Inn Subset (2.1)

Bree--Inn Subset--Cottage (2.1.1)

Bree--Inn Subset--Pub (2.1.2)

Bree--Inn Subset--Stone Alley (2.1.3)

Bree--Inn Subset--Square (2.1.4)

Bree: Crossroads Subset (2.2)

Bree--Crossroads Subset--Town in valley (2.2.1)

Bree--Crossroads Subset--Town in field (2.2.2)

Bree--Crossroads Subset--cottage (2.2.3)

Bree--Crossroads Subset--hidden (2.2.4)

Bree: Hill Subset (2.3)

Bree--Hill Subset--Large Town (2.3.1)

Bree--Hill Subset--Small Town (2.3.2)

Bree--Hill Subset--Night (2.3.3)

Bree--Hill Subset--Water (2.3.4)

Bree: Indoor Subset (2.4)

Bree--Indoor Subset--Dining Room (2.4.1)	Bree--Indoor Subset-- Bar (2.4.2)
Bree--Indoor Subset-- Parlor (2.4.3)	Bree--Indoor Subset-- Bedroom (2.4.4)

<u>Rivendell (3)</u>

Rivendell: Primary Set (3.0)

Rivendell--Primary Set--Small Town, No River (3.0.1)	Rivendell--Primary Set--Small Town, River (3.0.2)

Rivendell--Primary Set--Large Town, River (3.0.3)

Rivendell--Primary Set--Large Town No River (3.0.4)

Rivendell: Small Town, No River Subset (3.1)

Rivendell--Small Town, No River Subset--Town on Hill at Night (3.1.1)

Rivendell--Small Town, No River Subset--Town on Hill (3.1.2)

Rivendell--Small Town, No River Subset--Town in Wooded Valley (3.1.3)

Rivendell--Small Town, No River Subset--Lone Building (3.1.4)

Rivendell: Small Town, River Subset (3.2)

Rivendell--Small Town, River Subset--Across River (3.2.1)

Rivendell--Small Town, River Subset--Single House (3.2.2)

Rivendell--Small Town, River Subset--On Hill (3.2.3)

Rivendell--Small Town, River Subset--In Valley (3.2.4)

Rivendell: Large Town, River Subset (3.3)

Rivendell-- Large Town, River Subset--Largest Town (3.3.1)

Rivendell-- Large Town, River Subset—Medieval (3.3.2)

Rivendell-- Large Town, River Subset--Tall Buildings (3.3.3)

Rivendell-- Large Town River Subset--Modern Greek (3.3.4)

Rivendell: Large Town, No River Subset (3.4)

Rivendell-- Large Town, No River Subset--On a Hill (3.4.1)

Rivendell-- Large Town, No River Subset--Skyscrapers (3.4.2)

Rivendell-- Large Town, No River Subset--Between Trees (3.4.3)

Rivendell-- Large Town, No River Subset--In a Valley (3.4.4)

Moria (4)

Moria: Primary Set (4.0)

Moria--Primary Set--Pit (4.0.1)

Moria--Primary Set--Mountain (4.0.2)

Moria--Primary Set--Cavern (4.0.3)

Moria--Primary Set--Tunnel (4.0.4)

Moria: Pit Subset (4.1)

Moria--Pit Subset--Manmade (4.1.1)

Moria--Pit Subset--Aerial Crater (4.1.2)

Moria--Pit Subset--Erosion Channel(4.1.3)

Moria--Pit Subset--Looking Up (4.1.4)

Moria: Mountain Subset (4.2)

Moria--Mountain Subset--Single Cap (4.2.1)

Moria--Mountain Subset--Peak over Range (4.2.2)

Moria--Mountain Subset--Water (4.2.3)

Moria--Mountain Subset--Range (4.2.4)

Moria: Cavern Subset (4.3)

Moria--Cavern Subset--Most Natural (4.3.1)

Moria--Cavern Subset--Stone Block (4.3.2)

Moria--Cavern Subset--Modern Brick (4.3.3)

Moria--Cavern Subset--Carved Tunnels (4.3.4)

Moria: Tunnel Subset (4.4)

Moria--Tunnel Subset--Concrete (4.4.1)

Moria--Tunnel Subset--Mine (4.4.2)

Moria--Tunnel Subset--Carved (4.4.3)

Moria--Tunnel Subset--Natural (4.4.4)

Lothlórien (5)

Lothlórien: Primary Set (5.0)

Lothlórien--Primary Set--Habitation (5.0.1)

Lothlórien--Primary Set--Trees (5.0.2)

Lothlórien--Primary Set--Water (5.0.3)

Lothlórien--Primary Set--Rock (5.0.4)

Lothlórien: Habitation Subset (5.1)

Lothlórien--Habitation Subset--Elevated Cathedral (5.1.1)

Lothlórien--Habitation Subset--House with trees (5.1.2)

Lothlórien--Habitation Subset--Hedge (5.1.3)

Lothlórien--Habitation Subset--Treehouse (5.1.4)

Lothlórien: Trees Subset (5.2)

Lothlórien--Trees Subset--Golden Trees (5.2.1)

Lothlórien--Trees Subset--Green Trees (5.2.2)

Lothlórien--Trees Subset--Snow Trees (5.2.3)

Lothlórien--Trees Subset--Red Trees (5.2.4)

Lothlórien: Water Subset (5.3)

Lothlórien--Water Subset--B&W Fountain (5.3.1)

Lothlórien--Water Subset--Rapids (5.3.2)

Lothlórien--Water Subset--River (5.3.3)

Lothlórien--Water Subset--Waterfall (5.3.4)

Lothlórien: Rock Subset (5.4)

Lothlórien--Rock Subset--Solitary (5.4.1)

Lothlórien--Rock Subset--Peak (5.4.2)

Lothlórien--Rock Subset--Stones (5.4.3)

Lothlórien--Rock Subset--Waterfall (5.4.4)

<div align="center">

Appendix D:

Interview Protocols

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Diamond Ranking Interview Protocol

Why have you placed [character] in the [row chosen by participant] of the diamond?

Probe: What other reasons led you to place [character] in this row?

Did any of [character]'s actions help you choose where to place them in the diamond?

Probe: What other actions led you to place [character] here?

Did any of [character]'s relationships with other characters help you choose where to place them in the diamond?

Probe: What other relationships helped you decide where to place them?

What else about [character] helped you decide where to put them?

Is there anything more you would like to say?

What character from the Fellowship do you most identify with?

Photo-Elicitation Interview Protocol

First Level Questions:

What about this picture reminds you of [setting]?

Why is this picture more like [setting] than the other pictures?

Probe: May ask about specific pictures by pointing to them and asking a non-leading question, such as 'what about this one?'

Second Level Questions:

Is [characteristic] an important part of [setting] to you?

Is [characteristic] one of the first things you think about when you think about [setting]?

Concluding Questions:

What else in this picture reminds you of [setting]?

[If participant indicates an additional characteristic, clarify by using First Level Questions if necessary, then repeat Second Level Questions with new characteristic.]

If you could change one thing about this picture to make it look more like [setting] what would it be?

Is there anything more you would like to say?

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Appendix F:

Participant Age, Gender, Reading, and Adaptation Experience

Study ID	Gender	Age	LOTR Favorability	Tolkien Books Read	Reading History of LOTR	LOTR Video Games	LOTR Movies?
1A	Female	8-12 years old	More Than Most Books	H, FR, TT, RK	Read All the Books Once	I do not know any Lord of the Rings video games	Haven't Watched Them Before
2A	Female	8-12 years old	About the Same as Most Books	H, FR, TT, RK, Other	Read All the Books More Than Once	Never Played	Watched All the Movies Once
3A	Male	13-15 years old	More Than any Other Book	H, FR, TT, RK, S, Other	Read All the Books More Than Once	Never Played	Watched More Than Once
4A	Female	8-12 years old	More Than Most Books	H, FR	Still Reading Them for the First Time	Played More Than Once	Watched More Than Once
5A	Male	13-15 years old	More Than Most Books	H, FR, TT, RK	Read All the Books More Than Once	Played More Than Once	Watched All the Movies Once
6A	Female	8-12 years old	More Than Most Books	H, FR, TT, RK, Other	Read More Than Once	I do not know any Lord of the Rings video games	Watched All the Movies Once
7A	Male	<8 years old	More Than any Other Book	H, FR, TT, RK, S	Read More Than Once	I do not know any Lord of the Rings video games	Watched More Than Once
8A	Male	13-15 years old	More Than Most Books	H, FR, TT, RK	Read All the Books More Than Once	Never Played	Watched More Than Once
9A	Female	16-18 years old	More Than any Other Book	H, FR, TT, RK, S, Other	Read All the Books More Than Once	Never Played	Watched More Than Once
10A	Male	16-18 years old	About the Same as Most Books	H, FR, TT	Read Some of the Books	Played More Than Once	Watched More Than Once
11A	Male	8-12 years old	More Than Most Books	H, FR	Read Some of the Books	Played More Than Once	Watched More Than Once
12A	Prefer Not to Say	13-15 years old	More Than any Other Book	H, FR, TT, RK, Other	Read All the Books More Than Once	I do not know any Lord of the Rings video games	Watched More Than Once
12B	Male	13-15 years old	More Than any Other Book	H, FR, TT, RK, S, Other	Read All the Books More Than Once	I do not know any Lord of the Rings video games	Watched More Than Once
13A	Female	16-18 years old	More Than any Other Book	H, FR, TT, RK, S, Other	Read All the Books More Than Once	Played More Than Once	Watched More Than Once
14A	Male	16-18 years old	More Than any Other Book	H, FR, TT, RK, S, Other	Read All the Books More Than Once	Played More Than Once	Watched More Than Once

15A	Female	16-18 years old	More Than Most Books	H, FR, TT, RK, S	Read All the Books More Than Once	Played More Than Once	Watched More Than Once
16A	Male	16-18 years old	More Than any Other Book	H, FR, TT, RK, S, Other	Read All the Books More Than Once	Play Often	Watched More Than Once
17A	Male	16-18 years old	More Than any Other Book	H, FR, TT, RK	Read All the Books Once	Never Played	Watched More Than Once
18A	Female	16-18 years old	More Than Most Books	H, FR, TT, RK, S, Other	Read All the Books More Than Once	Played More Than Once	Watched More Than Once
19A	Male	13-15 years old	More Than Most Books	H, FR, TT, RK, S, Other	Read All the Books More Than Once	Played More Than Once	Watched More Than Once
20A	Male	8-12 years old	More Than Most Books	H, FR, TT, RK	Read All the Books Once	Played More Than Once	Watched More Than Once
21A	Male	8-12 years old	More Than Most Books	H, FR, TT, RK, Other	Read All the Books Once	Never Played	Watched Some of the Movies
22A	Male	8-12 years old	More Than any Other Book	H, FR, TT, RK, S, Other	Read All the Books More Than Once	Play Often	Watched More Than Once
23A	Male	16-18 years old	More Than Most Books	H, FR, TT, RK	Read All the Books Once	Played Once	Watched More Than Once
24A	Female	16-18 years old	More Than any Other Book	H, FR, TT, RK, S, Other	Read All the Books More Than Once	Played More Than Once	Watched More Than Once
25A	Male	16-18 years old	More Than Most Books	H, FR, TT, RK	Read All the Books Once	Played Once	Watched More Than Once
26A	Female	16-18 years old	More Than any Other Book	H, FR, TT, RK, S, Other	Read All the Books More Than Once	Played Once	Watched More Than Once
27A	Male	16-18 years old	More Than Most Books	H, FR, TT, RK, S	Read All the Books More Than Once	Played More Than Once	Watched All the Movies Once
28A	Male	13-15 years old	More Than any Other Book	H, FR, TT, RK, S, Other	Read All the Books More Than Once	Played more Than Once	Watched More Than Once
29A	Male	8-12 years old	More Than any Other Book	H, FR, TT, RK, S, Other	Read All the Books More Than Once	Play Often	Watched More Than Once

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