



UNIVERSITY OF
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'Bag End's a Queer Place, and Its Folk Are Queerer':

Queer Masculinities and Queerness in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*

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Tämä tutkielma käsittelee queer-maskuliinisuutta sekä queeriutta J.R.R. Tolkienin *Taru Sormusten herrasta* -teoksessa. Hyödynnän tutkielmassa aihetta koskevaa aiempaa tutkimusta ja tarkastelen teoksessa esiintyviä henkilöitä ja heidän välisiä suhteita. Tutkielman tavoitteena on esittää queer-tulkinta teoksesta niin queer-maskuliinisuuden esitysten kuin miesten välisten ihmissuhteiden ja homososiaalisen vuorovaikutuksen kautta.

Tutkielman teoriaosuudessa esittelen queer-teorian, josta siirryn tarkempiin käsitteisiin kuten queer-maskuliinisuuksiin. Käyn läpi myös kirjallisuuden queer-tutkimukseen yleisesti ja erityisesti fantasiakirjallisuuteen liittyviä aiempia tutkimuksia.

Analyysiosio on jaettu kahteen päälukuun, joista ensimmäinen alkaa tarkastelemalla itkun roolia teoksessa. Tämän jälkeen erittelen kuinka tietyt hahmot – Aragorn, Gandalf, Frodo Reppuli ja Samvais Gamgi – edustavat queer-maskuliinisuutta. Analyysin toisessa osiossa keskityn *Tarun Sormusten herrasta* tehtyihin queer-tulkintoihin. Osio on jaettu kahteen alalukuun, joista ensimmäinen tarkastelee Sormuksen saattuetta yleisesti, ja toinen keskittyy Frodoon ja Samiin sekä heidän väliseensä suhteeseen.

Luvuissa 3 ja 4 tehdyn analyysin pohjalta nostan esille kysymyksen kirjailijan tarkoitusperistä. Esittelen 'kirjailijan kuolema' (*death of the author*) -käsitteen ja pohdin, kuinka tätä voisi hyödyntää tarkastellessa *Tarua Sormusten herrasta* queer-tutkimuksen näkökulmasta. Haluan myös painottaa fandom-tutkimuksen merkitystä teoksen tulevissa tulkinnoissa, sillä queer-tulkinnat teoksesta kukoistavat nimenomaan siinä ympäristössä.

Tämä tutkielma tarjoaa kattavan katsauksen queer-maskuliinisuuteen ja queeriuteen J.R.R. Tolkienin *Taru Sormusten herrasta* -teoksessa. Hyödyntämällä aiempaa tutkimusta, ja analysoimalla teoksen hahmoja ja näiden suhteita, tämä tutkielma toimii vivahteikkaana queer-tulkintana teoksesta. Lisäksi se pohtii kirjailijan tarkoituksista ja merkityksestä sekä tulevasta tutkimuksesta fandom-tutkimuksen kautta ja painottaa, kuinka tärkeää kirjallisuuden tutkimuksessa on tarkastella teosta useasta eri näkökulmasta ja eri tulkintojen kautta.

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This thesis examines queer masculinities and queerness in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* by utilizing previous research on both of these topics, as well as analyzing specific characters and relationships in the novel. The aim of this thesis is to provide a queer reading of the novel, both in the ways in which queer masculinities are represented, and how queerness is present in the male relationships and homosocial interactions within the novel.

The theory section introduces the wide field of queer theory, before moving to more specific concepts such as the aforementioned queer masculinities. I will also present previous research, addressing both queerness in literature in general, and fantasy fiction specifically.

The analysis is divided into two main chapters. The first one starts by examining the act of crying in the novel. From there, I move on to analyze how specific characters – Aragorn, Gandalf, Frodo Baggins and Samwise Gamgee – represent masculinity, or more specifically, queer masculinity. The second part of the analysis focuses on queer readings of *The Lord of the Rings*, and it consists of two subchapters, the first one examining the Fellowship in general, and the second part focusing solely on Frodo and Sam.

Following the analysis in chapters 3 and 4, I raise the question of authorial intent. I will introduce the concept of 'the death of the author', and how that can be applied when examining *The Lord of the Rings* from a queer perspective. I also want to emphasize the importance of applying fandom studies in future research of *The Lord of the Rings*, since it is specifically there where the queer readings of the novel thrive.

This thesis offers a comprehensive exploration of queer masculinities and queerness within J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. By utilizing previous research on these topics and

conducting detailed analyses of specific characters and relationships, this study provides a nuanced queer reading of the novel. Furthermore, the discussion of authorial intent and the application of fandom studies underscore the importance of considering multiple perspectives and interpretations in the analysis of literature.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Aims and Structure

The aim of this thesis is to examine how queerness and queer masculinities are represented in *The Lord of the Rings*, focusing in particular on the performance of masculinity in certain characters such as Frodo Baggins and Aragorn, as well as the relationships, homosocial interactions and behavior between the male members of the fellowship, with a particular focus on the homosocial and in many ways ambiguous relationship between Frodo and Sam Gamgee.

The first section of this thesis will be focusing on the theories and previous research relating to the subject in question. I am going to introduce queer theory as it is utilized in literary analysis, shortly examining the terminology and means of this particular theory. From there I will move on to introduce the theory of queer masculinities, and, finally, present and critique previous research relating to queer theory and queer masculinities in literature, particularly in fantasy fiction.

Chapters 3 and 4 will consist of the analysis of the work in question, utilizing the previously introduced theoretical framework. Chapter 3 will focus on examining the performances of queer masculinity by breaking it down to four sections: subchapter 3.1 will examine the act of crying in the context of *The Lord of the Rings*, while subchapters 3.2, 3.3 and finally 3.4 will examine specific characters and how they perform masculinity – and more importantly queer masculinity – in the work. Chapter 4 is focused on the aspect of queerness itself in the work; that is to say, how the characters deviate from heteronormative norms and how their actions can be construed through the lens of queer theory. The subchapter 4.1 will focus on the homosocial (or at times equivocally homoerotic) interactions among the members of the fellowship. Finally, subchapter 4.2 is focused entirely on the relationship between the characters of Frodo and Sam, examining their interaction and acts of intimacy through the lens of queer theory, offering potential interpretations for the nature of their relationship within the story. Finally, chapter 5 will shortly examine authorial intent and the relevance of Tolkien's intentions as the novel's author, and whether those are relevant to the research.

The thesis concludes with a conclusion, briefly summarizing the observations made through chapters 3 and 4, and what they could possibly mean as a small part of the large whole that is research on *The Lord of the Rings*. Additionally, the conclusion will shortly discuss how these findings and queer research on the novel could be expanded on in the future.

1.2. Materials

The primary source of the study is *The Lord of the Rings* (1955) by J.R.R. Tolkien. Despite being published over sixty years ago, it remains one of the most influential works of fantasy fiction written to this date. Originally published in three volumes – *The Fellowship of the Ring* (1954), *The Two Towers* (1955) and *The Return of the King* (1955) – and therefore often erroneously called a trilogy, *The Lord of the Rings* tells the story of a fellowship of heroes who embark on a journey to the land of Mordor to destroy a magical ring belonging to the titular main antagonist of the trilogy, the dark lord Sauron. The story is mainly told from the perspective of four protagonists, the hobbits Frodo Baggins, Samwise "Sam" Gamgee, Meriadoc "Merry" Brandybuck and Peregrin "Pippin" Took. They are accompanied on their journey by a group of other characters, such as the human ranger and future king Aragorn, the elf prince Legolas and the dwarf warrior Gimli. Beginning from the second part, *The Two Towers*, the story is divided into two sections, one of them detailing the adventures of Merry and Pippin, and the other focusing on the journey of Frodo and Sam.

There is a plethora of studies, articles and all varieties of analytic works published on *The Lord of the Rings*; in fact, there even exists an academic journal which exclusively publishes papers on Tolkien called *Tolkien Studies: An Annual Scholarly Review* (2004–). Despite his reported dislike of allegory, many of the studies concerning Tolkien and his works seem to, quite ironically, focus on possible allegories of religion (or, more specifically, Christianity), or the First and Second World War in his works. Additionally, Tolkien's works have been studied by linguists as well as literary scholars, as he is, in addition to his career as an author, known for creating several constructed languages.

One of the key sources of this thesis is the dissertation "Re-reading the Lord of the Rings: Masculinities in J.R.R. Tolkien's Novel and Peter Jackson's Film Adaptation" (2015) by Beatriz

Domínguez Ruiz. The work examines many of the same themes and aspects as this thesis, such as the aspects of masculinity in *The Lord of the Rings*, along with queer themes. Several other articles on masculinity and queer aspects of *The Lord of the Rings* will also be featured in the thesis, along with studies on (queer) masculinity and queerness in literature in general. These articles discuss, for instance, the different masculinities in the novel, the nature (and queerness) of the male relationships (Frodo and Sam in particular), and several related concepts, such as male intimacy during the World Wars. Chapter 5 also utilizes Roland Barthes's famous essay about the concept of the 'death of the author', as well as a brief look on fanfiction studies.

2. Theory

This section will begin by going over the main concepts of queer theory in chapter 2.1. From there, I will move on to more specific concepts, mainly studies on queer masculinities. Chapters 2.3 and 2.4 will then outline previous research and studies on the topic, from queer studies of literature in general, to studies on queerness and queer masculinities in fantasy fiction. The aim of this section is to lay the background and groundwork for the analysis proper, which consists of chapters 3 through 4.

2.1. Defining Queer Theory

There has been some debate over the terminology of queer theory; after all, the literal meaning of the word *queer* is synonymous with words such as *abnormal* or *odd*. The *Merriam-Webster* dictionary in fact defines the term *queer* as "differing in some way from what is usual or normal"; however, in the context of the literary theory the more appropriate definition would be: "of, relating to, or characterized by sexual or romantic attraction to members of one's own sex" (*Merriam-Webster*, "Queer").

In his work *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide* (2006), Lois Tyson defends the term by stating that "the use of the term queer can be seen as an attempt to reappropriate the word from what has been its homophobic usage in order to demonstrate that heterosexists shouldn't be allowed to define gay and lesbian experience" (Tyson 334). He also points out that *queer* has been adopted as an umbrella term by "all people who consider themselves, for whatever reasons, nonstraight" (Tyson 334). Furthermore, the term *queer* can be used in a context where words such as *homosexual* or *heterosexual* do not necessarily apply; as Tyson explains, "queer theory defines individual sexuality as a fluid, fragmented, dynamic collectivity of possible sexualities" (Tyson 335). In other words, queer theory suggests that human sexuality cannot be fully defined by solid identities such as homo-, bi-, or heterosexual; at least not in every case.

In her article "Queer Theory" (2019), Jennifer Miller describes the purpose of queer theory as follows: "queer theory is committed to interrupting certainties, such as the normative relationship between sex, gender, and sexuality as well as essentialist notions of those categories" (83). Furthermore, she points out that it "disrupts and challenges regimes of

normativity" (Miller 83). Queer theory is quite often deconstructive in its nature, reading texts to "reveal the problematic quality of their representations of sexual categories [...] to show the various ways in which the categories homosexual and heterosexual break down, overlap, or do not adequately represent the dynamic range of human sexuality" (Tyson 336).

Naturally, queerness has been present in works of literature that predate the development of modern queer theory. In his work *Before Queer Theory: Victorian Aestheticism and the Self* (2019), Dustin Friedman claims how authors such as Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde, who lived during the Victorian era, "showed art to be a realm where queers can resist a hostile social world by developing an autonomous sense of self, one that is inspired by their sexual difference and grounded in the ability to resist dominant power relations" (2). During times when queerness was not only socially unacceptable but additionally a criminal offense, many artists found a way to subtly implement queerness in their works. As Friedman explains: "aesthetic experience allows one to gain a sense of personal independence while still enmeshed within structures of oppression, granting access to a domain where repressive laws are not always strictly enforced" (3). According to Friedman, the art movement of aestheticism (which both Pater and Wilde adhered to) "is one of queer theory's unacknowledged ancestors" (5). Furthermore, Friedman proposes that:

The aesthetes demonstrated that it is possible to have a radical theory of sexuality that assumes, in contrast to queer negativity, that the subject possesses a limited, yet meaningful, capacity for self-determination. Their aesthetic version of autonomy inheres in the individual's ability to reflect critically on his or her historical moment and test whether it is possible to envision new modes of seeing, forms of thinking, and ways of living. (6)

Queer theory has been quite largely influenced by the works of the French philosopher Michel Foucault, as is pointed out in *Queer Universes: Sexualities in Science Fiction* (2008): "queer theory returns to Foucault to examine the ways in which heteronormativity is enforced through panoptical incitements to self-discipline and the reshaping of the individual to fit statistical and discursive norms" (Pearson et al. 4). Indeed, Foucault's philosophies hold many ideas that are central to queer theory, as Kent L. Brintnall puts in his article "Once Upon a Queer Theory" (2021): "Rejecting the notion that power's relation to sexuality is primarily one of silencing or repressing, Foucault highlights all the ways that sexuality is compelled to speak [...]"

This compulsion to speak generates the idea that sexuality contains and reveals the self's most intimate, deep-seated secrets." (2) Furthermore, Brintnall explains that: "sexuality, as Foucault famously asserts, is a ruse—a trap or snare—of power; it makes regulation and constraint look and feel like freedom" (2).

While queer theory as a theoretical framework is in itself is rather recent, having evolved in the 1980s, it clearly overlaps with some earlier theories, such as feminist and gay/lesbian criticism. This overlap is very evident in the works of Judith Butler, whose "theoretical work, on the cusp of feminism and queer theory, suggests the potential for queering our reading of feminist issues in science fiction, at the same time as it suggests queer's support for core elements of the feminist project" (Pearson et al. 5-6). Butler's views on gender and sexuality clearly draw from Foucault's ideas yet revoke them, as Brintnall states in his article: "For Butler, gender and sexuality do not express a person's internal truth; they are not the unfolding of an interior core. Rather, through the ritualized repetition of certain stylized gestures and behaviors, gendered and sexual practices give rise to a sense of a self, a sense of a relatively fixed and stable interiority" (2). According to Butler, "gender and sexuality are [...] performative" (Brintnall 2). This performance might not always be consistent, and it could change over time.

In essence, examining the area of queer theory unveils a multifaceted landscape marked by resistance, deconstruction, and reclamation. By interrogating normative assumptions surrounding sex, gender, and sexuality, queer theory disrupts entrenched systems of power and challenges essentialist notions of identity. When navigating the complexities of queer theory, we are reminded of its transformative potential to destabilize binaries, disrupt hegemonic structures, and cultivate spaces of inclusivity and affirmation.

2.2. Queer Masculinities

When examining queer masculinities, the concept of hegemonic (or conventional) masculinity must be discussed first to establish the framework queer masculinities separate from. The term 'hegemonic masculinity' and the theories surrounding it were largely coined by Raewyn Connell (Yang 318–319). Connell's theory "has become the 'single theoretical framework' for studying men and masculinities" (Yang 318). There are several ways to define hegemonic masculinity, but

in essence, it is the most conventional, culturally dominating form of masculinity and masculine gender expression: "what defines hegemonic masculinity is its mechanism of domination, rather than any pregiven masculine qualities" (Yang 319). Furthermore "hegemonic masculinity dominates certain groups of men, notably gay men, with political and cultural exclusion, legal and street violence, and so on. These subordinate masculinities often have blurry boundaries with femininity. In addition, subordinate classes' and racial minorities' masculinities are marginalized" (Yang 320). The concept has been applied to criminology, education, as well as media representations (Connell and Messerschmidt 833). While a highly important concept, this thesis is less interested in what hegemonic masculinity entails than what it *does not*; that is, this thesis is focused on patterns of masculinity that deviate from hegemonic masculinity.

Theories on queer masculinities originate from the same theoretical framework as queer theory. As Les Wright writes in his article "Introduction to 'Queer' Masculinities" (2005): "The study of queer masculinities draws on much of this rich history but takes the scholar into yet again different territories" (246). According to Wright, "queer masculinities begin as, and are still often interpreted as, (the performativity of) gay male butchness or hypermasculinity" (246).

Queer masculinity and performing queer masculinity do not necessarily require a person to identify as "queer". In his article "Queer Masculinities of Straight Men: A Typology" (2005), Robert Heasley explains that:

many straight men experience and demonstrate 'queer masculinity', defined here as ways of being masculine outside hetero-normative constructions of masculinity that disrupt, or have the potential to disrupt, traditional images of the hegemonic heterosexual masculine. (310)

Culturally, "males are presumed to be straight and hold stereotypically masculine beliefs, attitudes, and values unless and until they present themselves as other" (Heasley 310).

In his attempt to create "a starting point in building a typology of queer-straight males", Heasley proposes a system of five different categories, which are "nonlinear and nonhierarchical" (314). These categories are listed as follows:

- I. Straight sissy boys;
- II. Social-justice straight-queers;
- III. Elective straight-queers (or the elective queer);
- IV. Committed straight-queers; and

V. Males living in the shadow of masculinity. (Heasley 315)

Each of the aforementioned categories are utilized to describe males who, despite self-identifying as heterosexual, perform queerness in some way, whether it is intentionally or unintentionally. For both categories I and V, being perceived as queer is not necessarily something they aspire to; in fact they might try to actively avoid it. Males who belong to category I "experience homophobic oppression for their apparent queerness" and they themselves "have varying degrees of homophobia or comfort and discomfort with homosexualities" (Heasley 315). Males in category V on the other hand can be quite supportive of queer rights, as "they are informed about sexuality and masculinity and are likely to understand and support feminism as well as gay rights" (Heasley 317). However, they still avoid performing queerness, as they "are not comfortable with queer straight men or with putting themselves in positions publicly where they might be perceived as gay" (Heasley 317). Males in categories II, III and IV perform queerness in varying degrees of commitment, with category IV "committed straight-queers" having "the intention of benefiting from moving toward queerness as an integral aspect of their sexuality and their masculinity" (Heasley 317).

Heasley's typology for queer masculinity in straight men is, of course, not absolute. He in fact states that "there is fluidity in these categories. Males may move around" (319). Regardless, Heasley proposes that identifying this queerness in straight males is valuable, as "queer-straight males respective refusal to actively participate in the dominant system serves to stall the system itself. Their absence, and at the very least, their lack of full participation in hetero-masculine culture, weakens the system of oppression that is an essential part of normative hetero-masculinity" (320).

Relating to the concept of queer masculinity, and especially queer masculinity of straight men, is the idea of hybrid masculinities. Tristan Bridges describes this idea in her 2013 study "A Very 'Gay' Straight?: Hybrid Masculinities, Sexual Aesthetics, and the Changing Relationship between Masculinity and Homophobia" as follows: "Hybrid masculinities refer to gender projects that incorporate 'bits and pieces' (Demetriou 2001) of marginalized and subordinated masculinities and, at times, femininities. 'Hybrid' is used in the social sciences and humanities to address processes and practices of cultural integration or mixing" (61). Bridges' descriptions and study of these hybrid masculinities and the practice of "gay aesthetics" in straight men is in many

ways similar to Heasley's typology of queer-straight males. Bridges concludes her article by describing the conflicting nature of these identities:

Hybrid masculinities illustrate the flexibility of contemporary masculinities [...], and straight men's reliance on gay aesthetics is one kind of hybridization. These 'gay straight' men might appear to blur the boundaries between gay and straight through assimilating a variety of gay aesthetics. Yet, this move toward 'inclusivity' (Anderson 2009) can be interpreted in more than one way and does not necessarily indicate declining levels of gender and sexual inequality [...] Straight men who identify aspects of themselves as gay in this study draw on varied resources to simultaneously assert heterosexual masculine identities, to distance themselves from stigmatizing stereotypes of masculinity, and—for some—to communicate authentic allegiance with groups to which they claim no formal membership. (Bridges 79–80)

Drawing upon the rich tapestry of queer theory, the exploration of queer masculinities unveils diverse landscapes within gender discourse. Queer masculinities navigate uncharted territories, shedding light on nuanced expressions of gender performativity. While traditionally associated with gay male hypermasculinity, queer masculinity transcends rigid boundaries, extending its embrace to individuals regardless of their self-identification. That is to say, queer masculinity does not necessarily correlate with queer identity, even if the two may sometimes appear interchangeable.

2.3. Previous Research

There exists a plethora of studies and research focused on queerness in different works of literature and literature in general. In this chapter I will present some of these previous studies and articles, focusing mainly on articles on the representation of queerness and queer masculinities in works of literature and media.

As mentioned previously in chapter 2.1, queerness has always been present in literature, long before the development of queer theory, queer masculinities and the pertinent terminology. Some of the earliest works of literature that have been rather extensively studied for allusions to queerness are the poems written by the ancient Greek poet Sappho. This comes

as little surprise, as she was fairly certainly queer herself. In fact, the word *lesbian* is derived from Sappho's place of birth, the Greek island of Lesbos, as *Merriam-Webster* dictionary defines that the word comes "from association with the ardent poetry written by Sappho of Lesbos (c. 610-c. 580 b.c.) to and about other women in the female religious and educational community she led" (*Merriam-Webster*, "Lesbian").

Another rather early literary work that has been quite extensively studied is none other than *The Bible*, especially the stories of Jesus in the New Testament. According to Stephen D. Moore in his work "Queer Theory" (2019), "queer New Testament criticism began in earnest, and notably early, with Robert Goss's 1993 gay and lesbian manifesto, *Jesus ACTED UP*" (7). According to Moore, there are several stories of Jesus that have long been interpreted as allusions to queerness:

Jesus's raising of Lazarus from the dead (John 11:1–44) has long been read as a coming-out story in queer communities of faith, as Goss observes (554; see also Perkins 2000; West 2003). The same is true of Jesus's own resurrection in all four Gospels. Goss recapitulates Elizabeth Stuart's interpretation of Jesus's resurrection as a metaphor for 'how queer folk come out of their self-crucifixions in the closet and death of self-hatred and internalized homophobia,' for how they 'emerge from the closet tomb' (Goss 2006a: 564; see Stuart 1995: 50). (Moore 8)

Nevertheless, despite the existence of numerous queer readings of *The Bible*, "all in all, queer biblical criticism, most of all queer New Testament criticism, has made extraordinarily little use of queer theory" (Moore 9). And while there are some studies where queer theory is utilized, "there has been far less of it than one might expect" (Moore 10).

The previously mentioned Aesthetic movement of literature is another quite extensively studied area; it includes works such as *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) written by Oscar Wilde, as well as the essays written by Walter Pater. These have been widely studied for their exploration of queer themes and elements, particularly in relation to depictions of same-sex desire and homoeroticism. Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in particular is a subject to much research, perhaps partly due to Wilde's own queerness. In her work *Materializing Queer Desire: Oscar Wilde to Andy Warhol* (2009), Elisa Glick explains the queerness around the key motif of the book, the portrait of Dorian Gray:

Although the portrait functions as a sign for the homosexual as eternally beautiful youth, Wilde does not define gay identity solely through this image. Finally, queerness in the text inheres not in the image of Dorian Gray, but in the networks of secrecy that constitute this image. Wilde makes it clear that the portrait does not exhibit a single secret; rather, it is the site for a circulation of secrecy in which all three characters— Basil, Dorian, and Lord Henry— are implicated. (Glick 20)

Indeed, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is, in a way, undeniably queer, in a manner that not all works of fiction can quite reach. As Glick explains it: "Although Wilde is fascinated by the way identity can dissolve into a vanishing point, queerness does not disappear in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Wilde materializes homosexual identity in fundamentally modern terms— as something ephemeral, variable, and elusive" (Glick 20).

In addition to studies relying on queer theory, queer masculinities in different types of media and literature have been fairly studied as well. One such study is Jennifer J. Moos' article "Boy Bands, Drag Kings, and the Performance of (Queer) Masculinities" (2013) where she argues that "the 'manufacturing processes' involved in the fabrication of a boy band as well as the fact that boy bands are promoted primarily via audio-visual material such as the band's music videos evolves into a specific 'boy band masculinity'. This soft, 'innocent' masculinity or even 'girlishness' heavily relies on markers of gay culture" (1). Moos uses boy bands such as the *Backstreet Boys* and their stage presence as well as music videos as evidence of this queer masculinity. For example, she describes that the setting of the video for the record "Quit Playing Games (With My Heart)" strongly applies queer masculinity:

By staging the boys in a homosocial setting at night with rain pouring down their half-naked muscular bodies, the video makes use of markers of male homosexuality. However, this opening up of possible alternatives beyond hegemonic, heterosexual masculinity often produces homophobic anxieties which frequently reveal themselves in a refusal to acknowledge boy band culture as a valuable way of cultural expression. (Moos 15)

Moos concludes her study by arguing that "boy band culture and boy band masculinity in particular [...] do not necessarily reproduce heteronormatively structured patterns. Instead, they actively invite a queering of supposedly straight lines" (16).

In conclusion, the field of literary studies is rich with with examinations of queerness, encompassing a broad spectrum of genres and historical periods. From Sappho to Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, previous research has illuminated the multifaceted manifestations of queerness within literature. Furthermore, studies into queer masculinities across various media forms, such as Moos' analysis of boy band culture, shed light on the intricate interplay between performance, gender, and sexuality. By destabilizing hegemonic notions of masculinity, these investigations pave the way for a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of gender expression.

2.4. Queerness and Queer Masculinities in the Fantasy Genre

Fantasy as a genre is, in many ways, accommodating and multifaceted, and it is not strictly limited to traditional or conventional forms or ideas of storytelling. Therefore, it is not surprising that it offers an opportune environment for telling stories not adhering to the norm – in this case, the ideas of hegemonic masculinity and heteronormative narratives. For the most part, this queerness is a fairly new phenomenon, as Anna Balay explains in her article "'Incloseto Putbacko': Queerness in Adolescent Fantasy Fiction" (2012): "The turn into the twenty-first century shows an increase in young adult fantasy novels that include gay characters and, though these novels follow the many rules that govern behavior (sexual and otherwise) in the fantasy genre, queerness is nevertheless there, and powerful as much because of fantasy's restrictions as in spite of them" (923). Balay notes that as a general rule, fantasy literature tends to avoid the topics of sex and sexuality, which is especially true for children's fantasy fiction. However, she notes that "an absence of coitus or its contemplation does not signify an absence of desire, sexuality, or even perversion" (Balay 924). Indeed, fantasy genre in itself is not necessarily particularly queer, but "fantasy is about rules, and therefore about rule violations, so queerness is always one if its possible subtexts" (Balay 924).

"What is queer about fantasy precisely, and what is fantastic – even uncanny – about queerness?" Jes Battis asks in their 2007 dissertation "Queer spellings: Magic and Melancholy in Fantasy-Fiction" (Battis 1). Both fantasy fiction and queer theory have a habit of looking inwards at the secret and fantastical, echoing the writings and theories of figures such as Sigmund Freud

and Judith Butler. Battis in fact partly answers their own question a few pages later: "To be queer is, in a sense, to be part of a fantasy, but also to be *fantastic*, somehow different" (Battis 12, emphasis original). They argue there is an inherent melancholy to fantasy fiction, which is then tied to queerness in particular. There is something uncanny in fantasy, something which is only emphasized in queerness within that context:

Fantasy makes us monsters to ourselves, providing us with a unique arena – a high, moonstruck tower, an abandoned bastion, a labyrinth at whose centre something waits – for the corporealization of our own bodily daydreams, extensions, and gender-prostheses. [...] To be queer is, in a sense, to have nothing but these fantasies to sustain a mode of living – to continually ignore the annihilative call of the world that repaginates and writes over you – and yet these fantasies also become the mark of danger, the thing above all that you can't share, the locked phantasmatic closet. (Battis 30)

One character archetype unique to fantasy fiction is the wizard. Indeed, Battis argues there is always an inherent queerness to wizards: "wizards are [...] exiled, strange, outlawed, peculiar. They work on the world, but not necessarily in the world, since the world [...] refuses to accept them. Even in fantasy, the wizard is queer; so the wizard, in a sense, through the sense of her body, makes fantasy itself queer" (40).

So, there is a conclusion to come to, that fantasy literature offers an exceptional arena for queer readings:

Fantasy provides a realm where same-sex relations can be presented uniquely and provocatively, since alien backgrounds and backdrops provide a space where conservative ethics are always dismantled, decoupled, and turned upside-down. But those same realms, the faraway kingdoms and the distant planets, can also merely recapitulate homophobic and patriarchal tenets. It is up to feminist and queer fantasy writers to create new worlds where this tension can be explored, and it is also up to queer and straight readers to continually acknowledge, appreciate, and even extract moments of queer pleasure from fantasy texts. (Battis 260–261)

Indeed, it is the aim of the next section of this thesis to take a closer look at the queer masculinities and queerness in *The Lord of the Rings* by deconstructing the novel's narrative and examining both it and the central characters in the context and framework of the theories introduced in this section.

3. Queer Masculinities of *The Lord of the Rings*

This section of the thesis will examine how queer masculinities are represented in *The Lord of the Rings* by examining certain behaviors, such as crying, and analyzing certain characters, namely Aragorn, Sam and Frodo, and their actions within the context of the work in question. The theories presented in the previous section will be utilized to support these findings.

3.1. "Boys Don't Cry": Subverted

In his 2006 article "On Men Crying: Lear's Agony", Richard Reichbart states that: "men are unable to weep because they believe that crying is weak and womanly are undoubtedly known to every psychoanalyst. The very concept that tears are womanly – that women are weak for shedding them and men strong for refusing to do so – is embedded in much of our cultural tradition" (Reichbart 1067–1068). In fact, the dictum "boys don't cry" is prevalent enough to having become the title of several films, novels and songs – perhaps most notable of which is the British rock band The Cure's song "Boys Don't Cry" (1979).

In many ways, *The Lord of the Rings* contradicts the idea that men's tears are shameful and somehow sacrilegious in the frames of masculinity. The men in the story oftentimes cry, such as a response to grief or great joy. The act of crying is never presented as something negative; the sole exception to this is perhaps the morally ambiguous creature Gollum, whose crying is arguably presented as somewhat pathetic – although this appears to have less to do with the act of crying itself, and more with Gollum's general character. This is made clear, for example, through Sam's sentiments towards him: "He [Gollum] would cackle with laughter and caper, if any jest was made, or even if Frodo spoke kindly to him, and weep if Frodo rebuked him. Sam said little to him of any sort. He suspected him more deeply than ever, and if possible liked the new Gollum, the Sméagol, less than the old" (Tolkien 619).

As mentioned, the act of crying is often associated with death and grief in the narrative of *The Lord of the Rings*. This is first observed upon the moment of Gandalf's (presumed) death. As the Fellowship flees the scene of battle, Frodo is the first to take notice of his and his companions' reactions: "Frodo heard Sam at his side weeping, and then he found that he himself

was weeping as he ran" (Tolkien 331). However, the two are not the only ones who react to Gandalf's demise by crying, as Tolkien describes that the rest of the Fellowship are eventually brought to tears as well: "Grief at last wholly overcame them, and they wept long: some standing and silent, some cast upon the ground" (Tolkien 332). Another example of grieving expressed by crying comes as another member of the Fellowship, Boromir, dies. Aragorn is deeply impacted by this, as he mourns the loss of his friend: "He knelt for a while, bent with weeping, still clasping Boromir's hand" (Tolkien 414).

Tolkien's stance on crying – particularly on *men* crying – can be perhaps best noticed in a line delivered by Gandalf at the very end of the novel. As him and Frodo bid their farewells to Sam, Merry and Pippin, Gandalf remarks: "I will not say: do not weep; for not all tears are an evil" (Tolkien 1030). Thus, Tolkien seems to imply that it is indeed acceptable for a man to cry, at least under certain circumstances, such as upon the loss of a friend.

Reichbart mentions in his article that there are contradicting notions on whether or not it is acceptable (within the framework of traditional, hegemonic masculinity) for men to cry: "As tempting as is the proposition that Western cultures have uniformly adopted the idea that crying for men is womanly and weak, it is not true. What is true is that there has often been conflict about whether it is manly to cry, and that there have been vastly different standards in various Western cultures, at various times, and even contradictory standards at the same time" (Reichbart 1071). However, "this does not gainsay the basic proposition, [...] that there tends to be a traditional notion today [...] that crying is unmanly" (Reichbart 1072). This applies to the context of *The Lord of the Rings* as well. Therefore it is possible to view these descriptions of men crying as a way to subvert the traditional notions of masculinity, especially the notions of heteronormative and hegemonic masculinity. Returning to the ideas presented in section 2.2. of this thesis, men crying could be categorized as an example of queer masculinity, since it does disrupt the traditional sentiment of crying as a "womanly" action. Furthermore, these instances of the male characters crying are often accompanied by acts of physical intimacy between them, which goes against the ideas of traditional masculinity as well.

Of course, it is important to note that within the narrative of *The Lord of the Rings*, the male characters are not under ordinary circumstances; they are, for the most part, soldiers in the middle of a war. This does, in a sense, make these actions more "acceptable" even outside the framework of queer masculinity, as Brenda Partridge notes in her article "No Sex Please – We're

Hobbits: The Construction of Female Sexuality in *The Lord of the Rings*" (1983): "War provides a context in which men can be acceptably intimate because they are at the same time being seen to live up to the socially desirable stereotype image of the aggressive male" (Partridge 184). Additionally, Victorian views on intimacy – which still somewhat persisted during Tolkien's lifetime – between men differ from contemporary ones; in other words, during the time of *The Lord of the Rings* being written throughout the 1930s and 1940s, intimate acts such as crying in homosocial settings may have been considered less unconventional than now.

Nevertheless, it is evident that Tolkien's portrayal of men crying in *The Lord of the Rings* challenges entrenched notions of masculinity that equate tears with weakness or femininity. Through poignant moments of grief and loss, Tolkien depicts his male characters shedding tears not as a sign of frailty, but as a testament to their humanity and emotional depth. The narrative not only affirms the validity of men's emotional experiences but also invites a reevaluation of gender norms that restrict the full range of human expression.

3.2. Aragorn – The Healer

In her dissertation "Re-reading The Lord of the Rings: Masculinities in J.R.R. Tolkien's Novel and Peter Jackson's Film Adaptation" (2015), Beatriz Domingues Ruiz states that "the characters that perform this model of collaborative masculinity are those whose principles are based on cooperative and diplomatic attitudes, those who resort to killing only when necessary, choosing whenever possible to preserve the life of others, in a way verbalizing Tolkien's own ideas" (Ruiz 144). Aragorn, evidently, falls into this model of masculinity. His masculinity differs from many other male characters of the story: "The pattern of hypermasculinity represented by Denethor and Boromir [...] contrasts with Aragorn's, which is characterized by more positive traits, such as humility and compassion". (Ruiz 153) Furthermore, "Aragorn's masculinity [...] rests on rendering service and protection, not on an excess of authority or power" (Ruiz 153).

When the character of Aragorn is first introduced, he is not using his true identity, but instead presenting himself as a mysterious figure named *Strider*: "He is one of the wandering folk – Rangers we call them. He seldom talks: not but what he can tell a rare tale when he has the mind. He disappears for a month, or a year, and then he pops up again [...] What his right name

is I've never heard: but he's known round here as Strider" (Tolkien 156). Ruiz describes this second identity as follows: "Strider's is one of Aragorn's most prominent facets in *The Lord of the Rings*. He introduces himself as such to the hobbits in Bree and also during the first encounter with the Riders of Rohan. Even if he knows that he is the heir to the throne of Gondor, his present occupation is that of a Ranger, so he adopts his Ranger name" (Ruiz 146–147).

Aragorn does not take the role of the leader in the Fellowship; that role falls on Gandalf, until he is killed – a moment that leaves Aragorn uncertain and forlorn. Indeed, Aragorn is not without flaw as a person, as Ruiz describes:

Aragorn always seems to feel somewhat inferior to Gandalf in matters of leadership. Unsure of what course to follow, the more they move on to Amon Hen, the more doubtful he is, so he struggles to decide what to do, and he even loses hope when Gandalf falls in Moria [...] he ponders on his own decisions and as he feels that everything he does 'goes amiss' – he is in this sense very well aware of his own flaws and admits his failure. (Ruiz 149)

It is only later in the story that Aragorn appears to fully embrace his true identity as *Aragorn, son of Arathorn* and the fated ruler of Middle-earth. Even then he does not use his rights or power to dominate others, but instead to heal, as is verified several times: "*The hands of the king are the hands of a healer*" (Tolkien 860, emphasis original). As it happens, Aragorn provides medical attention to Faramir, Éowyn and Merry, who have been wounded in the battle against the antagonist Sauron's forces, thus healing them. Healing, both as a practical skill and a personal quality, is typically associated with femininity, therefore standing out as a quality possessed by a character who is a warrior and a king, occupations that are very strongly associated with masculinity.

Aragorn eventually marries the Elven woman Arwen; however, this relationship is not discussed in the main novel, and is mainly revealed through the Appendices. Still, as Ruiz explains, Aragorn does display love throughout *The Lord of the Rings*, only not perhaps the romantic kind:

he [Aragorn] does pay attention to the Greek concept of *agape*, the form of love that he shows his friends in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, a kind of brotherly love. It is in this love that the new pattern of masculinity finds its grounds in Middle-earth, a pattern that is

collaborative rather than imposing, fraternal rather than competitive, comprehensive rather than exclusive. (Ruiz 155)

As mentioned, Aragorn evolves throughout the narrative, as he grapples with his identity and responsibilities, initially concealing his true lineage and struggling with feelings of inferiority compared to Gandalf. However, his journey culminates in a powerful acceptance of his destiny as the rightful ruler of Middle-earth, marked by his acts of healing and his commitment to nurturing relationships based on mutual respect and love. Through his character, Tolkien challenges conventional stereotypes and offers a more holistic portrayal of masculinity, accompanied by qualities typically associated with femininity, such as healing and nurturing.

In conclusion, Tolkien transcends traditional notions of masculinity with Aragorn's character arc, presenting a nuanced and inclusive portrayal that celebrates qualities typically associated with both masculinity and femininity. Initially introduced as the enigmatic figure Strider, Aragorn grapples with his identity and struggles with feelings of inferiority compared to Gandalf. However, as the narrative unfolds, Aragorn evolves, embracing his true lineage and destiny as the rightful ruler of Middle-earth. His acts of healing and nurturing, traditionally associated with femininity, challenge conventional stereotypes of masculinity, and his relationships, particularly his deep bond with his companions in the Fellowship, demonstrate a form of love characterized by collaboration, fraternity, and inclusivity. Thus, Aragorn's journey serves as a testament to the transformative power of acceptance, self-discovery, and the embracing of one's true identity.

3.3. Gandalf the G(r)ay

Returning to the observations made in chapter 2.4. of the thesis, there is an argument to be made that by being a wizard, a sort of an outcast in society, Gandalf is already inherently queer. As Battis eloquently puts it: "Gandalf is the drag-wizard who offers aid, the House Mother looking after her children" (175). He is first introduced in the novel through the perspective of the hobbits, being described as "old wandering conjuror" who occasionally visits Frodo's uncle Bilbo Baggins in his home of Bag End, a place described in the very same line as "a queer¹ place, and

¹ The word here undoubtedly indeed means *odd*, but it is nevertheless an amusing remark.

its folk are queerer" (Tolkien 24). The hobbits indeed appear to know very little of Gandalf's true nature as a powerful, magical being, instead viewing him as a slightly shady figure who occasionally arranges firework shows.

Gandalf, despite his eccentricities, is shown to be quite fond of, if not protective over, the hobbits. Ruiz describes this "paternal" side of Gandalf: "the character is shown in his most 'human' behaviour [...] In comparison with other fathers or father figures that appear in *The Lord of the Rings*, despite his initial grumpiness [...] Gandalf has been endowed with positive traits that seem to be inherent of the type of masculinity that he performs in Middle-earth. Gandalf's most outstanding trait is his protectiveness towards the hobbits" (Ruiz 130–131). Indeed, instead of viewing them as pawns or a necessary sacrifice in the war against Sauron, Gandalf wants to "protect [...] the apparently weak race of hobbits, for, after all, the preservation of Middle-earth and all its living creatures is one of his main tasks" (Ruiz 131). Battis echoes this sentiment of Gandalf's, in many ways, quite endearing fondness for the hobbits in their dissertation: "Gandalf the Grey begins his career as a lone magus, but by the end of LOTR he has essentially adopted the hobbits, thereby allowing him to distance himself from lone wizards like Saruman, or the nameless Necromancer" (Battis 180). Echoing the sentiments of Ruiz and Battis, it can be claimed that Gandalf's interactions with the hobbits are reminiscent of the archetype of a grumpy yet lovable grandfather. Despite his initial aloof gruffness, Gandalf's actions reveal a deeper sense of care and devotion toward the hobbits, who are characterized as meek, simple, and vulnerable (albeit only seemingly so, as will be later revealed in the story). This portrayal of masculinity, characterized by a blend of sternness and affection, challenges conventional notions of masculine identity referenced in the previous section (chapter 2.2). Gandalf's role as a protector and mentor to the hobbits exemplifies a positive and nurturing form of masculinity, one that transcends traditional gender roles and fosters meaningful relationships within the narrative. The message Gandalf wants to get across is clear: "life is the most valuable thing that we have and it must be preserved, so actions must be carefully pondered on, as they affect other characters as well" (Ruiz 134).

Gandalf, undoubtedly, differs quite substantially from the other male characters of the novel; indeed, it could even be stated that Gandalf's archetypal role in the narrative is so inherently disconnected from perceptions of gender that if the character were a woman instead – but otherwise completely similar to their original counterpart – their role in and contribution to

the larger story would not be changed in the slightest. This becomes even more evident when examining another character introduced later on in *Fellowship of the Ring*, namely that of the Elven Queen Galadriel, who, despite her strikingly different outward appearance of ethereal and otherworldly beauty, momentarily assumes quite a similar role to Gandalf's as the Fellowship's guide after the latter's apparent demise.

Gandalf's eccentric nature is clear from the very moment he is properly introduced to us: "In the beginning of *The Hobbit*, Gandalf appears as a kind of fabulous presence on Bilbo's doorstep, transforming Bag End into the ultimate White Party² [...] as he invites in a troupe of Dwarven explorers. Later, in *Fellowship*, Gandalf scratches his mark on Bilbo's door—a stylized 'G,' which could signify all sorts of interesting queer possibilities (like 'Gandalf the Gay'). His outfit [...] is particularly eye-catching" (Battis 182). There is a certain performativity to his actions – in fact, "much of Gandalf's later magic seems almost entirely performative—his voice deepens, his shadow lengthens, his appearance seems to change, but we can't be entirely certain" (Battis 188). In their dissertation, Battis goes as far as to suggest this performativity is akin to drag queens, or that there is a similar, performance-relying queer aesthetic in Gandalf's character.

There is something to be said here of Gandalf's portrayal in the film adaptations by Peter Jackson. Played by Sir Ian McKellen, a renowned actor who has also been a vocal queer rights activist since the 1980s, Gandalf's character takes on added layers of complexity and resonance under McKellen's performance. Certainly of note is Gandalf's – and specifically McKellen's Gandalf's – legacy. From the affectionate and cheeky nickname "Gandalf the Gay" to the internet meme "Gandalf Big Naturals" depicting Gandalf with large breasts, the wizard continues to perform and break the conventions of traditional, hegemonic masculinity.

Returning to the observations made throughout this thesis, it becomes evident that Gandalf embodies a form of masculinity that challenges conventional norms and expectations. His eccentricities, initially perceived as mysterious, ultimately reveal a deeply caring and protective nature. Ruiz and Battis both highlight Gandalf's role as a protector and mentor to the hobbits, emphasizing his commitment to preserving life and fostering meaningful relationships. This portrayal of masculinity, characterized by a blend of strength and compassion, challenges traditional notions of gender and masculinity referenced earlier in the thesis. Furthermore,

² "White Party" refers to a queer dance party event.

Gandalf's portrayal in Peter Jackson's film adaptations, particularly under the performance of Sir Ian McKellen, adds layers of complexity and resonance to the character. Thus, in conclusion, Gandalf's character serves as a powerful symbol of resilience, compassion, and inclusivity, challenging traditional notions of masculinity and what performing masculinity can mean.

3.4. Sam – The Servant

Sam's role in *The Lord of the Rings* is, for the most part, to act as the protagonist Frodo's moral support, protector and servant. He is sometimes even referred to as the "true hero" of the novel, presumably due to his more physically active (and more adhering to the ideas of traditional masculinity) role in the story compared to Frodo. As Ruiz explains: "Sam is a true believer and a practical character too, also characterized by his pure naïveté and candidness at times. A loyal friend and faithful servant, Sam seems to be the clearest embodiment of the 'domestic' pattern of masculinity that hobbits are endowed with" (Ruiz 199).

Sam is introduced in the story as Frodo's and his uncle Bilbo's gardener, who joins Frodo in his quest slightly unwillingly at first. Regardless, he accepts his role and his relationship with Frodo quite quickly evolves from mere servanthood to genuine loyalty and friendship – and perhaps something even more, as will be discussed later on in the thesis. Nonetheless, whatever the interpretation of the exact nature of their relationship, the connection between Frodo and Sam is a key element to the story, and one of the defining traits of both characters – much of Sam as a character is defined by how he views and treats Frodo, and vice versa.

In direct contrast to Frodo, Sam takes a much more physical role in the story. He is ready to defend Frodo and keep him safe, even through means of violence. Perhaps most notably, Sam fights off the giant spider Shelob who has attacked Frodo and rendered him unconscious. Tolkien describes Sam's protectiveness over Frodo as something almost feral: "No onslaught more fierce was ever seen in the savage world of beasts, where some desperate small creature armed with little teeth, alone, will spring upon a tower of horn and hide that stands above its fallen mate" (Tolkien 728). In his more direct approach to conflict, contrasting with Frodo's more passive and peaceful one, Sam exhibits certain traits of traditional masculinity, which is oftentimes associated with traits of aggressiveness and violence. On the other hand, the sort of

protectiveness Sam displays over Frodo is not always necessarily seen as traditionally masculine, as in his case it is exerted upon another man (one who is not related to him); rather it could be considered queer, not conforming to the heteronormative displays of traditional masculinity that can require a certain apathy towards other men.

Another, perhaps queer, aspect of Sam's character and his masculinity is his love for nature, already witnessed in the beginning of the novel through his occupation as a gardener. He has a love for all things rustic and relating to his home in the Shire, along with nature in general. This is evident, perhaps most poignantly, when the One Ring tries to tempt Sam. Instead of conventional power, it promises him he can become a great gardener: "And then all the clouds rolled away, and the white sun shone, and at his command the vale of Gorgoroth became a garden of flowers and trees and brought forth fruit. He had only to put on the Ring and claim it for his own, and all this could be" (Tolkien 901). But Sam rejects this: "The one small garden of a free gardener was all his need and due, not a garden swollen to a realm; his own hands to use, not the hands of others to command" (Tolkien 901). This love for nature is something Sam shares with the race of Elves, who, as been already established, are in many ways feminine; and indeed, especially at the beginning of the story, Sam admires Elves and their beauty and otherworldly nature. It is in embracing his role as caretaker of the natural world, and a humble one at that, that Sam embodies a form of masculinity that celebrates nurturing and stewardship – a stark departure from conventional ideals centered on strength and aggression.

Sam's masculinity, along with his overall character, develops throughout the story. Ruiz summarizes this development as follows:

From the 'rustic' hobbit endowed with a more 'rural' pattern of masculinity when he left the Shire, we finally see a Sam that has grown and become a hero. He has not only helped his master destroy the One Ring, but he has also helped the inhabitants of Hobbiton by helping restore peace in the area. In his evolution, his masculinity has evolved into one that contains traits performed by characters like Faramir, Gandalf and Aragorn, a new and eco-conscious collaborative pattern that sees life as the most important aspect to preserve in Middle-earth. Moreover, he has ended up adopting a role that has been traditionally associated with the feminine, as he also becomes a steward of the land, *the* steward and healer of the Shire, thus being a perfect example of the assimilation of masculine and feminine traits. (Ruiz 205)

Thus Sam, by adopting these traits of traditional and non-traditional masculinity, both aggressive and nurturing, falls under the category of queer masculinity – he both adheres to and defies the heteronormative constraints set by traditional, hegemonic masculinity.

3.5. Frodo – The Pacifist

Compared to Aragorn and Sam, Frodo is, in many ways, more passive in his fight against the antagonist Sauron. That is not to say that he does not fight; in fact, quite the opposite, as Ruiz describes: “Despite all their vicissitudes, Frodo’s fight is the hardest [...] all the experiences he has to go through and his burden change him” (Ruiz 207). From the beginning of the novel, Frodo is the one tasked with carrying the One Ring, an object that has the ability to corrupt and torment even the most powerful of beings. Ruiz compares Frodo’s suffering to that of Jesus Christ: “Frodo suffers physically and mentally in his quest, as if each step of the way was one of the Catholic Stations of the Cross³, in which the journey becomes increasingly more difficult and he begins to lose his will” (Ruiz 207). Much like the trials faced by Jesus, Frodo's path is fraught with anguish and sacrifice. In other words, it is clear that Frodo suffers immensely throughout the novel, an aspect that in a way “forces” him to a more passive role, as he is, for a large part of the story, wounded, or in mental and/or physical pain. Frodo grapples not only with external threats but also with inner turmoil, the One Ring eating away at his will and his very soul.

Frodo seldom uses violence, instead attempting to solve conflicts through negotiation. This is, of course, partly due to the immense psychological and physical trauma he goes through. As mentioned, Frodo is the one carrying the burden of the One Ring for most of the journey, and is, in addition, stabbed in his shoulder quite early on in the narrative; the wound is supernatural, and continues to haunt him for the rest of the story. Additionally, Frodo is arguably the most mature out of the four protagonists, a fact that leads to him choosing a non-violent approach whenever it is possible. One of the key contrasts (and only disagreements) between him and Sam is their attitude towards Gollum; whereas Sam makes his dislike towards Gollum quite clear, Frodo feels pity towards him, and decides to spare his life: “I will not touch the creature. For now

³ Stations of the Cross refers to “a series of 14 pictures or carvings portraying events in the Passion of Christ, from his condemnation by Pontius Pilate to his entombment” (*Britannica*).

that I see him, I do pity him” (Tolkien 615). This is partly due to the increasing mental anguish the One Ring is causing on Frodo – as Gollum has been through (and still suffers from) the same effects, Frodo feels empathy towards him. It is also possible, quite likely even, that Frodo sees himself in Gollum; or at least what his potential future could be like should the Ring continue its corrupting influence on him.

When the hobbits return home by the end of the novel, Frodo is most undeniably suffering symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, also formerly known as shell shock; similar symptoms were commonly observed on soldiers during and after the First World War, when the term shell shock was indeed coined:

The term ‘shell shock’ was coined in 1914 to describe the association between the experience of explosions from artillery shells and the witnessing of the deaths of numerous comrades on the one hand, and a series of symptoms on the other [...] Very soon, shell shock was to become an overwhelming problem for the armed forces and the medical staff treating the military. (Bogdan and Ioana 81–82)

The trauma Frodo is going through is very much apparent in the text: “One evening Sam came into the study and found his master looking very strange. He was very pale and his eyes seemed to see things far away” (Tolkien 1025). As Sam asks Frodo what is wrong, he answers: “‘I am wounded’ [...] ‘wounded; it will never really heal’” (Tolkien 1025). This could be interpreted as a reference to his physical wounds (which are partly of supernatural nature), but Frodo’s words might also be referencing the psychological effects he is suffering. Tolkien’s description of his eyes seeming “to see things far away” is eerily reminiscent of the “thousand-yard stare” seen in pictures and descriptions of traumatized soldiers: “The phrase [...] dates back at least to World War II. In that conflict, it was a slang term used by members of the US military to describe the appearance of troops who suffered mental injuries in combat or who were mentally overwhelmed by their experiences” (Wade 121). Frodo’s words echo the enduring legacy of trauma, a wound that festers within his psyche, defying all attempts at healing. Moreover, Frodo’s plight serves as a stark reminder of the often-overlooked aftermath of conflict, where the true cost of heroism is measured not only in lives lost but also in shattered spirits and fractured minds. Through Frodo’s struggle, Tolkien underscores the enduring relevance of addressing the mental health challenges faced by those who have witnessed violent conflicts and war.

It is Frodo's trauma, along with the pity he had for Gollum, that affects Frodo's masculinity and character the most: "His permeable masculinity has been influenced by other characters' traits [...] and this has turned Frodo into a pacifist, but his experiences and his suffering are what have changed him the most. He has understood in the end the importance of sparing a life". Essentially, "his masculinity is based on pity and mercy" (Ruiz 212). Of course, Frodo's pacifistic nature could be viewed as unmasculine – or possibly feminine – but this is not necessarily the case. As Ruiz theorizes: "By redefining Frodo's masculinity and constructing it on the grounds of pacifism, Tolkien is constructing a new type of masculinity that is based on traits such as humility, pity, mercy, love, forgiveness, and respect for the others" (Ruiz 212–213). Out of all the aforementioned characters, Frodo's masculinity perhaps differs from the model of traditional hegemonic masculinity the most, thus planting him as an exemplary illustration of queer masculinity.

4. Queer Readings of *The Lord of the Rings*

This section will examine certain elements of the novel by utilizing queer theory. The first subchapter will focus on the Fellowship in general, and the homosocial interactions between its different members, while the second subchapter will solely examine the relationship between Frodo and Sam.

Before moving on to the analysis proper, it should be mentioned that the word *queer* itself is used throughout the novel on quite many occasions. In a 2023 article "'We Could Do with a Bit More Queerness in These Parts': An Analysis of the Queer against the Peculiar, the Odd, and the Strange in *The Lord of the Rings*", Yvette Kisor observes that: "Given what many see as a queer subtext in the novel, the prevalence of the term can seem telling", but that it appears "Tolkien uses the word in its older meaning of 'strange, odd, peculiar, eccentric'" (Kisor 1). Despite this, Kisor points out that:

a closer look shows that Tolkien is interrogating the word and the concept, perhaps not with any sense of sexual deviance, but certainly with some sense of deviance. Further, his usage of the word in *The Lord of the Rings* can be seen to fall into specific patterns that call into question the valuation of what is identified as 'queer' that in some ways presage the modern development and usage of the word. (Kisor 1)

Indeed, the word 'queer' appears, in total, 43 times in just *The Fellowship of the Ring*. The usage of the word is most notable at the very beginning of the novel in a conversation between Sam's father Gaffer and two other hobbits, where the word appears in lines such as "It beats me why any Baggins of Hobbiton should go looking for a wife away there in Buckland, where folks are so queer" (Tolkien 22), "Mr. Frodo left an orphan and stranded, as you might say, among those queer Bucklanders" (Tolkien 23), and "Bag End's a queer place, and its folk are queerer" (Tolkien 24). Kisor notes that this works to establish a certain polarizing mentality: "Thus established is the 'us' vs. 'them' dynamic in which an inside community, those of Hobbiton, at the center of the Shire, see those at the borders as 'queer' and view them with suspicion" (Kisor 3). However, at least Gaffer does not see the term as strictly negative, and instead "insists the generosity of Bag End is of more worth and asserts that queerness itself, if those are the terms, is a positive value, thus ending the conversation in a diametrically opposed position to where he started it. Once those he loves and esteems become seen as queer, queerness itself becomes

something to value and embrace" (Kisor 3). Indeed, it could be claimed that *queerness* is a trait shared by many, if not all, of the novel's main characters, as said trait ultimately prompts them to leave for an adventure in the wider world in a most "un-hobbit-like" manner – and thus, the Fellowship, as a whole, is *defined* by its queerness.

It is evident that Tolkien's use of the term *queer* serves as a lens through which to explore notions of strangeness, peculiarity, and deviance. While the word may initially evoke a sense of otherness or suspicion, closer examination reveals a nuanced interrogation of its meaning within the context of the narrative. This nuanced portrayal of queerness underscores Tolkien's broader exploration of diversity, acceptance, and the complexity of relationships within the narrative. Thus, while the term *queer* may carry different connotations in modern discourse, its usage in *The Lord of the Rings* offers a rich and multifaceted exploration of identity and belonging.

4.1. The Fellowship

When it is formed, the Fellowship consists of nine characters in total: the hobbits Frodo, Sam, Merry and Pippin, Men warriors Aragorn and Boromir, the Dwarf Gimli, the Elf Legolas, and the wizard Gandalf. Since all of the aforementioned characters are male, homosocial interactions are, naturally, bound to happen; or, as Ruiz puts it, "somewhat compulsory given the scarcity of female characters" (Ruiz 236).

The Fellowship's internal relationships are, to some extent, hierarchical in nature. Gandalf takes on the role of both the mentor (mainly to Frodo and Aragorn) and the leader of the group, until his untimely demise, after which both roles mainly fall upon Aragorn for the remainder of the events of *The Fellowship of the Ring*. Within this hierarchy in the Fellowship, other members have distinct roles and relationships as well. Frodo, as the Ring-bearer and the primary focus of the quest, holds a central position. Sam, while technically Frodo's gardener and servant, transcends his initial role to become Frodo's most loyal and trusted companion, displaying qualities of both a friend and a protector (and, perhaps, a lover, as will be discussed in the next section). Merry and Pippin, initially portrayed as youthful and somewhat naïve – especially in the case of the latter – gradually mature throughout the journey, but still look up to the older and more experienced members of the Fellowship for guidance. Boromir, initially a proud and noble

warrior representing the interests of Gondor, challenges the group's cohesion with his desire to use the Ring, conflicting with the Fellowship's task of destroying it.

Previous research on the queer possibilities within the relationships in *The Lord of the Rings* is rather scarce – apart from the case of Frodo and Sam, whose relationship has been the subject of speculation (both academic and otherwise) for several decades now and whom we will return to in the next section. This does not mean said possibilities are nonexistent, nor does it mean they have not previously been explored through other avenues, such as the realm of fan fiction. Ruiz, indeed, notes that “in the case of *The Lord of the Rings*, the subjects of these visual narratives are usually the couples Sam/Frodo, Merry/Pippin, Aragorn/Boromir, and Legolas/Gimli” (Ruiz 232–233).

Merry and Pippin are the youngest members of the Fellowship, sometimes regarded almost as children by the people they encounter. Pippin in particular is, in several ways, immature in the beginning of the story, sometimes acting impatient or unruly, and complaining more than the other members of the Fellowship. In many ways Merry – Frodo's witty and resourceful 37-year-old⁴ cousin – acts almost as the younger Pippin's guardian at the start of the journey, steering him away from trouble. Now, it should be noted here that the two are, in fact, cousins; while Tolkien does imply that every Hobbit is related to each other to some extent, it is plainly established that Frodo, Merry and Pippin are cousins, their exact relations even shown through the family trees included in Appendix C of the novel. Regardless, as Merry and Pippin are both male, their relationship is inherently homosocial, which presents an opportunity for possibly homophilic and homoerotic encounters to occur.

Throughout the novel, as established, Merry acts sort of as Pippin's protector and moral support. As the two get captured by the Uruk-hai, Merry, despite being wounded, tries to offer Pippin comfort through humor: “Merry stood up, looking pale but grim and defiant, and very much alive. The gash in his forehead gave him no more trouble, but he bore a brown scar to the end of his days. 'Hullo, Pippin!' he said. 'So you've come on this little expedition, too? Where do we get bed and breakfast?’” (Tolkien 448). Later on they both attempt to bring each other comfort through light-hearted conversation:

⁴ Hobbits, being a longer-lived race, mature noticeably slower than Men; for instance, one's twenties, or *tweens*, are described as “the irresponsible [time] between childhood and coming of age at thirty-three” (Tolkien 21).

As they walked they compared notes, talking lightly in hobbit-fashion of the things that had happened since their capture. No listener would have guessed from their words that they had suffered cruelly, and been in dire peril, going without hope towards torment and death; or that even now, as they knew well, they had little chance of ever finding friend or safety again. 'You seem to have been doing well, Master Took,' said Merry. 'You will get almost a chapter in old Bilbo's book, if ever I get a chance to report to him.' (Tolkien 458)

These interactions are in many ways reminiscent of what British soldiers may have gone through during the First World War where camaraderie and humor often served as coping mechanisms amidst the horrors of conflict. Merry's role as Pippin's protector and source of humor mirrors the bonds formed between soldiers on the battlefield, where comrades relied on each other for emotional support and solidarity in the face of adversity; this was especially true between soldiers of different ranks: "Officers, NCOs and men on the Western Front were caught up in a web of relationships permeated by trust and dependence [...] There was pride in trusting relationships across the BEF's hierarchy and much genuine warmth between many rank and file and their officers" (Fletcher 119–120). And indeed, Merry, being the older and more mature of the two, does serve as the *de facto* leader, and the protector for Pippin.

Aragorn and Boromir share a relationship that is certainly not without its conflicts. The two are, in many ways, quite similar: they are both of the race of Men, have a sense of loyalty to the kingdom of Gondor, and are both brave and resourceful warriors who pledge their allegiance to Frodo on his task to destroy the Ring. Yet as the Fellowship moves on on their journey, the key conflict between Aragorn and Boromir becomes apparent – while Boromir wishes for the group to travel to Gondor, Aragorn decides to take another route: "Boromir held out long against this choice; but when it became plain that Frodo would follow Aragorn, wherever he went, he gave in" (Tolkien 389–390). Ultimately, Boromir momentarily succumbs to the power of the Ring and attempts to forcibly take it from Frodo, an act that serves as the main catalyst for the breaking of the Fellowship as Frodo decides to carry on his journey without the rest of the group, with the exception of his loyal servant Sam. The same event also serves as a catalyst to Boromir's demise:

A mile, maybe, from Parth Galen in a little glade not far from the lake he found Boromir. He was sitting with his back to a great tree, as if he was resting. But Aragorn saw that he was pierced with many black-feathered arrows; his sword was still in his hand, but it was broken near the hilt; his horn cloven in two was at his side. Many Orcs lay slain, piled all

about him and at his feet. Aragorn knelt beside him. Boromir opened his eyes and strove to speak. At last slow words came. 'I tried to take the Ring from Frodo,' he said. 'I am sorry. I have paid.' His glance strayed to his fallen enemies; twenty at least lay there. (Tolkien 413–414)

Aragorn is deeply moved by Boromir's actions, moving to comfort him: "'No!' said Aragorn, taking his hand and kissing his brow. 'You have conquered. Few have gained such a victory. Be at peace! Minas Tirith shall not fall!'" (Tolkien 414). The intimate act of hand-holding and kissing takes place during non-ordinary and extreme circumstances, but the act is, nevertheless, homophilic in nature; then again, it is sometimes difficult to say what is queer and what is not, since "the line that separates homosociality, homophilia and homoeroticism in *The Lord of the Rings* is sometimes really fine" (Ruiz 237). Aragorn's intention to express his compassion in Boromir's final moments in a traditionally non-masculine manner is very much representative of how the novel treats acts of male intimacy and gentleness in general.

Lastly, there is the odd couple of the elf prince Legolas and dwarf Gimli. The two are very much opposites in many ways; Legolas is described to have a "fair Elvish face", and while the novel – surprisingly enough, given that he is one of the most prominent characters – offers very little physical description of Gimli, we know he has a large beard and is most likely rugged like all dwarves. This creates an almost humorous juxtaposition in Legolas and Gimli's physical attributes, which almost caricature the dynamics of a stereotypical heterosexual couple; Legolas, with his fair Elvish features, long hair, and delicate appearance, presents a stark, feminine contrast to Gimli's masculine ruggedness, characterized by his large beard and sturdy demeanor typical of dwarves. This interplay of masculine and feminine traits adds a layer of complexity to their relationship, challenging traditional notions of gender roles and highlighting the diverse spectrum of identity within both the Fellowship and the narrative as a whole. It is also established early on that the races of Elves and Dwarves generally do not get along very well, as Gandalf remarks "'If all the grievances that stand between Elves and Dwarves are to be brought up here, we may as well abandon this Council'" (Tolkien 255). This conflict is further elaborated on when the Fellowship journeys to Moria:

'Well, here we are at last!' said Gandalf. 'Here the Elvenway from Hollin ended. Holly was the token of the people of that land, and they planted it here to mark the end of their domain; for the West-door was made chiefly for their use in their traffic with the Lords of

Moria. Those were happier days, when there was still close friendship at times between folk of different race, even between Dwarves and Elves.' 'It was not the fault of the Dwarves that the friendship waned,' said Gimli. 'I have not heard that it was the fault of the Elves,' said Legolas. 'I have heard both,' said Gandalf; 'and I will not give judgement now. But I beg you two, Legolas and Gimli, at least to be friends, and to help me. I need you both.' (Tolkien 303)

This animosity, too, is reminiscent of the kind of (manufactured) divide that is commonly built between men and women, and is evidenced in popular culture, such as in works like *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus* (1992) by John Gray. Gray's book, and the pervasive attitudes surrounding it have been widely studied too, such as in the work *Men and women in interaction: reconsidering the differences* (1996) by Elizabeth Aries:

There are certain widely held beliefs about gender differences in the interaction styles of men and women [...] Many have drawn attention to the opposition between male and female styles, and gender differences in interaction have been portrayed as absolute differences. (vii)

These differences are, of course, not absolute in truth, even if the belief in them is: "The stronger our belief in gender differences, the more firmly we will keep current gender arrangements in place" (Aries ix). And, as becomes evident, neither are the differences between Dwarves and Elves.

It appears to be the case even in the case of *The Lord of the Rings*, that opposites attract. It is only a few chapters later that Legolas's and Gimli's friendship seems to have blossomed, and the two are described sharing a boat together: "and in the third were Legolas and Gimli, who had now become fast friends" (Tolkien 372). The two indeed become fiercely loyal to each other, protecting each other if needed, such as when Eomer threatens Gimli: "'I would cut off your head, beard and all, Master Dwarf, if it stood but a little higher from the ground,' said Eomer. 'He stands not alone,' said Legolas, bending his bow and fitting an arrow with hands that moved quicker than sight. 'You would die before your stroke fell'" (Tolkien 432-433). The two also engage in friendly banter, and even compete on which of them can kill more orcs - this competition seems to be, too, a playful one, as Legolas does not appear to take offense in Gimli winning it: "'Forty-two, Master Legolas!' he [Gimli] cried. 'Alas! My axe is notched: the forty-second had an iron collar on his neck. How is it with you?' 'You have passed my score by one,'

answered Legolas. 'But I do not grudge you the game, so glad am I to see you on your legs!'" (Tolkien 543). They even make plans to travel together if they both survive the War of the Ring intact:

'You move me, Gimli,' said Legolas. 'I have never heard you speak like this before. Almost you make me regret that I have not seen these caves. Come! Let us make this bargain – if we both return safe out of the perils that await us, we will journey for a while together. You shall visit Fangorn with me, and then I will come with you to see Helm's Deep.' 'That would not be the way of return that I should choose,' said Gimli. 'But I will endure Fangorn, if I have your promise to come back to the caves and share their wonder with me.' 'You have my promise,' said Legolas. (Tolkien 548)

And indeed, by the end of the novel Legolas and Gimli journey together both to the caves and to Fangorn, and finally, as revealed in the lengthy appendixes, out of Middle-Earth and to the Undying Lands: "We have heard tell that Legolas took Gimli Glóin's son with him because of their great friendship, greater than any that has been between Elf and Dwarf. If this is true, then it is strange indeed: that a Dwarf should be willing to leave Middle-earth for any love" (Tolkien 1081). Here, Tolkien even points out the exceptionally strong bond of mutual love these two characters share, going so far as to emphasize its significance on a racial/cultural level.

It would perhaps be wise to point out that Tolkien seems to put more importance on his characters' diverse ancestries and cultural backgrounds than gender, per se: in the world of Middle-earth, it can be surmised that a heterosexual couple belonging to two different species would most probably stir up more controversy than a same-sex couple of a singular folk. However, further examining the societal tensions between Tolkien's different races is, unfortunately, beyond the scope of this thesis.

The relationship between Legolas and Gimli serves as an example of camaraderie transcending societal norms and expectations. Despite belonging to historically antagonistic races, their relationship blossoms amidst adversity, defying the conventions of their respective cultures. Their bond is characterized by mutual respect, loyalty, and genuine affection, exemplifying a form of intimacy that challenges traditional notions of male friendship.

4.2. Frodo and Sam

The relationship between Frodo and Sam could easily be identified as the driving force behind the entire story of *The Lord of the Rings*. While theirs is not the only important or meaningful storyline, it is, arguably, where the heart of the story lies. And although different adaptations and retellings of the story sometimes change or leave out multiple details and parts of the books, one thing seems to always be the same; the relationship of Frodo and Sam, and how central it is to the plot. Valerie Rohy, author of the article "On Fairy Stories" (2004), goes as far as to suggest, that "Sam and Frodo enjoy greater intimacy, while the ring endures, than the couples whose weddings the novel will finally celebrate" (Rohy 939). Additionally, Frodo himself states that the whole mission to destroy the One Ring would have probably failed very quickly without the help of his companion: "'Frodo wouldn't have got far without Sam'" (Tolkien 712).

Frodo and Sam share a relationship that is highly intense and intimate; they are regularly physically affectionate with each other, holding hands and sleeping beside each other multiple times throughout the novel. In addition, the pair often exchange tender words, and, as most of their story is told from the perspective of Sam, the reader can get a clear glimpse of his thoughts on Frodo and their relationship. Sam appears to admire Frodo and his love for him is unconditional; Ruiz quite effectively sums up these feelings: "Frodo means everything to Sam, who always puts his needs first" (Ruiz 202). Sam's love for Frodo is indeed so great that, when thinking Frodo has died, he expresses his unwillingness to continue living without him: "They had better both be dead together" (Tolkien 732). This love and devotion does not seem to be one-sided, as Frodo also expresses his affection towards Sam multiple times in the story. He calls Sam "dear Sam" on multiple occasions, saves him from drowning at the end of *The Fellowship of the Ring*, and is fully content with the thought of dying with him: "'I am glad you are here with me. Here at the end of all things, Sam'" (Tolkien 947).

One of the first intimate moments between Frodo and Sam occurs when Frodo is recovering in Rivendell near the end of the first part of *The Fellowship of the Ring*. While he is still resting in his bed, Sam rushes to him: "He [Sam] ran to Frodo and took his left hand, awkwardly and shyly. He stroked it gently and then he blushed and turned hastily away". Sam goes on to

imply that he has held Frodo by his hand multiple times: "It's warm! [...] Meaning your hand, Mr. Frodo. It has felt so cold through the long nights" (Tolkien 225). This gesture, while seemingly very small, has a quite large significance, so much so that in Peter Jackson's movie adaptation of *The Fellowship of the Ring* (2001), Gandalf's actor Sir Ian McKellen encouraged the actors of Frodo and Sam to do it:

When I suggested to SEAN [Sam's actor] that he took ELIJAH's [Frodo's actor] hand it was because I thought anyone who knew the book would care about the deep friendship often of an innocently physical nature, and that might be missed by two resolutely heterosexual actors who mightn't appreciate that gay people like myself saw in a touch something perhaps more meaningful than others might. (McKellen)

Later on in the story, Frodo and Sam are separated from the rest of their fellowship, and continue their journey to Mordor alone. As the burden of the One Ring starts to wear Frodo down, Sam becomes his physical and emotional support: "He [Sam] put Frodo in front of him now, and kept a watchful eye on every movement of his, supporting him if he stumbled, and trying to encourage him with clumsy words" (Tolkien 631). Sam's concern for Frodo is, in a certain way, almost parental, as he tries to make sure that Frodo is getting enough rest: "'I'd be dearly glad to see you have a sleep. I'd keep watch over you; and anyway, if you lay near, with my arm round you, no one could come pawing you without your Sam knowing it'" (Tolkien 714). And, Sam is fully prepared to carry Frodo when the latter's strength is completely gone due to the burden he is carrying: "'I can't carry it for you, but I can carry you and it as well. So up you get! Come on, Mr. Frodo dear! Sam will give you a ride. Just tell him where to go, and he'll go'" (Tolkien 940).

Frodo and Sam are constantly physically affectionate towards each other on their harrowing journey. There are various examples in the text of Sam caressing or holding Frodo; when he wakes Frodo up, Tolkien describes how "gently he smoothed the hair back from Frodo's brow, and bending down spoke softly to him" (Tolkien 715), to which Frodo reacts by smiling. At a later point, as Sam rescues Frodo from imprisonment at the tower of Cirith Ungol, the two share another tender moment: "he [Frodo] lay back in Sam's gentle arms, closing his eyes, like a child at rest when nightfears are driven away by some loved voice or hand / Sam felt that he could sit like that in endless happiness" (Tolkien 910). When Frodo is shivering from cold, Sam is upset that he left his blanket behind, opting to then try to "comfort Frodo with his arms and body" (Tolkien 940). As Frodo is almost taken over by darkness and asks Sam to hold his hand,

Sam immediately complies: "Sam took his master's hands and laid them together, palm to palm, and kissed them; and then he held them gently between his own" (Tolkien 943). Thus, Sam is comforting Frodo through gentle touches at every chance he gets.

In addition to the physical demonstrations of love between Frodo and Sam, the sentiment is also expressed verbally in the text, mainly through Sam's thoughts. As he is watching Frodo sleep, Sam quietly mutters: "'I love him. He's like that, and sometimes it shines through, somehow. But I love him, whether or no'" (Tolkien 652). Sam's words seem to quite unambiguously express how he loves Frodo, no matter what. Another occasion of the text simply stating Sam's love for Frodo is when he is searching for Frodo at the tower of Cirith Ungol: "His love for Frodo rose above all other thoughts, and forgetting his peril he cried aloud: 'I'm coming, Mr. Frodo!'" (Tolkien 899).

Even after the One Ring is destroyed and the heroes return home, the bond between Frodo and Sam stays. When Sam is expressing his desire to become married he is conflicted, feeling "torn in two" between his wife-to-be Rose Cotton, and Frodo. Frodo further confirms this: "'you want to get married, and yet you want to live with me in Bag End, too?'" (Tolkien 1024). Furthermore, Sam later ends up naming one of his children after Frodo.

Interestingly enough, the idea of hints of homoeroticism in *The Lord of the Rings* is not entirely a new one, with the earliest mention of it appearing in a 1962 review of the story by Edmund Fuller (Rohy 928). However, before the twenty-first century these ideas were not widely accepted, and academic material of the relationship through romantic or sexual perspective was quite scarce. With the rise of the queer theory at the end of the twentieth century, and the release of the 2001–2003 film adaptations by Peter Jackson making *The Lord of the Rings* accessible to a wider audience, the idea of the relationship of Frodo and Sam having homoerotic implications became more popular. Naturally, the concept has met some resistance, with people pointing at the marriage between Sam and Rosie contradicting with his possible relationship with Frodo, or stating that the idea of any homoeroticism would ruin the friendship between the two. While these concerns are surely legitimate for some, they raise a question of certain elements of homophobia and the dismissal of homosexual relationships as something "lesser" or sinful.

Certainly, the deep level of intimacy Frodo and Sam share can be interpreted as romantic and/or sexual in nature. The physical actions between the two men, such as holding hands,

sleeping together and embracing, could easily be categorized as actions typical for lovers. Similarly, Sam blushing upon touching Frodo's hand could be seen as a sign of infatuation. There is also the curious fact of Frodo staying unmarried and fairly uninterested in women; while it could be theorized that this lack of interest comes from the trauma he has gone through, there is also the possible option of him not taking interest in women due to not conforming to the heteronormative ideas of society. In other words, Frodo could be read as a queer character. Sam's marriage to Rose Cotton is also puzzling, as the idea of him having feelings for her comes up very abruptly near the end of the story, with barely no foreshadowing – though it should be mentioned here that *The Lord of the Rings* in general is rather devoid of (heterosexual) romance, with considerably more attention paid on homosocial relationships and interactions within the story. Additionally, as mentioned before, some time before his wedding Sam remarks he feels "torn in two", which could be interpreted as him harboring feelings for both Rose and Frodo. With that in mind, Sam's sexuality could be categorized under the sphere of bisexuality, as it seems he is capable of feeling affection (and attraction) to both men (Frodo) and women (Rose). But, since the exact nature of Frodo's and Sam's relationship and their individual sexual (and romantic) orientation is not (nor can be) confirmed, perhaps the most fitting description for them is, in its simplicity, queer.

Of course, the Victorian views on male intimacy mentioned in the previous section cannot be fully ignored here. As has been previously noted, Tolkien took part in the First World War, and his experiences of homosocial relationships were undoubtedly shaped by that. However, as Anna Smol points out in her article "'Oh... Oh... Frodo!': Readings of Male Intimacy in 'The Lord of the Rings'" (2004):

In calling on his experiences of the First World War in the writing of *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien was writing about male friendship as experienced by many men at the time, but his book was only published years after the Second World War, when male intimacy such as that experienced by Frodo and Sam might have seemed ridiculous, outdated, or, possibly, [...] sexually inadequate. (955)

It is true that Tolkien based the character of Sam on the batmen he met during the war (Smol 962). It is also true (as discussed in the next chapter) that the line between homosocial and homosexual blurred during times of World War One and Two, when men had to rely on each other for intimacy. Indeed, Smol notes that "the batman-officer relationship was one that could

encourage the physical and emotional intimacies that occurred between men in the war" (963). A queer reading of Frodo and Sam may not have been what Tolkien intended – or how most of the readers at the time of publication viewed the characters – but it is nevertheless grown to be a beloved interpretation. As Smol observes:

Clearly, the contemporary audience is responding in various ways to aspects of Tolkien's work, and one of the features that has caused some debate and given rise to a creative outburst is the nature of the friendships that the story represents. Fifty years after *The Lord of the Rings* was first published, the homosocial relationship of Frodo and Sam has become the ground for challenging ideas about both male and female sexuality and gender roles. (967)

The relationship between Frodo and Sam emerges as the driving force of the story in *The Lord of the Rings*. Rohy's assertion that Sam and Frodo share a greater intimacy than the couples whose weddings conclude the novel underscores the depth of their relationship, as does the text itself; their love is palpable in the tender moments they share, from physical affection to verbal expressions of admiration and devotion. Sam's unwavering commitment to Frodo, even in the face of seemingly insurmountable challenges, epitomizes the essence of their bond. While interpretations of their relationship may vary, what remains undeniable is the authenticity and purity of their love. They are two men – two male Hobbits – who share a deeply intimate and loving relationship that is based on mutual devotion, love and respect. Their bond transcends conventional labels, challenging societal norms and expectations, and it is the love they have for each other that gives them the strength to face all the evil and adversity that comes their way. It is a love so beautifully and authentically real, beautifully *queer*, serving as their guiding light through the darkness of Mordor and beyond.

5. The Question of Authorial Intent

In the previous section we have examined *The Lord of the Rings*, its narrative and characters through the lense of queer theory and theories on queer masculinities. Authorial intent behind several of the examined parts of the novel have been alluded to, but not fully speculated on. This chapter aims to take a look at Tolkien's role as the author of *The Lord of the Rings*, his potential authorial intentions, and, the question whether they even matter in the end. The concept of "death of the author" will be shortly introduced and discussed here.

The concept of 'death of the author' was first introduced in the critical essay "The Death of the Author" (1967) by Roland Barthes. Barthes notes how critical literary analysis has, in many ways, relied on the role of the author and what meaning they instill onto the text. This, however, in many ways limits the analysis: "Once the Author is removed, the claim to decipher a text becomes quite futile. To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing" (Barthes 147). Barthes argues that to separate the author from the text, and to look at the text as a separate entity, is in many ways liberating:

In the multiplicity of writing, everything is to be *disentangled*, nothing *deciphered*; the structure can be followed- 'run' (like the thread of a stocking) at every point and at every level, but there is nothing beneath: the space of writing is to be ranged over, not pierced; writing ceaselessly·posits meaning ceaselessly to evaporate it, carrying out a systematic exemption of meaning. In precisely this way literature [...], by refusing to assign a 'secret', an ultimate meaning, to the text [...], liberates what may be called an anti-theological activity, an activity that is truly revolutionary since to refuse to fix meaning is, in the end, to refuse God and his hypostases - reason, science, law. (Barthes 147, emphasis original).

In other words, Barthes argues for the autonomy of the text, liberated from the constraints of authorial intent. By divorcing the text from its creator, readers (and literary scholars) are encouraged to engage in a dynamic process of interpretation, where meaning is not fixed but constantly negotiated. This approach to literary analysis fosters a multiplicity of readings, each valid in its own right, and undermines the notion of a singular, authoritative interpretation imposed by the author.

Tolkien's infamous dislike of allegory has been noted by many readers and scholars alike. In his foreword to *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien made a rather clear-cut statement on his stance:

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 thought and experience of readers. I think that many confuse 'applicability' with 'allegory'; but the one resides in the freedom of the reader, and the other in the purposed domination of the author. (Tolkien xxiv)

It would thus seem that Tolkien encouraged the readers of his works to apply the idea of "death of the author" and find meanings within the text themselves. He, however, did note that his (and authors' in general) experiences affect the text, but that attempting to speculate how exactly is gratuitous: "An author cannot of course remain wholly unaffected by his experience, but the ways in which a story-germ uses the soil of experience are extremely complex, and attempts to define the process are at best guesses from evidence that is inadequate and ambiguous" (Tolkien xxiv).

When faced with interpretations of *The Lord of the Rings* that do not necessarily fit the norm of what some consider "appropriate" literary analysis and critique – such as queer interpretations – some readers react with opposition, hostility even. Authorial intent is often evoked, with appeals to Tolkien's Catholic faith as one of the main reasons why, for example, a queer interpretation of his works would be inappropriate. It is true that same-sex relationships (and other displays of queerness such as transness) are commonly condemned by Catholic Church officials – especially so during Tolkien's lifetime and the time he wrote *The Lord of the Rings* in the 1940s. However, being queer was not unheard of, and Tolkien, who was in correspondence with several queer authors, was likely not unfamiliar with the idea. Moreover, Tolkien took part in the First World War, and war, as already acknowledged earlier in this thesis, provides unusual circumstances for many kinds of things. As Paul Jackson writes in the second edition of his work *One of the Boys: Homosexuality in the Military During World War II*⁵ (2010): "While the bonds of family were both strengthened and weakened as a result of military necessity, individuals found themselves in extraordinary circumstances that presented previously unknown sexual possibilities" (16). Furthermore, he notes that "the unusual had become commonplace in wartime England, and the abnormal normal. Heterosexual and

⁵ While Jackson's work deals with the Second World War, I argue that his findings can be easily applied to First World War as well.

homosexual behaviours of all kinds flourished in the war environment, at all levels of society" (Jackson 16). So, Tolkien, who had taken part in a war, was more than likely familiar with these practices, and more than likely witnessed strong homosocial relationships during his time in the British armed forces. As Jackson observes: "Evidence from the war teaches us that a great many men formed exceptionally close bonds with their comrades in the course of their service. These bonds were formed between queer men and straight men, between straight men, and between homosexuals" (Jackson 18). So, while some may resist interpretations of *The Lord of the Rings* that deviate from traditional literary analysis, such as queer readings, it is essential to acknowledge the broader context in which Tolkien wrote and lived; while his personal views on queerness remain speculative, it's evident that he was not unfamiliar with its existence, and his work may indeed offer space for queer interpretations.

As noted in the previous chapter, queer interpretations of *The Lord of the Rings* have indeed grown more widely-known and popular. In recent years, several news sites and journals have published articles discussing these queer readings, from *The Guardian* to *Polygon* and *Medium*. The titles of these articles already reveal their subject matter; titles such as "Queer readings of The Lord of the Rings are not accidents" (2021), "'Lord of the Rings' Is Still Gayer Than Ever" (2023) and "The very, very queer history of *Lord of the Rings* – from Gandalf's sexuality to Frodo and Sam" (2022) are not subtle in expressing how popular queer interpretations of *The Lord of the Rings* are. Queer themes of the novel have also been explored through video medium, such as in the video essay "The Queer History of *The Lord of the Rings*" (2024) by the YouTube content creator and video essayist Verity Ritchie, better known by her username *verilybitchie*.

In addition to the articles and essays, queer interpretations of *The Lord of the Rings* have also inspired countless fan works, such as fan fiction and fan art. As of April 2024, the most popular pairings in *Lord of the Rings* fan fiction on the popular fan fiction site *Archive of Our Own* are Frodo/Sam⁶, Legolas/Gimli, and Legolas/Aragorn, each of which have garnered thousands of fanfics. Additionally, sites like X (formerly *Twitter*), *Tumblr*, and *DeviantArt* are hosts to numerous amounts of fan art depicting the male characters (most commonly Frodo and Sam and Legolas and Gimli) in homoromantic or homoerotic scenarios. The role of fan communities (or *fandoms*,

⁶ This genre of fan fiction is commonly called 'slash fiction', referring to the '/' aka. *slash* symbol between the characters' names that signifies a romantic pairing.

as they are commonly called) has only grown due to the rise of the internet, and their importance in defining literary works (and other works of media) cannot be ignored. Fandom studies is an emerging field of media and literary studies, and while several studies on different fan communities have been published over the past decade, there has not yet been much research on *The Lord of the Rings* fandom, or the fan works the community has produced. Fanfiction in particular is a field filled with many possibilities, as it, in a way, applies the concept of 'death of the author' by its existence:

It may not be coincidental that the specter of authorial intention, cast out with the rise of poststructuralism and postmodernism, coincides with fan fiction's beginnings. The interpretive power shifted away from the author and even the text. Instead, it resides in the process of reading and interpretation [...] In a way, fan fiction might be read as a fictional embodiment of this collaborative reading process, although it is also a creative text in its own right. From its inception, fan fiction has always been multiple: entertainment and analysis, original and derivative. (Hellekson and Busse 19–20)

Indeed, fanfiction as a genre is unique compared to more "traditional" forms of literature. It is transformative and interpretive, as Hellekson and Busse note: "Fan writers perform interpretive functions when redefining characters, retelling story lines differently, and changing points of view" (22). With these qualities in mind, this aspect of the *The Lord of the Rings* – that is, fan interpretations, works, and fandom – offer an interesting opportunity of research in the future.

In conclusion, the examination of *The Lord of the Rings* through the lens of queer theory and theories on queer masculinities opens up a rich avenue of interpretation that challenges traditional literary analysis. As evidenced by the growing popularity of queer interpretations of *The Lord of the Rings* in recent years, from mainstream media coverage to fan works and discussions within online communities, it is clear that these readings resonate deeply with audiences. The emergence of fandom studies as an academic field highlights the importance of fan communities in shaping our understanding of literary works and their cultural significance.

6. Conclusion

This thesis started out with a look at the history of queer theory, then on the study of queer masculinities, as well as queerness in general in literature. From there I moved to queer studies focused on fantasy fiction in particular. The analysis proper first examined queer masculinities in *The Lord of the Rings*, taking a look at the act of crying, then moving on to study how different characters portray masculinity in the novel, namely Aragorn, Gandalf, Sam, and Frodo. Then I examined queerness – homosociality and homosexuality in particular – in the novel, first from a more general point of view and then focusing specifically on Frodo and Sam. Finally, the thesis briefly discussed the question of authorial intent, and what role Tolkien, his ideas and his life play when examining his works.

In essence, queer readings of *The Lord of the Rings* are, in some ways, almost obvious, given the close, in many ways intimate interactions between the male characters, Frodo and Sam in particular. Interpreting these male relationships as queer is, as evident in Ian McKellen's commentary, quite straightforward and an easy conclusion to be made, especially for readers (and researches) who are queer themselves, and can recognize themselves in these interactions. That is partly why these interpretations are indeed so important. Additionally, in a time where masculinity is a hot and controversial discussion topic both off- and online, examinations of portrayals of masculinity that differ from the hegemonic model many are used to are also important and refreshing in many ways.

As evident through prior studies and articles mentioned, as well as the observations and remarks made in this thesis, research on queer masculinities and queer characterizations in *The Lord of the Rings* is an area with rich and vast possibilities. While this analysis has provided valuable insights into the themes of queerness within Tolkien's work, it is important to recognize that this is just the beginning. In particular, the emergence of fandom studies offers a great opportunity to observe queer readings from an entirely new perspective, not only taking into account the intent behind the text itself, but the way fans of the work engage with it, from fan theories to fan art and fanfiction. The backlash these queer readings have received, as well as the long-ongoing form of (possibly homophobic) comedy driven from the intimate relationships between the male characters in *The Lord of the Rings* is also something that could be delved further into in future research. These areas were, unfortunately, beyond the scope of this thesis,

and were thus discussed only very briefly and from a surface level. The same applies to Peter Jackson's film adaptations; while they were mentioned, this thesis had its focus more on Tolkien's novel itself than the adaptations of it, no matter how relevant they may be to the contemporary discussion on *The Lord of the Rings*. Discussions of the female characters were also largely left out, although one could argue there is not that much material to analyze, except perhaps for the character of Eowyn whose act of disguising herself as a man could certainly be examined from a queer perspective.

The journey of inquiry into queer themes in *The Lord of the Rings* is far from over. Queer readings of the novel have existed since its publication, and they will continue to do so as long as the novel and its adaptations remain as beloved as they are: a staple of the fantasy (and arguably literary) canon. As we navigate this ongoing exploration, it is imperative to remain aware of the evolving socio-cultural landscape that shapes interpretations of Tolkien's work. The popularity of *The Lord of the Rings* ensures that discussions surrounding queerness within its pages will persist, serving as a testament to the enduring relevance and complexity of the text, and what it can mean to people, queer or not.

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