Chapter 4

The Exploration of the Limits of the Intertraditional Dialogue in *The Lord of the Rings*

In a narrative that constantly puts narrative traditions in dialogue, like *The Lord of the Rings*, it becomes peremptory for any critic who aims at analysing the presence of different literary genres in this work, to take into account the particular *dynamics* of the intertraditional dialogue. Quite obviously, given that *The Lord of the Rings* is not *exclusively* a novel, it would be misleading and absurd to read and judge it exclusively from a novel perspective, as it would be to complain about the limited psychological evolution of Ulysses in the *Odyssey*, the impossibility of Atlas being turned into a mountain in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the excessive emphasis on heroic feats in *Chanson de Roland*, or the lack of verisimilitude in the descriptions of physical space in *Le Mort D'Arthur*, to mention four examples from different narrative traditions.

The challenge of analysing literary genre in Tolkien's work is further increased by the fact that the character-drawing, the descriptions of action and the treatment of different themes are not coherent from the point of view of any fixed, genre-based conventions, but seem to acquire coherence from the *dialogue* between traditions. Depending on the particular narrative characteristics of each situation, the traditions may merge or clash, adding or aborting the influence of others. This process defines a great deal of the narrative treatment of characters, physical space and action, and an important part of the narrative is dedicated to exploring the constraints of the literary traditions in dialogue.

One of the many striking features of *The Lord of the Rings* is the flexibility with which the main characters move between different narrative traditions. I think mainly of Frodo, who ends up assimilating all of these traditions to a greater or lesser extent, but also of Gandalf and Aragorn. Lobdell (2004:36) says that "Tolkien's use of different style for different stages of the action may not be entirely successful [...] but it is important to see that this is what he is

trying to do", and he adds: "Throughout *The Lord of the Rings*, the diction matches, or is intended to match, the action". (Lobdell 2004:37)

The question is whether the diction is only intended to match the action, or whether there are other factors that may be able to alter it. When contemplating the flexibility of the above-mentioned characters, a great number of questions inevitably come to my mind. For example, is Aragorn, an essentially epic character, influenced by the hobbits toward novel standards in Bree, or is it the other way around? If he *is* influenced, is it due to the characters, the physical space or to the action? And why is Sam hardly mentioned in the episode taking place at Tom Bombadil's house? Could it be that the setting, events and characters of the sequence are more related to romance and myth than to the predominant narrative tradition of the Shire, and Sam, being more informed as a character by the nineteenth-century novel than the others, is unable to relate to them?

This leads me to the more general question of whether all of the apparent contradictions and inconsistencies regarding character-drawing, style, choice of focalization, etc., may be explained by the particular dynamics of the intertraditional dialogue. However, the most interesting question is perhaps the following: to what extent does the totality of the work depend on the narrative demands of this dialogue?

In order to carry out the analysis as such, I will take into account three different narrative levels. The first one is the *generic* level, which is composed of what I perceive as the four fundamental Western narrative traditions – myth, epic, romance and novel. Within each of these traditions there are a number of sub-genres and possible combinations, such as the *chanson de geste*, the medieval romance, the adventure novel, etc., which will be considered parts of the basic paradigms mentioned above.

The second narrative level is the *situational* one. This level is made up of five main influences that, depending on the circumstances, *may* be capable of altering the general direction of the intertraditional dialogue: the physical space, the characters, the theme, the action, and the focalization. Because of their potential as decisive conductors of the dialogue, we can also call them

'dialoguemes'. I will call any particular combination of these five influences a 'narrative zone' (which in Bakhtin's terminology would correspond to a minor chronotope).

With the *physical space*, I will refer to any given location of variable extension, such as the Shire, Rivendell, Minas Tirith or Mordor. It can also be a particular building, for example the *Prancing Pony* and the tower of Cirith Ungol, or a natural environment, like the fields of Cormallen or the Old Forest.

When talking about the *characters*, I will refer to the dominating narrative tradition associated to a particular character, or set of characters, in a given narrative zone. There are characters, like Gandalf, Aragorn and Frodo, that show different degrees of adherence to different traditions depending on the narrative zone, while others, like Éomer, Legolas and Sam, are less flexible.

The main activity carried out by the protagonists of each narrative zone will be considered as the *action*. The action may be both internal (thoughts, dreams) and external (warfare, conversation, travelling, etc.).

The *theme* is the basis for the action, whereby the presence of different characters may add different themes to a given situation. As with the chronotopes, there are major and minor themes. For example, we might say that the two great themes in *The Lord of the Rings* are the moral corruption brought by power and the implications of the passing of time for mortals and immortals. Within this global thematic context, there are a number of lesser themes, associated to different characters and places, such as the price and rewards of loyalty in the case of Sam Gamgee, Aragorn's renewal of the kingdom, the defeatism of Denethor, etc. Each narrative zone may also yield even lesser themes, such as Éowyn's unrequited love for Aragorn, Boromir's heroic redemption, the courage of Merry on the fields of the Pelennor, etc.

The *focalization* is another resource that the narrator may use in order to manipulate the presentation of the fictional reality. In *The Lord of the Rings*, Frodo is the narrator of the greater part of the story, but he is not always the focalizer. As narrator, he may choose to transfer the focalization to another character, usually when he has not been there himself to bear witness of the

events, but sometimes also when he *has* been present (as in the episode that takes place in front of the Black Gate), due to the demands of the intertraditional dialogue.[137]

The third narrative level which is part of our analysis is the *transitional*; that is, the way in which the narrative moves from one tradition to another in a given narrative zone. There are seven basic types of transitions, divided in two groups. The first group is made up of *prepared transitions*. Within this group, there are five different types: the *accepted invitation*, that takes the narrative quickly, and without hardly any dialogue, from one tradition to another due to a powerful presence of one or more elements of the situational level; the *rejected invitation*, that blocks the transition due to an inhibiting presence of elements of the situational level; the *dialogue*, which combines two or more traditions for some time and ends up with the predominance of one of them; the *mélange*, that combines different traditions without any clear direction; and the *meta-dialogue*, that involves an explicit reference, on behalf of the narrator or the characters, of the presence of a narrative transition.

The second group is made up of *unprepared transitions*; that is, transitions that are not preceded by a growing presence of new narrative elements from other traditions. These may have two results: either they manage to efficiently introduce a new tradition into the narrative (from the point of view of narrative fluency), in which case we would speak of an *intruder*, or else they don't, which would be called *arrested intruder*.

The present analysis is not an attempt at disclosing *all* the aspects of the interaction between traditions in *The Lord of the Rings* – this would be impossible in a work of this limited extension – but rather to offer an introduction to its dynamics that might explain the general movements, which in turn condition both the writing and the reading of Tolkien's masterpiece. For this

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137 As Segura (2004:122-129) explains, Frodo compiles all the information needed for his chronicle from the different members of the Fellowship. After that he turns the information into a narratively efficient sequence, which implies, among other things, a careful selection of what we may call secondary narrators and focalizers. Sometimes, Frodo the narrator yields his focalization to other characters, for instance to Aragorn in the chapter 'The Breaking of the Fellowship', or to an omniscient eye, as in the battle on the Fields of the Pelennor.

reason, I will concentrate on certain situations and characters that show how the presence of different narrative paradigms are integrated in the dialogue, and how the combination becomes a self-exploratory process that lays the foundation for a great part of the plot-making and character-drawing in this work.

Finally, my aim is not to offer a definitive explanation of the creative process that gave rise to *The Lord of the Rings*, to which no one but Tolkien himself – and perhaps not even he, as he implies in one of his letters (*Letters*, 145) – ever had access, but to interpret the interaction between narrative traditions using the text as the only point of departure. If this approach should yield plausible evidence for how the creative process may have worked, it should be looked upon as an addition to (rather than an attempt at annihilation of) other critical interpretations.

I am also conscious that Tolkien would probably not agree with many of the interpretations that will be presented in this chapter. However, if the text itself should offer the possibility of such interpretations, I will not refrain from presenting them just because the author categorically denies, for example, that the theme of courtly love should be among his favourite subjects in medieval romance. Whether the author wants it or not, it is perfectly possible that such a theme might sneak into the narrative at one point or another. At the same time, the author's opinion is as interesting as that of any other qualified critic of his work, therefore I will not deny him the right to speak whenever he should have something to say about the situation that is being analysed, whether supporting or denying the hypothesis.

As a consequence, the autobiographical data or opinions of the author will never constitute a decisive argument for or against the presence of any narrative tradition in the text, but there will be room for them in the analysis. Likewise, the explicit mentioning of possible literary sources for places, characters, actions and themes will only be used as support for the argument, not as a validation. In the first place, I will always detect the presence or absence of narrative paradigms with reference to the conclusions of the second chapter of this study, which will be further complemented with opinions taken from other studies on the characteristics of particular literary genres.

We will begin by looking at four exemplary passages from *The Lord of the Rings* that show its generic diversity. The first piece takes place at Bag End:

> Gandalf crept to one side of the window. Then with a dart he sprang to the sill, and thrust a long arm out and downwards. There was a squawk, and up came Sam Gamgee's curly head hauled by one ear.
>
> 'Well, well, bless my beard!' said Gandalf. 'Sam Gamgee is it? Now what may you be doing?
>
> 'Lor bless you, Mr. Gandalf, sir!' said Sam. 'Nothing! Leastways I was just trimming the grass-border under the window, if you follow me.' (*LotR*, 77)

The second example comes from Amon Hen:

> He heard himself crying out: *Never, never!* Or was it: *Verily I come, I come to you?* He could not tell. Then as a flash from some other point of power there came to his mind another thought: *Take it off! Take it off! Fool, take it off! Take off the Ring!*
>
> The two powers strove in him. For a moment, perfectly balanced between their piercing points, he writhed, tormented. Frodo, neither the Voice nor the Eye: free to choose, and with one remaining instant in which to do so. He took the Ring off his finger. (*LotR*, 421)

Our third passage is taken from the Battle of the Pelennor Fields:

> Then Théoden was aware of him, and would not wait for his onset, but crying to Snowmane he charged headlong to greet him. Great was the clash of their meeting. But the white fury of the Northmen burned the hotter, and more skilled was their knighthood and bitter. Fewer were they but they clove through the Southrons like a fire-bolt in a forest. Right through the press drove Théoden Thengel's son, and his spear was shivered as he threw down their chieftain. Out swept his sword, and he spurred to the standard, hewed staff and bearer; and the black serpent foundered. (*LotR*, 872-873)

The final example is from the fields of Cormallen:

> And all the host laughed and wept, and in the midst of their merriment and tears the clear voice of the minstrel rose like silver and gold, and all men were hushed. And he sang to them, now in Elven tongue, now in the speech of the West, until their hearts, wounded with sweet words, overflowed, and their joy was like swords, and they passed in thought out to regions where pain and delight flow together and tears are the very wine of blessedness. (*LotR*, 990)

Put next to each other in this way, out of context, it is hard to imagine that the narrator of these passages is one and the same, the stylistic and thematic

differences being so great. However, while almost all readers of *The Lord of the Rings* are aware of the varied diction, they do not usually seem to consider the variations incongruent and the work fragmented. In this chapter, I will try to explain why this is so.

4.1. Leaving the Shire

In *The Lord of the Rings*, the narrative treatment of the Shire entails a series of problems related to the question of how to integrate it in the larger universe of Middle-earth. These difficulties are to a great extent derived from the creative labours of the author, who did not know how or where the story would end when he first wrote this part of the narrative.[138] The tale starts off almost casually in the Shire, the land of the hobbits, where Tolkien had left Bilbo at the end of *The Hobbit* several years earlier, but the story soon becomes more complicated than that of its predecessor, and the first chapters of *The Lord of the Rings* clearly show the problems that arose when Tolkien subsequently realised that he needed to take the hobbits and the reader from one narrative universe (that of *The Hobbit*) to another (Middle-earth as presented in the greater part of *The Lord of the Rings*). This first part of the journey, from Hobbiton to Crickhollow, becomes an exploration of the strategies that Tolkien had to develop in order to bring the two worlds closer to each other.

The outcome of this process shows the Shire as an idealised reconstruction of a rural England, prior to the Great War,[139] and the literary traditions that Tolkien uses to portray this world belong fundamentally to the realm of the novel,[140] especially the Victorian novel. As an example, we can clearly see the influence of Dickens's *The Pickwick Papers* in Bilbo's birthday speech. Two examples from the texts will make our point clearer. The first one is taken from Bilbo's

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138 The best book to understand the creative process behind the writing of this part of the story is, naturally, *The Return of the Shadow* (Tolkien 2000). Christopher Tolkien's annotated transcription of the original manuscript (together with the successive revisions) reveal that the author of *The Lord of the Rings* did not know from the start what would happen to his main characters, nor where they were headed. See also *Letters* (letter 163).

139 See Shippey (2003:102-103), and *Letters* (letters 181, 183).

140 See Forster (1963:29-31) on the relationship of the novel with "life in time". To a certain extent, the Shire is also similar to the "chronotope of the provincial town", as defined by Bakthin (1989:398). See also Bobes Naves (1993:179–180).

birthday speech, together with the responses from his audience, which Tolkien describes in the following way: "*I hope you are all enjoying yourselves as much as I am.* Deafening cheers. Cries of *Yes* (and *No*). [...] The noise subsided. *I shall not keep you long*, he cried. Cheers from all the assembly." (*LotR*, 41-42). Dickens portrays Pickwick's inaugural discourse in a similar way:

> He (Mr Pickwick) would not deny, that he was influenced by human passions, and human feelings, (cheers) – possibly by human weaknesses – (loud cries of "No"); but this he would say, that if ever the fire of self-importance broke out in his bosom the desire to benefit the human race in preference, effectually quenched it. (Dickens 2003:17)

One of the big differences in these two works is the somewhat distanced and ironic presentation of Pickwick on behalf of the narrator, whereas the narrator of *The Lord of the Rings* shows a much more respectful attitude towards Bilbo (even if it is not wholly deprived of irony). We find another similarity between the two works in the character of Sam Gamgee, who shares several features with his namesake Sam Weller (Pickwick's servant), such as his role as quick-tongued and good-natured servant, his craftiness, his prejudices and a general pragmatic attitude towards life. There are of course many other examples of this type of servant in Victorian literature, such as in the works of Geroge Eliot or Elizabeth Gaskell, among others, but the analogue with Sam Weller is perhaps most conspicuous since it is further enhanced in the episode taking place at *The Prancing Pony*, which is very similar to chapter 16 of *The Pickwick Papers*.[141] At the same time, it should be noted that Tolkien was not very fond of this work (*Letters*, 349).

Sam as a character can also be identified with one of the prototypes of the hero's friends in the British imperial adventure novel of the Victorian and Edwardian eras (Toda Iglesia 2002:27), like those of Rider Haggard (especially Job, from *She*). This could also be said of Gandalf, who initially takes on the role of the particular "helper-initiator" inherent in this genre, defined by Toda Iglesia (2002: 27-28) as "the wise and powerful with fantastic and supernatural connections."[142] The kind of relationship that exists between Frodo and Sam is also present in other emblematic representatives of the novel tradition, such as Don Quijote

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141 For further similarities between the works of Dickens and Tolkien, see Nelson (2005:145-149).
142 The translation is mine.

and Sancho Panza in Cervantes's famous novel, or Tom Jones and Partridge in Fielding's, but the couple made up by Frodo and Sam is closer to the treatment of these 'types' in the Victorian and Edwardian adventure novels.[143]

We also perceive touches of the narrative universe of Victorian novelists such as Thomas Hardy, George Eliot, Elizabeth Gaskell and George Moore, particularly in the portraits of English nineteenth-century rural life in general, in the parallels to the gossipy tone of the rustic villagers found in the dialogues that take place at *The Ivy Bush* and *The Green Dragon* in Hobbiton. The tone, setting and atmosphere of the episode that tells of the dinner at Farmer Maggot's house clearly recall several scenes from *Far From the Madding Crowd*.[144]

In addition, we notice an occasional humoristic strain, similar to the tradition of elegant wit based on paradox and usually centered on the revelation of a cynical human nature, which was the trademark of Oscar Wilde:

> 'You don't belong here; you're no Baggins –you – you're a Brandybuck!'
>
> 'Did you hear that, Merry? That was an insult, if you like,' said Frodo as he shut the door on her.
>
> 'It was a compliment,' said Merry Brandybuck, 'and so, of course, not true.' (*LotR*, 52)

While the hobbits travel through the Shire during *daytime*, their leisurely behaviour is not far from that of the jolly group of travelling friends in *The Pickwick Papers*, but it is also close to Jerome K. Jerome's *Three Men in a Boat*, another novel belonging to a similar tradition, if more straightforwardly expressed than in the pedantic diction of Dickens's narrator. The irreverent joking of the members of the excursion is a constant feature of this part of the narrative, and the travelling as such is more like a walking holiday in the countryside than a dangerous expedition:

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143 Regarding *LotR* as "an adventure story in the Edwardian mode," see Lobdell (2004:1-24).
144 For example, the episode that relates Gabriel Oak's arrival at the village where the woman he loves keeps her farm, and his conversation with the locals at the inn (Hardy 2000:46-63). Allen's (1971: 244) opinion about Hardy's novels is also interesting in that it shows the similarities with Tolkien's attitude towards past and present: "[P]erhaps it is on the word story telling that the emphasis should fall. Of current theories of realism he was highly critical [...] [Hardy] turned to the primitive oral tale. [...] Acutely, painfully aware of the modern world as he was, he looked back to the past and summed up in his fiction a life that was dying when he was a child, a life cut off from the main stream of national life, more primitive, more pagan [...]."

> 'All right!' said Pippin. 'I will follow you into every bog and ditch. But it is hard! I had counted on passing the *Golden Perch* at Stock before sundown. The best beer in the Eastfarthing, or used to be: it is a long time since I tasted it.' (*LotR*, 101)

Part of the explanation for this lack of 'seriousness' lies in the fact that the Shire is already known to us from a previous narrative – that of *The Hobbit* – which is much closer to the carefree and humoristic tradition found in the novels mentioned before, on the one hand, and that of the fairy-tale, on the other. This blend was a formula used by several well-known British writers in the nineteenth century, such as Thackeray (in, for example, *The Rose and the Ring*), Lewis Carroll (*Alice in Wonderland*), George MacDonald (*The Princess and the Goblin*), Andrew Lang (*Prince Prigio*), Oscar Wilde (*The Selfish Giant*), or Dickens (*The Magic Fishbone*), but it can also be detected in some writings belonging to the first category; stories which avoided the fairy-tale on the surface level, but kept its spirit as an underlying essence. Allen (1971:162), says that the world that Dickens evokes in *The Pickwick Papers* is "a world as innocent as Beatrix Potter's [...] the world of fairy tale, with the bad fairies not monstrous but absurd."

The statement brings us straight to the core of the problem which Tolkien had to face when he wanted to move the hobbits out of the Shire and place them in the far bigger and immensely more complex narrative universe of Middle-earth. The setting that Tolkien first presented to the readers in *The Hobbit*, and which he later used as the starting point for *The Lord of the Rings*, shares many features with the blend between the nineteenth-century novel and the fairy tale;[145] it is a cosy narrative microcosm in which the truly bad monsters, as well as the other deadly serious and ominous elements of the grand, epic scenarios of the greater world beyond its limits, simply do not make any sense. The absurdity of the monsters in the Shire is revealed in the inflexible response to Sam Gamgee's somewhat dreamy reflections on dragons and walking trees at *The Green Dragon* in Bywater:

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[145] Segura (2003) provides a useful introduction to the narrative strategies Tolkien employs in order to carry out the transition from the fairy-tale world (of the Shire) to the more majestic, epic sceneries of the outside world.. See also Segura (2004:129-130). For a more detailed and precise explanation of the term 'fairy-tale', or 'fairy-story', as Tolkien saw the genre, see 'On Fairy-Stories' (Tolkien 1966).

'No thank 'ee,' said Ted, 'I won't [talk about dragons]. I heard tell of them when I was a youngster, but there's no call to believe in them now. There's only one dragon in Bywater, and that's Green,' he said, getting a general laugh. (*LotR*, 57)

The defensive tone in the reply seems, at the same time, to acknowledge that there is a real threat implied in Sam's mentioning of these strange phenomena. The effect of this is that the reader perceives the Shire as a momentarily safe but fragile utopia, into which more mundane and darker elements may penetrate in a not too distant future. In effect, the plot will soon demand that darker elements enter this idyllic microcosm. Frodo, Sam and Pippin will have to flee from nothing less than the Ringwraiths, Sauron's most powerful servants, who have come to find the One Ring and will stop at nothing until they find it. They will be saved from these Ringwraiths by elves, another markedly foreign race that inhabits the greater world outside, and all of this will take place within the boundaries of the cosy microcosm of the Shire, made up by this nineteenth-century narrative blend of rural bliss, prosaic people, irreverent jokes and a general fairy-tale/fable atmosphere *à la* Beatrix Potter or Kenneth Grahame,[146] where the genuinely evil monsters and the dark side of the fantastic are so out of place. Tolkien must have been acutely aware of the narrative obstacles derived from these circumstances, and he uses various strategies to carry out the delicate movement from the Shire to the exterior world, where mythic, epic and romance narrative elements may be integrated with less friction.

In the first place, the narrator disposes of certain characters that help him modify the narrative world of the Shire and make a little more room for the monsters. Bilbo is already known to us from *The Hobbit*, a story that has acquainted us with the idea of the hobbit-adventurer who leaves the Shire to roam unknown and dangerous parts of the world, having fantastic adventures

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146 We know that Tolkien appreciated both Beatrix Potter (Tolkien 1966:43) and Kenneth Grahame (*Letters*, letter 77; Tolkien 1966:91). Tolkien (1966:43) considered that most of Beatrix Potter's stories belong to a genre somewhere between the fable and the fairy tale, and that it is their inherent morality that brings them close to the latter category. A combination of novelistic rules of credibility and nineteenth-century fairy tale, such as the one we find in the opening chapters of *The Lord of the Rings*, would fall closer to Tolkien's definition. As for Kenneth Grahame, the influence of *The Wind in the Willows* can also be seen in the episode taking place in the Old Forest, which is very similar to chapter 3 ('The Wild Wood'), of Grahame's tale.

as he goes along.[147] Bilbo reminds us that the Shire is in fact a part of the much bigger Middle-earth, inhabited by a great number of strange and wild creatures, where both dangers and considerably more ceremonious and solemn cultural traits are part of everyday life. The Ring, the most important inheritance from Bilbo's adventures, is so prominent a theme in the first two chapters, 'A Long Expected Party' and 'The Shadow of the Past', that it can almost be seen as the true protagonist of this part of the story.

In these chapters Gandalf, another important character taken from *The Hobbit*, talks and acts in accordance with the novelistic narrative standards of the Shire, but he also contributes to the idea of the land of the hobbits as an exception to the 'rules'. In his long digression about the Ring in the second chapter, Gandalf reminds us of a number of events from the previous narrative, such as the meeting between Bilbo and Gollum. He also informs us of the dangers connected with the possession of the Ring, underlining its absolute relevance to the global conflict between the great forces that operate in Middle-earth.

Frodo is a new character, but he is significantly associated to the Ring from the first chapter, when he inherits it from Bilbo. Apart from Frodo's initial identification with the Ring, Tolkien presents him as an unusual, restless, sensitive hobbit, not fully integrated in the lifestyle of The Shire.[148] For this reason, Bilbo as Frodo's 'precursor', the association with the Ring and the personality of Frodo make the reader expect the appearance of some sort of unusual adventure related to his person.

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147 Shippey (2003:71) talks of Bilbo as having two essential sides, saying that he "knows almost nothing about Wilderland, and cannot even skin a rabbit, being used to having his meat 'delivered by the butcher, ready to cook'. Yet he has a place in the ancient world too, and there is a hint that (just like us) all his efforts cannot keep him entirely separate from the past." Shippey (2003:72) concludes that Bilbo has "not entirely lost his passport into the ancient world, and can function in it as our representative, without heroic pretensions but also without cynical ironies."

148 See Segura (2004:190). Bobes Naves (1993:180) points out that the hero's self-imposed alienation from his fellow country-men is a typical feature of novels set in provincial towns (the most famous example of how this chronotope can be used in the novel is found in Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*). Frodo himself admits that "there have been times when I thought the inhabitants too stupid and dull for words, and have felt that an earthquake or an invasion of dragons might be good for them." (*LotR*, 76). In this way, while in the Shire, Frodo is portrayed as a character with certain affinities to romance – being associated to the realm of the fantastic thanks to the Ring – but also to novel paradigms, especially in his attitude towards the world that surrounds him and towards 'truth', as we shall see.

Last but not least we have Sam Gamgee, Frodo's gardener. Sam is without doubt one of the most novelistic characters of the whole story, but he has been absorbing Bilbo's adventure stories ever since he was young, and he is eager to become acquainted with the mysteries of the world beyond the borders of the Shire. We have already seen how he ventures to question the limits of the prosaic local vision of his countrymen in the scene at the inn in which he tries to talk about dragons and walking trees, and his father, not quite pleased with this tendency, says of him:

> '[...] Crazy about stories of the old days he is, and he listens to all Mr. Bilbo's tales. Mr. Bilbo has learned him in letters – meaning no harm, mark you, and I hope no harm will come of it.
>
> '*Elves and Dragons*! I says to him. *Cabbages and potatoes are better for me and you. Don't go getting mixed up in the business of your betters, or you'll land in trouble too big for you*, I says to him.' (*LotR*, 36)

Sam presents us with a split attitude towards reality: the prosaic, which seemingly comes from his upbringing (typical of the Shire) as well as his social class; and the open-minded, which admits the possible existence of certain phenomena regarded supernatural by the people of the Shire (typical of Bilbo).

Collectively, the characters of Bilbo, Gandalf, Frodo and Sam confirm the *possibility* of high adventure and the inclusion of dark, fantastic elements in a narrative that starts off in a nineteenth-century blend of bourgeois fairy tale and humoristic and rural novels, in a community marked by a narrow-minded concern for material interests and respectability.

However, Tolkien disposes of more narrative tools than just characters to help him render coherence to the presence of the darker and "grander" elements that anticipate the narrative wealth of the exterior world. My analysis of the inter-traditional literary dialogue in this part of the story will focus on the strategies that Tolkien uses to integrate romance elements in the nineteenth-century blend, as the hobbits move together with the reader along the road that leads towards the rest of Middle-earth.

The Black Riders in the Shire

The exceptionally limited power and competence of the Black Riders as agents of Sauron during their sojourn in the Shire has been the subject of both hostile and reconciliatory critical approaches.[149] From my point of view, none of these approaches has yielded very satisfactory explanations. At this stage of the story, the Black Riders seem almost incompatible with the powerful and terrible creatures we come across further on in the narrative, and this incongruity is not easily accounted for. Manlove (1978:181), in his characteristically naïve analysis of Tolkien's works, attributes this inefficiency of the Black Riders to sheer incompetence on behalf of the author, arguing that Tolkien is unable to stick to his initial narrative propositions, while Shippey (2003:105) admits somewhat apologetically that they are less powerful here than in any other part of Middle-earth, adding laconically that "[i]t seems likely that […] Tolkien found the transit from familiar Shire to archaic Wilderland an inhibiting one."

Tolkien himself tries to explain the initial weakness of the Riders in one of his letters, stating that they have an intrinsically limited physical power over the brave, and that their real strength lies in the fear they inspire in their victims. In the same letter, Tolkien also claims that the Witch King of Angmar could not be as powerful at this stage of the story as he later would become (in *The Return of the King*), alluding to the transformational effects taking place when Sauron gives him the military command over the troops, something which would render him an additional, demonic force. (*Letters*, letter 210)

This argument sounds very much like a reconstruction with the benefit of hindsight; an attempt at rationalising the intuitive narrative strategies the author employed when trying to fit in the Black Riders in the narrative zone of the Shire. In the first place, even if it would be true that the Ringwraiths should become more feeble the further away from Mordor they come, hence making their limited power in the Shire coherent with their conception, it still would not make much sense that Sauron should send a pack of ghosts with limited physical power over the brave to recover something as supremely important

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149 See Manlove (1978), Shippey (2003), and Gasque (1968).

as the One Ring. A more credible scenario, given Sauron's pragmatic ruth-lessness, would put another kind of malevolent warrior on display; someone as implacable as the Black Riders but more inconspicuous, cunning and subtle, for instance the ambassador who appears in the chapter 'The Black Gate Opens', especially as we know that Sauron has such subalterns at his disposal.

For my part, I believe that the reason for the weakness of the Black Riders in the Shire is due to the initial, happy-go-lucky kind of aimlessness of the author when he first launched the hobbits out of the Shire and into the exterior world. At first, Tolkien believed that he was writing a sequel to *The Hobbit*, but to his surprise, his narrative world had changed since he last visited it and he found himself immersed in a far darker, vaster, deeper and wider world than the fairy-tale atmosphere that haunted the version of Middle-earth present in the earlier narrative would give room for. The progressive discovery of this "new" world would eventually lead him on over many hundred pages and culminate in the narrative we today know as *The Lord of the Rings*, but the fact remains that Tolkien did not know where the road would lead him when he wrote the first drafts of the initial episode, and this includes the later role of the Black Riders. During the subsequent re-elaborations of the text that took place once the whole manuscript was finished, he must have become aware of the problems they entail as powerful and supernatural beings within the boundaries of the Shire, and this was probably the reason why he decided not to elevate them to their full status as the most powerful agents of the Dark Lord until the third book, leaving the original descriptions of them much as they were. However, even in this "lighter" version their presence becomes a serious narrative challenge, the demands of which Tolkien meets with not a little skill.

Gasque (1968:155) considers that the Black Riders are presented ambiguously at first, "so that we have believed in them as real men before they are con-firmed as Wraiths." This point of view is a more fruitful starting point than the opinions we have seen earlier, although it does not explain all the facets of the problem, as we shall see.

From the chapter 'Three Is Company' and on there is a significant change in the narrative, due to the narrator's shifting focus, which is now directed

towards a more romance-oriented perception of reality.[150] In order to achieve a balanced and coherent dialogue between novel and romance, the narrator frequently makes use of what we might call 'light effects'. When the chapter begins, the narration is firmly rooted in the characteristic blend between the nineteenth-century humoristic and rural novel and the fairy tale, the narrative trademark of the Shire, with a narrator putting an ironic emphasis on the gossipy inclination of the villagers:

> One summer's evening an *astonishing* piece of news reached the Ivy Bush and Green Dragon. Giants and other portents on the borders of the Shire were forgotten for *more important matters*: Mr. Frodo was selling Bag End, indeed he had already sold it – to the Sackville-Bagginses! (*LotR*, 79)[151]

Shortly after, Gandalf leaves the Shire and Frodo waits in vain for his return. Finally, he decides to begin his journey without the wizard, accompanied by Sam and Pippin. After finishing his last dinner at Bag End, Frodo goes for a short walk in the neighbourhood. Night is falling, and the progressively weakening light affects Frodo's perception of his home:

> The sun went down. Bag End seemed sad and gloomy and dishevelled. Frodo wandered round the familiar rooms, and saw the light of the sunset fade on the walls, and shadows creep out of the corners. (*LotR*, 82)

The description is a clear anticipation of the first appearance of a Black Rider, a few lines later. Significantly, in this first encounter, Frodo can only vaguely hear the voice of the Rider, which intuitively seems to him "strange" and "unpleasant", and it is a relief to him to hear the footsteps move down the road, away from Bag End. The first description of the twilight brings about this strangely threatening atmosphere, closer to romance than to the novel, based as it is on purely subjective impressions in turn affected by an almost supernatural sensibility, pushing the narrative from the daylight realm of order and familiarity towards the chaotic, fearful and uncontrolled landscapes of the night.[152] A moment later, Frodo tries to rationalise his instinctive fear, turning

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150 For introductory studies on the perception of reality in romance literature, see Vinaver (1971), Stevens (1973), and Beer (1977). The common idea is that the treatment of space and time is subordinated to the experiences of the protagonist, and that reality is often presented as dreamlike and vague; space becomes a scenery in which rational perception fades, and time is split up in fragmentary, unconnected moments (Vinaver 1971:5).
151 My italics.
152 Night is related to "chaos, death, regression, anxiety, secular fear" and is "a symbolic realm full of monsters." De Paco (2003:323). My translation.

back toward his familiar house where he meets Sam Gamgee, with whom he talks in a way that once more recalls the interaction between Pickwick and his servant Sam Weller:

> 'Sam!' he called. 'Sam! Time!'
>
> 'Coming, sir!' came the answer from far within, followed soon by Sam himself, wiping his mouth. He had been saying farewell to the beer-barrel in the cellar.
>
> 'All aboard, Sam?' said Frodo.
>
> 'Yes, sir. I'll last for a bit now, sir.' (*LotR*, 83)

The journey begins. The narrator holds the romance elements in check by sticking to the nineteenth-century narrative blend in the meticulous descriptions of the landscape and the exact chronology of the events, which are mixed with a certain inclination towards the fable and the fairy tale, as in the use of parenthesis and the sudden, seemingly uncalled-for focalisation on behalf of a fox watching the sleeping hobbits as he passes by.[153]

The next meeting with a Black Rider will alter this atmosphere once more. This time, the appearance of the Rider does not take place at dusk or at night (though it is hinted at when the narrator mentions that the sun is on its way down),[154] but its mere presence produces an uncanny reaction in Frodo, who, inspired by his fear, feels an almost irresistibly strong need to put the Ring on his finger. As Gasque observes in the quotation above, the description of the Rider is thoroughly ambiguous:

> Round the corner came a black horse, no hobbit-pony but a full-sized horse, and on it sat *a large man*, who seemed to crouch in the saddle, wrapped in *a great black hood and cloak*, so that only his boots in the high stirrups showed below; *his face was shadowed and invisible.*
>
> When it reached the tree and was level with Frodo the horse stopped. The *riding figure* sat quite still with its head bowed, as if listening. From inside

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153 See Segura (2003).

154 In the first draft, this scene begins in the middle of a sentence, without previous reference to space and time (Tolkien 2000:47). The fact that the final draft presents us with a scene taking place at nightfall might be due to a significant change in the text: in the first draft, it is *Gandalf* who appears on the horse. Only when the Black Rider had replaced the wizard, Tolkien indicated the references to dusk and night, perhaps as a means of preparing the appearance of the Ringwraith with a more "romance-friendly" ambience.

the hood came *a noise as of someone sniffing to catch an elusive scent*; the head turned from side to side of the road. (*LotR*, 88)[155]

On the one hand, the narrator describes the Rider as a man, but on the other, the person is shrouded in mystery, hidden under his clothes with his face concealed. In the following paragraph, the Rider is referred to as a "figure", while the sniffing sound and the head (not *his* or *her*, but *its* head, as if the creature were sexless or belonged to the animal world) turning from side to side leave us with an uncertain impression as to the Rider's identity, making us ask ourselves whether we are dealing with a man or an animal, or perhaps a monstrous combination of both. The threatening atmosphere is very much present in this scene, and the almost supernaturally motivated fear that Frodo feels for the Rider makes us associate the black colour of the clothes with its symbolic significance: violence, death, and evil.[156]

The fact that these symbolic associations are more immediate here than those of, for example, the grey colour of Gandalf's cloak in the scene describing his arrival at Hobbiton in the first chapter,[157] indicates the degree to which the appearance of the Black Riders adds a strong flavour of the romance tradition to the narrative, as well as the necessity to construct a dialogue to fit in this new element. However, it is also important to notice that the descriptions are still ambiguous. Tolkien offers a dialogue between the novel and the romance traditions which ends with a return to the territory of the novel. We are not convinced of the human characteristics of the Rider, but there is still nothing in the descriptions that clearly indicates that he should belong completely to the realm of the supernatural. Rather, the description shows something – a man, a strange animal or perhaps something else – which at any rate is markedly alien to normal hobbit experience: the Ringwraith is "dressed up" as a person because

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155 My italics. It is interesting to notice that in the first draft, in which it is Gandalf who appears on the horse, he too is ambiguously presented. The subsequent modifications altered the initial descriptions, making the horse black instead of white, the man upon it large and not small, and eliminating the description of an actual nose that protrudes from within the hood, sniffing (Tolkien 2000:54).

156 It is also interesting to notice that Miller (2000:283), when discussing the figure of the "Black Knight" in the epic and romance traditions of the Scandinavian and Germanic north, says that in these traditions, black "also marks […] the monster, who is simultaneously made black, anomalously shaped, and inhumanly hideous."

157 See *LotR*, 37. On the one hand, Gandalf wears not grey only: his hat is blue, and his scarf is silver. On the other hand, the wizard arrives in plain daylight and he is welcomed by hobbit-children.

of the need to adapt him to the narrative zone of the Shire. At the same time, the description leaves a clear romance mark on the narrative.

It is Sam who brings the narrative back to the novel tradition when he retells his father's conversation with the Black Rider at Bag End (the same conversation that Frodo barely overheard before leaving), providing a new point of view that underscores the human potentiality of the Black Rider:

> *What sort of a fellow was he?* says I to the Gaffer. *I don't know,* says he; *but he wasn't a hobbit. He was tall and black-like, and he stooped over me. I reckon it was one of the Big Folk from foreign parts. He spoke funny.* (*LotR,* 89)

As a result of tossing the Rider back and forth between possible interpretations, the ambiguity of the figure is still present, but as Sam's father is given the last word, our final interpretation is inclined towards a novel-conceived reality.

The next time the Rider approaches the hobbits, night has already fallen and a pale "unearthly" starlight makes the descriptions of the landscape less precise. At this occasion, Tolkien does not insist on the ambiguity of the Rider, whose human characteristics are considerably toned down:

> The sound of hoofs stopped. As Frodo watched he saw *something dark* pass across the lighter space between two trees, and then halt […] The *black shadow* stood close to the point where they had left the path, and it *swayed from side to side.* Frodo thought he heard the sound of *snuffling.* The shadow bent to the ground, and then began to *crawl* towards him. (*LotR,* 92)[158]

In this description, the stress falls on the infrahuman characteristics of the Rider, emphasising the threatening sensation and an animal-oriented behaviour. To begin with, the Rider is no longer mounted on his horse, it is not only the head but the whole body that turns from side to side, the verb "sniff" is changed for "snuffle"; and when the figure moves it "crawls" over the ground towards Frodo. Again, the influence of the weak light guides the narrative toward romance paradigms, revealing, even if it is only partially, the monster that resembled a human being during the day.

The repeated apparitions of the Black Rider during the first stage of the journey, the ambiguity of the descriptions and the threatening atmosphere brought

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158 My italics. This description is identical to that of the first draft (Tolkien 2000:58).

about by his presence also recall the mysterious knight that appears time and time again to Ralph, the hero of William Morris's *The Well at the World's End*, in the first chapters of that book. However, this prose romance is closer to the romance tradition and does not dialogue with the novel – and even less with the nineteenth-century blend we have mentioned – in the same way as *The Lord of the Rings*.

The elves in the Shire

Luckily for the hobbits, dusk is also an adequate atmosphere for the introduction of more benevolent romance beings, such as the elves. When Gildor Inglorion arrives a moment after the re-appearance of the Black Rider, the descriptions suddenly acquire far more positive symbolic associations, such as the songs,[159] the laughter, and the light in their eyes and around their feet. Frodo justifies the presence of the elves attending to novelistic rules of probability, explaining to the others that they (the elves) sometimes cross this part of the Shire, but facts are that the reader is witnessing the first instance of what Tolkien calls "eucatastrophe", which, given the arbitrary character of such miraculous turns of events, must be excluded from one of the basic premises of the realist novel, namely that of credibility. Both improbable coincidences and a miraculous saving grace play an important part in the structural framework of romance narratives in general,[160] and the fact that the narrator feels obliged to justify its presence denotes the still strong novelistic influence on the events taking place in the narrative zone of the Shire, even in its nocturnal, more 'romance-friendly' version.

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159 Concerning songs and declamations of poetry in *The Lord of the Rings*, Segura (2004:122) notes that they function as an interlacement of the different cultural traditions that exist in Tolkien's imaginary world. Gildor's song doubtlessly contributes to enhance the dialogue between novel and romance. Regarding the elves and their relation to the romance treatment of space and time, all through *The Lord of the Rings*, the episodes in which elves play a prominent role bring about some sort of distortion in ordinary perception of space and time (in the Shire, Rivendell and Lórien), paving the way for transcendental experiences. In the Shire, where the narrative *mélange* novel/romance does not permit any major deviations in either direction, these experiences are reduced to mere sensations, as when Sam, the day after meeting the elves, seems to lack words to describe what he feels about them.

160 Stevens (1973:4) divides the fantastic elements in romance narratives in four categories: the exotic; the mysterious; the strictly magic (the marvellous controlled by man); and the miraculous (the marvellous controlled by God). Eucatastrophe leans close to the last category, albeit without any explicit mention of any divine influence on the course of the events.

The elves as such are also related to the tradition of medieval romance. Shippey (2003:55-65) concludes that the medieval poem *Sir Orfeo* is the text that inspired Tolkien most when creating the elves, while at the same time acknowledging many other analogues to romance narratives, such as *Pearl* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, and their presence substantially modifies the narrative towards these domains. The gratuitous appearance of an 'adventure', the indistinct landscape of medieval romance and the elves' slightly archaic diction – "we too are only tarrying here a while, ere we return over the Great Sea" (*LotR*, 93) – contribute to the general influence of romance paradigms on the narrative, which from this moment on becomes a *mélange* of the romance and novel traditions. This mixture is born out of the tension between the elves, the night and the monstrous enemy, on the one hand, and the hobbits and the Shire – even in its nocturnal shape – on the other.

As a result, Sam and Pippin, a lot more novelistic in attitude and conception than Frodo, become difficult to integrate in this environment, and the efforts of Pippin to adapt his speech to that of the elves sound artificial and forced: "'O Fair Folk! This is good fortune beyond my hope,' said Pippin. Sam was speechless." (*LotR*, 94)[161] Pippin's comment shows that a basically novelistic character cannot suddenly alter his natural speech in accordance with the diction of another tradition without considerable friction. If this radical change in tone has not been previously prepared for by means of an efficient narrative transition of some sort, such a clash is doomed to seem incongruous. In terms of the inter-traditional dialogue, we may consider Pippin's intervention an 'arrested intruder', given that it reflects a romance influence on his person which is not incorporated into the dialogue with sufficient narrative fluency. One of the reasons for this failure is that his sudden reverential attitude and formal speech do not match any previous assimilation of romance elements – as opposed to Frodo, Pippin has up until this moment been consistently immune to any tradition except for the blend of the nineteenth-century novel and fairy tale.

The hobbits are invited by Gildor to join the elves and they walk together to a glade in the woods. During this nightly walk, the narrator suggestively combines vague and exact descriptions in his constant references to a palpable

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161 In the original draft, this comment belongs to Frodo, and not to Pippin (Tolkien 2000:60).

geography, at the same time omitting any specifications regarding distances and the chronology of events. The novel/romance *mélange* persists in the subsequent conversation between Gildor and Frodo, during the course of which the hobbit manages to keep his discourse on a level above the colloquial tone he has employed in his interaction with Sam and Pippin, but without yielding totally to the ceremonious diction of romance. Gildor not only uses a more archaic speech than Frodo, but he also explicitly acknowledges the possible influence of the hand of fate on their encounter:

> 'In this meeting there may be more than chance; but the purpose is not clear to me, and I fear to say too much.'

> 'I am deeply grateful,' said Frodo, but I wish you would tell me plainly what the Black Riders are. If I take your advice I may not see Gandalf for a long while, and I ought to know what is the danger that pursues me.'

> 'Is it not enough to know that they are servants of the Enemy?' answered Gildor. 'Flee them! Speak no words to them! They are deadly. Ask no more of me! But my heart forebodes that, ere all is ended, you, Frodo son of Drogo, will know more of these fell things than Gildor Inglorion. May Elbereth protect you!'

> 'But where shall I find courage?' asked Frodo. 'That is what I chiefly need.' (*LotR*, 98)

In this dialogue we notice the difference in attitude towards reality showed by Frodo, on the one hand, and Gildor, on the other: while the words of the elf are shrouded in mystery and have an air of vagueness about them, expressing irrational beliefs, such as forebodings based on intuition, Frodo wants to find out concrete things, for practical purposes. A romance attitude is mingled with a novelistic impulse, firmly rooted in a tangible reality, and we do not perceive any clear direction in the dialogue.

This *mélange*, in which romance elements are given more room than before, is not in any way opposed to the nineteenth-century blend of novel and fairy tale that composes the essence of the daylight version of the narrative zone of the Shire, it is rather a logical extension of it. The integration of the idea of destiny and forebodings in the framework of a rural novelistic narrative set in a nineteenth-century milieu is not a new one; it has an antecedent in Thomas Hardy, whose novel *Far From the Madding Crowd* we have already mentioned

as a possible source of inspiration for certain aspects of the Shire (though it must be said that there is no evidence that Tolkien ever read Hardy).

In this context, it is interesting to notice that E.M. Forster (1963:90) considers that Hardy puts an excessive emphasis on the element of causality: "[...] the flaw running through Hardy's novels [is that] he has emphasized causality more strongly than his medium permits." The comment – which could also be applied to other nineteenth-century writers about rural life, such as Emily Brontë or Nathaniel Hawthorne (though the latter portrays rural *New* England) – suggests that Hardy breaks with what Forster perceives as a fundamental premise of the realist novel, namely that of presenting a plausible portrait of people whose lives depend both on circumstance and chance, rather than one based on other grounds (whether in the shape of a divinely defined, and hence predestinate, plan for the course of events or the overarching influence of a plot-centred narrative in which the characters conform to the story rather than the other way around).

The use that Tolkien makes of the idea of destiny, taking its presence into account while not fully acknowledging it as *the* supreme controlling force, likewise moves the narrative toward the periphery of the realm of the novel, but, as in the cases of Hardy, Hawthorne and Brontë, without obliterating its influence. This is an important part of the process that creates the *mélange* between novel and romance in this episode. The outcome is a narrative zone which, being compatible with the daylight version, can act as a mediator between the Shire and the outside world, preparing the reader for what is to come in later chapters.

The next day, the elves have disappeared and we are back in the daylight version of the narrative zone of the Shire. Accordingly, Pippin is given plenty of room to exhibit his most irreverent joking side, including comments that could have been taken straight out of *Three Men in a Boat* – "'I didn't want to leave you any [food], but Sam insisted'" –, and he harasses Frodo with questions related to purely practical issues, such as the route to follow. Frodo, however, is still in deep thoughts after the nocturnal meeting with the elves and seemingly needs more time to shift back to the carefree holiday atmosphere which surrounds the hobbit excursion at daytime.

After dismissing Pippin, Frodo turns to Sam, with whom he spends some time talking about the elves. Only after this is he allowed to be drawn back toward the narrative territory of the novel, mainly through the renewed conversation with Pippin. During the ensuing dialogue between romance and novel, the romance aspects of Frodo gradually fade as the novel paradigms become more dominant.

The rest of the journey through the lands of the Shire remains anchored in the nineteenth-century blend, which is reaffirmed during the dinner at Maggot's house, a character whose diction, behaviour and local knowledge shows a marked resemblance with the portraits of farmers in Hardy and other rural novelists of the era. Nightfall alters the narrative once more towards romance standards, though the narrator allows himself to play a cheap trick on the credulous hobbits (and the readers, by now), based on a limited perception of reality produced by the darkness and the fog, having Merry appear in the shape of a Black Rider. This false concession to romance brings the narrative dangerously close to the satirical devices used by Jane Austen in *Northanger Abbey*, in which the author ridicules the conventions of the gothic novel by having apparently supernatural phenomena rationally explained, and the trick would have pushed the delicate balance between romance and novel (which, as I have argued, is essential to the construction of the Shire as a narrative zone) too far towards the territory of the novel and the satire if it had not been counterbalanced by the reminder that the danger, though 'supernatural', is at least *potentially* real, as shown by the sudden appearance of a real Black Rider on the opposite side of the river a few moments later.

At the same time, the fact that Tolkien *does* include the joke in the first place shows just how deep into the territory of the nineteenth-century blend of novel and fairy tale the narrative has delved, and in the next chapter we find the hobbits comfortably settled in a bourgeois cottage, bathing, chatting, singing and dining in the carefree spirit of the Pickwickians, Jerome's holiday-goers, or the animals in Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows*.

The opinion of Gasque (1968:155), who emphasises the credulity of the hobbits, and above all that of Sam, as the key to the reader's acceptance of the elves,

is just a part of the intricate fabric of narrative strategies that Tolkien had to weave in order to integrate these elements in the narrative zone of the Shire. More important is the lingering influence of the first drafts of this part of the story, when Tolkien still thought he was writing a sequel to *The Hobbit*, and the subsequent revisions to make the narrative zone of the Shire, largely inherited in spirit from the first story, fit into a larger literary chronotope dominated by a profound *mélange* between earlier narrative traditions, such as myth and epic.[162]

Romance, whether in the shape of the adventure novel, the pseudo-medieval novels of Morris, the gothic novel or the original nineteenth and early twentieth-century fairy tales and fables, proved an efficient narrative vehicle to put traditions in dialogue, and Tolkien would later exploit it further for the incorporation of new traditions, as in the episode of the Old Forest and the Barrow Downs, when the narrative engages in a dialogue with myth, and in Bree, when the reader and the hobbits are put on the threshold to the epic world. It is possible that the problem of how to integrate the Black Riders and the elves in the narrative microcosm of the Shire triggered his discovery and later use – conscious or not – of romance as the most eloquent mediator between the different narrative traditions that take part in the narrative dialogue in *The Lord of the Rings*.

4.2. The Tom Bombadil-digression: from myth-making to map-making

When the hobbits cross the border of the Old Forest, they enter a lugubrious and thoroughly strange region which has very little to do with the Shire, which precedes it in the story, and even less with Bree, which is to follow. Within the framework of *The Lord of the Rings* as a whole, the episode constitutes an exception to the general dynamics of the intertraditional dialogue in which no narrative paradigm is allowed to obliterate the presence of the others.

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162 Segura (2004:125) considers that Tolkien, when writing this part of the narrative, realised that it was necessary to eliminate the authoritative and impersonal tone of the omniscient narrator that he had begun with. This is shown in the progressive evolution of the style, from the nineteenth-century blend of the rural/humoristic novel and fairy-tale/fable of the first chapters, towards the prose romance that comes to dominate the narrative once the hobbits arrive at Bree.