

## *Fictionality in “Fog on the Barrow-downs”: Myth and Reference*

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**Abstract.** Exploring fictionality as the link between imagined and referential reality, the paper draws on the theoretical framework of cognitive narratology in examining the mechanisms on which the creation of myth relies in the narratives introduced at the beginning of J. R. R. Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings*, in Chapters 7 and 8 of *The Fellowship of the Ring*. In the introductory section, the authors review relevant literature pertaining to the manner in which immersion occurs, how analogous links are formed between fiction and reality, and whether the pragmatic dichotomy of the fictional and factual holds in all fictional circumstances. Essentially, the reviewed literature offers an insight into how text reception depends on context and the imported or integrated rhetorical frame of the fictional text. Next, the paper uses these two chapters as illustration, with reference to the appendices relevant to their interpretation, from the perspective of the formulated framework. The concluding remarks summarise the importance of immersion, as well as other automatic processes activated during reading, in internalising truth programs contained within fiction and myths that render their fictionality almost irrelevant.

**Keywords:** myth; narrative; *Lord of the Rings*; J. R. R. Tolkien; cognitive narratology; rhetorics; truth program; fictionality

### Fictionality, Reference and Myth

The assumption from which the exploration of fictionality, myth and reference begins is that there is a connection between the reference world and the story-world created by the narrative discourse, overtly or covertly, contained in the analogous nature of the context. Basic literary competence ensures that readers understand that stories are fictional accounts of imagined realities sending across certain truths that reflect, to a varying degree, the reality we experience. Exploring the analogous nature of discourse cues the mapping of storyworlds to the reference world. In “Cognitive Narratology” (2013), David Herman

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discusses narrative interpretation, ascribing semiotic signals the fundamental role in “[constructing] and imaginatively [inhabiting] storyworlds”. Semiotic signals are “a precondition for leveraging narratives to construe what’s going on in wider environments for sense making” (Herman 2013) and, therefore, crucial for both the construction of the storyworld and the process of extracting the narrative – the story – from the discourse. The processes of storymaking (construction) and interpretation (re-construction) are simultaneous and co-extensive (Ignjatović 2018: 105). In crafting fictional storyworlds, these processes use analogies based on referent world contexts regardless of the degree of resemblance of the setting to the referent world.

In “Narrative Empathy” (2013), Suzanne Keen draws on the insight of Richard Gerrig and David Rapp<sup>2</sup> and their research into the psychological mechanisms by which readers process literature, emphasising the seemingly counterintuitive occurrence in literary immersion. When immersed in a literary text, the prevalent effort of readers is not to remain in the state of *suspension of disbelief*<sup>3</sup>, but rather the opposite. Keen says that “readers naturally experience narrative information as continuous with information gleaned from real experience and thus must exert themselves consciously to regard fictive narratives as fictional” (2013: Par. 6). Experiencing narrative fiction involves intellectual and emotional investment on the part of the reader stemming from “the paradox of fictional emotions, for narrative empathy transacts feelings through narrative representations” (Keen 2013). Moreover, narrative empathy, crucial for complete immersion and the formation of the ultimate cognitive structure that is the narrative extrapolated from the discourse, “overarches narratological categories, involving actants, narrative situation, matters of pace and duration, and storyworld features such as settings” (Keen 2013). In other words, fiction is experienced in the same manner as reality, but the experiencer is aware of its fictionality. The experience of the narrative discourse itself can be as powerful as the real-life experience due to the semiotic power of the context (Herman 2013), even if the narrative elements causing the immersion remain in the domain of the fictional. In her article, Keen’s review of the “phenomenology of transportation” (2013) explains the readers’ immersion essentially as a temporary displacement from the real world into the fictional world, creating the “paradox of fiction” (2013) in which the convention appears

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<sup>2</sup> Gerrig, R. J., Rapp, D. N. 2004. Psychological Processes Underlying Literary Impact. *Poetics Today* 25, 265–81.

<sup>3</sup> See: Coleridge, S. T. 1834. *Biographia Literaria: Or, Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions*. New York: Leavitt, Lord & Company, 175.

to serve only as a lifeline preventing the reader from drifting off entirely from the realm of the *real*.

Storytelling-wise, in "Experientiality" (2014), Marco Caracciolo explains the meaning of the basic structures engaged in narrative processing relying on Monika Fludernik's narratological model which proposes that the "basic structures of human engagement with the world" (2014), those occurring *naturally* in conversation, are equally present in fictional narratives. It is *because* the storyteller relates their own evaluation of the embodied experience that it is possible for the experiencer, the reader, to process the content as if it were "a 'natural' narrative situation" (2014: Par. 3). Caracciolo underscores Fludernik's position on the significance of narrative empathy (2014: Par. 4) for without emotional investment, emplotment itself would not be possible, nor, by extension, post-hoc configuration or reconfiguration (narrativisation) of the experienced. Fludernik's narrative model as assessed by Caracciolo in terms of experientiality sheds light on the nature of the convention of fictionality because it specifically explains the significance of the link between storytelling and immersion as different manifestations of the same sense-making cognitive process (2014: Par. 5). Fludernik's extensive study of natural and unnatural narratives – the fictional worlds that cannot be said to reflect in any *mimetic* manner experiences possible in the real world – explicate the extraordinary manner in which the pseudo-ontological activates cognitive capacities utilised for real-world sense making. In *Towards a 'Natural' Narratology* (1996), Fludernik explains this *experiential mimesis* as a concept differing from mimesis as imitation. Rather, the "quasi-mimetic ... needs to be treated as the artificial and illusionary projection of a semiotic structure which the reader recuperates in terms of a fictional reality" (35). The reader, therefore, heavily relies on real-life experiences in order to decode the semiotic signals (Herman 2013) in the discourse relating a world that has little resemblance to reality. Caracciolo terms the experientiality of such narratives "simulative" (2014: Par. 11) since it relies on the readers' ability to correlate real-world experiences with those represented in the fictional discourse. The fact that the fictional world bears little resemblance to the real world does not hinder immersion, nor does it prevent "a connection with human experientiality via the themes they address" (Caracciolo 2014). Additionally, this experiential-mimetic relationship between real-life experience and fiction seems unavoidable and "both conversational and fictional stories can impact recipients' interaction with reality by leaving a mark on their values and attitudes" (Caracciolo 2014: Par. 12). Interaction with fiction as quasi-reality allows for negotiations pertaining to the ideas, values and ideologies developed in the narrative of the discourse based on experience in real-life contexts. The extent to which such negotiations

are activated in the experiencers, i.e. readers, depends on their own experience, literary, cultural and other competences. As Gavins and Steen note in *Cognitive Poetics in Practice*, “reading is a skilled activity that relies on familiar knowledge and flexible, adaptive responses to novel situations” (2003: 27).

## Fact, Fiction and Myth

The reception of a literary narrative might affect the reader in a manner similar to real-world experience, yet there is a clear difference between that which can objectively be termed *real* or *factual*, and that which pertains to fiction. Jean-Marie Schaeffer’s “Fictional vs. Factual Narration” (2012) discusses the problematics of the pragmatic view of the dichotomy, which is useful for the phenomenon of literature as it differentiates between the type of narrative that “advances *claims* of referential truthfulness” (Par. 1), the factual, and the fictional narrative which simply does not. The postmodern attitude here is to bear in mind that the quality of factuality remains contingent upon the process of narrativisation and that focalising bias is inevitable. Likewise, Schaeffer’s position draws on the discursive nature of reality, where “every (narrative) representation is a human construction, and more precisely ... it is a model projected onto reality” (2012: Par. 4). Although this attitude does not “disqualify ontological realism or the distinction between fact and fiction” (Schaeffer 2012: Par. 4), the manner in which the conventionalised dichotomy operates in culture, and the form it takes in the process of narrativisation and in fictionalisation, is particularly significant for the examination of myth-making practices. Factual narratives can be defined as “discourses that are meant to be taken ‘seriously’ and others whose status is different” (Schaeffer 2012: Par. 3), and yet myth resists place in either of these two categories exclusively.

Myths contain such representations that overarch reality, with supernatural occurrences and characters whose abilities surpass known human potential, yet they are taken as “a type of factual discourse: people adhere to it as serious discourse referring to something real” (Schaeffer 2012: Par. 3). In other words, the distinction between fact and fiction in myth reception is present in the same manner as it is present in the reception of any literary work or narrative. What renders the distinction irrelevant is the so-called “truth program”<sup>1</sup> (Schaeffer 2012: Par. 3) which relies on the feature of experientiality that extracts from the narrative that which may have truth-value in the ontological domain of the real world. The process of myth reception simultaneously disregards its

<sup>1</sup> Schaeffer draws on Veayne, P. 1988 [1983]. *Did the Greeks Believe their Myths?* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

fictional nature and seeks truth-value that corresponds to the circumstances of the experiencer based on their literary, cultural and other competences and, therefore, receptiveness to the ideas of beliefs produced by the narrative.

Considering myth as a form of fictional narrative calls for another digression to fictionality as the defining feature of narrative. In *The Rhetoric of Fictionality* (2007), Richard Walsh approaches it as a feature of all narratives contingent upon relevance in the pseudo-communicative situation, but also the context of the experiencer. For Walsh, fictionality is a "cultural rationale" for "the exercise of our narrative understanding" (Walsh 2007: 8), which corresponds to the previously discussed link between emplotment and experientiality. Walsh's rhetorical perspective of fictionality proposes that the *truthfulness* of the narrative may only be observed in terms of the contextual circumstance of the narrative world itself (Walsh 2007: 30) regardless of the referential value in the real world. However, the reader experiences the pseudo-communicative situation of fiction as if it were an actual communicative situation, additionally allowing for the accumulation of the thematically transferable *truths* between the story-world and the real world once there is relevance. The dynamics of this transfer, or negotiation as Caracciolo (2014) terms it, is highly reliant on the cognitive environment of the reader and their competences, as well as the overall relevance of the thematic import from the real world. Therefore, even a highly fictional narrative can possess relevance to real-world circumstances owing to the thematic import that is decoded by the reader. Following this line of thinking, Simona Zetterberg Gjerlevsen (2016) defines fictionality "as a fundamental rhetorical mode ... understood as a means to communicate what is invented and as such transgresses the boundaries of both fiction and narrative" (2016: Par. 1). In "Historiographic Narration" (2014), Daniel Fulda underscores that "[history] is narrated" (Par. 1), explaining that the very process of the structuring of the material that forms the vast body of what we call "History" operates according to a "dramaturgical model" (Par. 1). In other words, what is considered factual material necessitates narrativisation that transforms it into a *consumable* product. If we digress to Walsh's (2007) view of fictionality, essentially as "a contextual assumption by the reader, prompted by the manifest information that the authorial discourse is offered as fiction" (2007: 36), we can assume that the interpretation of historical narratives implies the opposite assumption – that of factuality, even if the model used for historiographic narration may rely on "the typical plots of literary genres" (Fulda 2014: Par. 10). Therefore, fictionality is inevitably present both in genres purporting factuality and fictionality, although it is the culturally established convention that guides the reader into the direction of either *restraining* their *belief* (with fictional narratives) or *disbelief* (with

factual ones). The reception of myths specifically relies on this conventional *negotiation* process, which can be overtly or covertly guided by “the choice of emplotment” (Fulda 2014: Par. 10) – the modality of experience shaped by ideology, culture, etc., rhetorically charged to activate the readers’ ability to recognise the thematic import from the real world. Furthermore, in “Ideology and Narrative Fiction” (2013), Luc Herman and Bart Vervaeck state that the “frame installs hierarchical relationships between pairs of oppositional terms such as real vs. false, good vs. bad, and beautiful vs. ugly” (Par. 1). These authors suggest that “[successful] narratives present these oppositions in a way that convinces and seduces the reader” (Herman & Vervaeck: Par. 30), but the interpretative choice is ultimately on the reader, on their context and overall competence. All narratives inevitably possess a rhetorical core, or an ideological frame, relying on the specific type of emplotment to signpost the sense-making process and facilitate the projection of the narrative onto the reader. Myths specifically rely on such *frames* that activate truth programs which operate from the realm of the real world.

### Analysis: “Fog on the Barrow-downs” as history and myth

The continuum of the narrative of Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* is interrupted by separate narratives related to the storyworld. This frequent practice of storytelling within the confines of a broader narrative, the framing, necessarily layers the story in a manner that requires readers’ interpretation of very complex networks of interconnected narratives. Such networks must then rely heavily on the readers’ ability to experientially relate the fictional narratives to their real-life context. In turn, experientiality, which allows for the analogous linking of the fictional to the experienced factual, extracts the truth program outline of the fictional context and fills in the gaps in a flexible, context-bound circumstances of both worlds. The process of interpretation becomes complicated because some of these narratives, especially those at the very beginning of the novel are not told in a linear manner, but are recounted partially, and only implicitly expounded on across several chapters. Additionally, information is focalised through characters who have little to no prior knowledge of those stories. In that sense, at certain points in the broader narrative, these characters both share the reader’s task of making sense of the story presented to them and act as mediators between the third-person narrator and the reader. Inviting the reader to activate their experience and adapt it to various characters’ focalising positions facilitates emotional involvement. Therefore, narrative empathy relies on the fact that the narratives are communicated to the reader through devices typically associated with

emphatic effects, such as variable focalising points and the representation of the characters' consciousness.

Chapters 7 and 8 of *The Lord of the Rings* are examples of narratives which establish a strong basis for experientiality and the activation of narrative empathy considering their truth program value. Tom Bombadil recounts various stories to the four Hobbits from whose perspective the initial chapters of the novel are told, "sometimes half as if speaking to himself, sometimes looking at them suddenly with a bright blue eye under his deep brows" (Tolkien 2007a: 169). Immediately following this description, the text shifts to a brief description of the stories' contents, without directly employing the voice of Tom Bombadil. Significantly, the omniscient narrator establishes the Hobbits as the direct recipients of Bombadil's words, and mediators who partially communicate Bombadil's narration to the reader through indirect speech. From the very beginning, the interpretation is guided and influenced by the Hobbits' understanding of the narratives, so that what is shared with the reader is dependent entirely on the importance the Hobbits assign to specific pieces of information and the way in which they choose to arrange them. Moreover, what is conveyed as the Hobbits' first impression of Bombadil's stories is the value program of dichotomies positioning the pastoral idyllic scenery against evil that emerges in such a way that the descriptions (Tolkien 2007a: 170), brief and generalised, prime thematic significance. The choice of words essentially not only signals the manner in which the Hobbits themselves understand the narratives, but also begins constructing a potential ideological frame of the narratives through what Herman and Varvaeck term a hierarchical relationship of binary oppositions, in this case the oppositions of good and evil, friendly and unfriendly, cruel and kind.

The story of the Barrow-downs, as told by Tom Bombadil, is contained within a single paragraph of Chapter 7 of *The Fellowship of the Ring* (Tolkien 2007a: 170–171). Curiously, the indirect communication of Bombadil's words begins with a concise description of the hilly area. The narrator immediately directs the reader's attention to "the Great Barrows, and the green mounds, and the stone rings," emphasising their number and omnipresence "upon the hills and in the hollows among the hills" (Tolkien 2007a: 170). What is foregrounded are three explicit references to tombs, burial grounds and ritual practices with the intention of conveying an atmosphere of death and desolation, and thus covertly priming the reception to align with the ideological frame introduced before the tale itself. The following sentences in the paragraph depict a seemingly chronologically ordered sequence of events through a series of fleeting images. Although the initial state attributed to the Downs is one of peace and prosperity, populated only by sheep "bleating in

flocks" (ibid.), and by a period of peaceful human settlement of the region during which "Green walls and white walls rose" (ibid.), the atmosphere shifts to one of constant conflict, violence and destruction wherein "Kings of little kingdoms fought together" (ibid.) and "towers fell, fortresses burned, and flames went up into the sky" (Tolkien 2007a: 171). What follows is another peaceful period during which the Downs again seem to be devoid of human presence, returning momentarily to the initial state attributed to it, only for that peace to be disturbed once more, "A shadow came out of dark places far away" (ibid.) and "Barrow-wights walked in the hollow places" (ibid.). Although few details about the Barrow-wights are provided and no relation to conflict, violence and destruction as explicitly as the actants mentioned in the previous period of turbulence, the use of the noun shadow to describe the arrival of the Barrow-wights and their overall nature is enough to invite the reader to interpret them in a negative light. Additionally, the comparison at the very end, of the "stone rings" rising from the ground like "broken teeth" (ibid.) is the final touch at the emotional level rendering the account of the Downs a chilling foreshadowing that need not be interpreted literally within the storyworld context. What little of Bombadil's narrative is communicated to the reader aligns in terms of content and structure with the ideological frame introduced for its interpretation through very broad and generalised binary oppositions of good and evil, friendly and unfriendly, etc. Considering that such dichotomies make a clear distinction between the acceptable and unacceptable in the context of the storyworld, which is experientially based on the real-world via truth program, choosing sides is facilitated by very specific characterisation, representation techniques and focalisation.

Although incomplete, Bombadil's narrative attains the status of grand narrative or myth within the storyworld because of the truth program. Symbolically represented by the cyclical shifts in periods of peace and turbulence, the forces of good and evil are conveniently simplified and generalised to appeal to the readers' broadest experiential scope. What is peculiar about this brief explanation is that its elements reference nothing supernatural, or outside of the ontological reality of the real world, until the very end of the reported tale. The pastoral and epic images largely facilitate the reception of the poetic passage in which the landscape is the experience of history. Moreover, as such, the landscape becomes a dynamic element itself, which is typical of Tolkien and his narrative technique. This author's ingenious *broad stroke* allows for the cross-cultural activation of the readers' generalised internalisations of the cued dichotomies in the discourse, reminiscent of traditional historiographical narratives: a series of events centred on a specific geographical location and occur over a period of time, recounted in

chronological order with little attention paid to causal relations between those separate events. The missing causal links are merely hinted at and do not hinder interpretation as the gap-filling takes place on the part of the readers in the process gradually informed by the narrative's established truth program, all contingent upon the readers' ability to make analogies, especially so due to the historiographic form of the passage. It should be noted, at this point, that in the context of the storyworld itself, as the narrative offers information about places, events and characters whose characteristics align with the ontological reality of the storyworld and the Hobbits' knowledge of it, Bombadil's tale can be said to be factual. This piece of storyworld history builds the internal coherence of the narrative, but in the minds of the readers, the veracity it relates has little to do with storyworld fact-checking and more with the truth program it pushes forward. The story's apparent factuality in relation to the storyworld is confirmed by the novel itself, in both the continuation of the broader narrative, in Chapter 8 of *The Fellowship of the Ring*, to be discussed later on in the analysis, and in the Appendices of *The Lord of the Rings*. The violent conflicts mentioned in the story are a reference to the Civil War which tore the Northern Kingdom of Arnor into three smaller kingdoms, their constant disputes over rights to The Weather Hills and the palantir of Amon Sul, and the subsequent war with Angmar (Tolkien 1955a: 1360–1367). Thus, not only is Bombadil's account of the Downs a factual narrative within the storyworld, it is also part of the storyworld's broader history.

If we consider Fulda's assertion that history is narrated, with the aim of transforming apparently factual information into a *consumable product*, and that the interpretation of historical narratives is prompted by the assumption that the disclosed information is, indeed, factual, we might assume that the Hobbits likewise interpret Bombadil's tale as such. This assumption seems only to be supported by the previously mentioned fact that the novel establishes the practice of storytelling as an intrinsic part of the cultures represented within the storyworld, especially in the context of the claim that cultural conventions guide the reader to restraining their belief or disbelief in the process of interpreting fictional and factual narratives respectively. In this sense, it is unsurprising that the paragraph pertaining to the Barrow-downs, phrased in a manner reminiscent of a historiographical, factual narrative, is a reflection of the Hobbits' own interpretation of Bombadil's tale.

The fictionality of Bombadil's narrative, underscored by the appearance of Wights, becomes irrelevant against the real-world as referent. The narrative of the Downs is, at first, presented to the reader in a manner mimicking historiographical texts and activating analogous knowledge and programs in the reader. The text contains elements which correspond with the ontological

realities of both the storyworld and the real world, which facilitates the creation of the conception of the barrows, burial mounds and stone circles as corresponding to the ontological reality of their own real-world context, just as the short passage establishes them as part of the ontological reality of the storyworld. Similarly, many historiographical texts corresponding to the real world are accounts of monarchs' reigns in the same manner in which the text about the Downs references the monarchs of the kingdom of Arnor and the smaller kingdoms into which Arnor's territory is split. In effect, these points of similarity function as more or less overt textual references connecting the storyworld to the referential reality, or the ontological reality of the reader, illustrative of Herman's (2013) claim that narrative interpretation involves the same discourse-cue mapping as that of real-life situations.

Finally, it is important to comment on the fact that the brief paragraph about the Barrow-downs in Chapter 7 is interrupted, rather abruptly, by a marked negative emotional response from the Hobbits before further information could be provided on the Barrow-wights themselves. The reader's exposure to the story of the Downs might have ended at that point in the broader narrative, had the following chapter not transferred the Barrow-wights from the realm of a story to the realm of the Hobbits' lived experience, thus expounding on Bombadil's tale by continuing it almost at the point where it had been interrupted. Once the story related to the Barrow-downs and Barrow-wights shifts from interrupting the broader narrative of the novel to being part of it, the reader likewise stops receiving the Hobbits' interpretation of stories and returns to following their experiences as the Hobbits live them. The Hobbits relinquish their role of mediator between the storyteller and the reader, and become storytellers reporting their own experience. The reception of the Downs narrative as factual and historiographic generates the weight of the Hobbits' experience afterwards in terms of the context of the larger truth program of the narrative. The convention of fictionality allows for the (written) narrative to be experienced as equally believable to real-life experience, with the understanding that it is objectively not. Once the internal structure of the fictional world is established as coherent, and the experiential simulative relations established to the objectively real experience of the readers, what is storyworld-factual holds the same importance, substance and significance in the context because of the activated truth program. This is particularly noticeable in the reception of myths.

Following a night of restful sleep in Bombadil's home when the four Hobbits – Frodo, Sam, Merry and Pippin – set out to cross the Barrow-downs on a morning “cool, bright, and clean under a washed autumn sky of thin blue” (Tolkien 2007a: 176). Mimicking the structure of Bombadil's tale, the

peaceful atmosphere of the morning gives way to the mounting terror of the late afternoon. Having unintentionally fallen asleep next to a standing stone after their midday meal, the Hobbits awake to the sight of the setting sun sinking into a sea of fog. Their trepidation at having accidentally failed to heed Tom's warning about crossing the Downs before nightfall is, at first, tempered by hopefulness that there remained enough time to reach the line of trees they had previously perceived as the mark of the beginning of the Road. Yet their progress is hindered by the dense fog and growing darkness, and they are separated from each other before much distance could be put between them and the hill on top of which they had slept. It is only then that hopefulness disappears entirely, and fear becomes the dominant emotion of the scene. Frodo, left alone, frantically searches for his companions and, instead, comes upon a Barrow-wight. The brief encounter ends in Frodo losing consciousness upon physical contact with the Wight whose grip is "stronger and colder than iron" (Tolkien 2007a: 182). As though to refer to the initial sentence reported in Bombadil's story, and its emphasis on tombs and burial grounds, once Frodo wakes up he finds himself in complete darkness, "flat on his back upon a cold stone with his hands on his breast" (Tolkien 2007a: 183), and realises that he is trapped in a barrow. The intention of the Wight is made clear by the position Frodo wakes up in, curiously reminiscent of the way in which a body would be arranged before a funeral. The other three Hobbits, Sam, Merry and Pippin, are arranged in a similar manner, with the only marked difference being that "across their three necks lay one long naked sword" (*ibid.*). The terror, hopelessness and darkness referred to in the earlier stages of the scene are joined by the threat of violence and the possibility of imminent death, thus explicitly completing some of the emotions implied in the conflicts recounted by Bombadil. The Wight never does achieve its design of taking the Hobbits' lives and transforming them into Wights, for Frodo recalls the rhyme Bombadil had taught them should they be in need of his help. As might be expected, before long, Tom Bombadil appears along with the first light of a new day, and, with the Hobbits delivered to safety, the scene moves away from the darkness, violence and terror towards light and peace. Clearly, the Hobbits' experience on the Barrow-downs ends on a note opposite to Bombadil's, but it is nonetheless interesting to note the same cyclical shifts between peace and war, friend and enemy, idyllic and ominous, prosperity and ruin, etc., are some of the binary opposites participating in the value foundations of the truth program of the narratives.

## Conclusion

In Bombadil's framed narrative, as a narrativised historical account or myth, the paradox of fiction works on two levels. On the one hand, the implied factuality of the narrative, however removed from the world of the Hobbits, is received as intended – as history, but also as a myth. As a historical account, it prepares the immersed readers, initially the Hobbits, for the experience that would follow the account. The Hobbits' and the readers' immersion is facilitated by the stature of Tom Bombadil who describes himself as "Eldest" (Tolkien 2007a: 172), and thus an entity present in Middle Earth "before the river and the trees" (ibid.), an entity which "remembers the first raindrop and the first acorn" (ibid.). In essence, Bombadil's authority and direct communication to the Hobbits allows for his narratives to be processed as 'natural' narrative situations, as previously explained. As a myth, it carries symbolic meaning that would shape the storyworld reception, as well as real-life readers' interpretation of the framed narrative and the narrative of the Hobbits that follows. Myth becomes factual discourse with a truth program that renders its fantastical qualities irrelevant. The simulative function of experientiality activated in the process of reading formulates analogies between the ontological domains involved, even if there are more than two, which is the case of these framed narratives.

The aforementioned analogies between the two distinct ontological domains are not necessarily bound only to the narrative of the Downs, but also the later chapters. Notably, many of these analogies are associated with the violence and destruction of armed conflicts, and a suitable example would be the landscape and the history of the Dead Marshes, described as "dreary and wearisome" (Tolkien 2007b: 818). The bodies floating in the waters of the Marshes, the site of the Battle of Dagorland which took place during the War of the Last Alliance (Tolkien 2007c: 1423), could be taken as a reference to soldiers fallen in the Battle of the Somme and left in the mud of the battlefield. As Tolkien himself wrote in a letter to Professor L. W. Forester, "The Dead Marshes and the approaches to the Morannon owe something to Northern France after the Battle of the Somme" (Carpenter 2013). This link to the referential reality, probably a product of Tolkien's own experience in the First World War, thematically corresponds to the narrative of the Downs, as well as the broader narrative of the novel. The conflicts that form part of the history of the Downs, the War of the Last Alliance and the War of the Ring represent the same mythical struggle – the battle between the forces of good and evil, wherein the forces of good eventually prevail.

The factual is not the subject of fiction, even if it is present. The objective of fiction is the representation of *a* reality that configures the thematic content

the referential value of which may or may not become relevant against the real world as the context of the reader. This reality may *naturally* rely on the real world and reference it, or it may *unnaturally* diverge from it, yet retain thematic relevance that defamiliarises the cognitive environment of the reader, i.e. the real world, with its specific contexts. This is the case of myths, to an extent: although the storyworlds of myths *unnaturally* move from the ontological facts of the real world, the ontological quality of the myth-based world reflects or simulates the thematic concerns of the real world by means of experientiality in the form of the readers' capacity to thematically or otherwise relate their real-world experiences to the emplotted narrative discourse of the myth. The gap-filled structure of the historiographic narrative of the Downs assumes the function of the myth through its omitted content, the manner in which it fits into other narrative flows in the novel, but also in the emotional structure that it relates as a truth program. The gaps in the narrative are filled by the immersed reader, cued by the discourse, but also by their individual and collective experience in the real-world. Moreover, it is the mythical qualities of this brief narrative that allows for the main narrative(s) of the novel to acquire additional, larger-than-life meanings. Frodo's victory over the Wight is not merely situational, novel-bound, but rather part of a larger narrative, one beyond the narrative of *The Lord of the Rings* itself because of the analogous character of the storyworld events to real-world context.

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