

## **The Undecidable Quest: A Derridean Reading of Tolkien's *The Hobbit***

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper attempts to scrutinize and analyse Tolkien's high epic fantasy novel, *The Hobbit*, in the light of Derrida's views on literature as a liberal institution. Many scholars have read this novel through the lens of European mythologies, Abrahamic theocracy, etc. because Tolkien's text lends itself to such readings by practicing liberality. However, all these trends have a common overarching finalization; that is, finding a certain originarity for Tolkien's sub-created cosmos. While as a Derridean reading, this study contemplates the impossibility and danger of searching for originarity to disinter and discover new pleasures of reading Tolkien, it also seeks to investigate the affinity that exists between Derridean terms such as undecidability, iterability, and alterity, and Tolkien's text itself. This is crucial because the aim here is to explain the liberal power and the liberality of Tolkien's text according to Derridean concepts. The argument is that the text of *The Hobbit* is a stage on which the above-mentioned concepts interplay and the flow and dynamism of the story is guaranteed by literature as a liberal institution. This is while the play of structure is at work in *The Hobbit's* narrative to keep the stories' continuum alive and dynamic. This means that the story, with its liberal power, neutralizes any claim over ideality by constantly revisiting its own context. Accordingly, finalized and whole identities, presences, and claims are challenged and destabilized by the undecidable discourse of the story, and as a result more meanings and possibilities are revealed in a provocative reading.

*Keywords:* Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, Derrida, liberality, undecidability

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Tolkien's genius in creating a world populated with imagined languages, races and ethnicities is rarely matched by any other author in English literature, and the

impacts of his works is well recognised and appreciated by many cultural and literary products. Tolkien's mythology represents a multi-layered and complex cosmos that includes a variety of elements, stories, myths, and even names originated from Celtic, Nordic, Latin and Greek languages and cultures. However, despite borrowing from a host of cultures, his narratives remain to be innovative and unique while they are also independent and well-wrought. One example of such narratives is *The Hobbit*, in which various beliefs, dispositions, races and cultures are synthesised to develop a seemingly simple plot of children fantasy that is interestingly sophisticated and unique.

A Derridean reading, however, gives the readers a great opportunity to explore and analyse the intricately designed components of *The Hobbit*. By addressing and exploiting Derridean terms such as undecidability, liberality, and khora in reading *The Hobbit* this study intends to demonstrate the extent Tolkien has written a piece of fiction that is, in many ways, in tandem with Derridean views on fiction as a liberal and institutionless institution, and this is how this study will distinguish itself from the previous endeavours conducted in analysing Tolkien's works. Accordingly, characters such as Beorn and Bilbo and his decision making will be examined through concepts of khora and undecidability to show the dynamic flow of the narrative and demonstrate how the liberal forces of the story itself remove self-proclaimed kings mostly through Bilbo's great act of

forgiveness, Beorn's character, and finally Bard's slaying of Smaug. It will finally be clarified how Derridean terms such as iterability, alterity, undecidability, and so forth, can shed light on Tolkien's texts to reflect and represent the liberal forces of fiction in *The Hobbit*.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Tolkien's works have always been the subject of scholarly curiosity ever since their publication. One reason for such appeal can be the style of composition and narration that seems to be open to different interpretations, creating different meanings for different readers. An unforgettable fact, however, is Tolkien's genuine attempt in creating a world from which readers can take the highest amount of pleasure. As Smith (2006) observes "for Tolkien, the fruit of the unrealistic attempt to possess life securely through power is a diminished life; a life not awake to the wonder of being" (p. 93). When too occupied with the finalisability of possessing and appropriating, one can lose the joy and true value of life. Bilbo, for example, is described as "a smug, wealthy, timid, bourgeois recluse enjoying a secure and comfortable life" (p. 87). However, Bilbo at the end of this quest is cured of his greed. Yet, while Smith's approach is more of a catholic revisiting of moral principles, this alterity of self could be described and analysed by a Derridean reading that as Greenwood observes (2005) can give Tolkien's writings a new twist as he himself has twisted the real world around him, representing it in a new

way (p. 171). The interesting point to note here is introducing Tolkien's works, by some critics, as representations of mere morality and didactic trends (Burns, 1990, p. 49). In this view, Tolkien's fiction is considered simple because of its simplicity in presenting the confrontation between Evil and Good, which is apparently very similar to Abrahamic religions.

This seems, however, to be a superficial reading of Tolkien's writings because the multi-layered structure he has created is not deservedly considered. As Burns maintains, there is a great deal of liberality/liberty and departure from the real world's observed reality in Tolkien's fantasy fiction, where multiplicities, complexities and surprises are expected (1990, pp. 50-51). These sorts of multiplicity can appear in a single character, usually lone, exceptional even marginalized ones such as Beorn or Bilbo. Furthermore, as Chance (2001) observes, although many critics degrade Tolkien's tales as just childish, too simple, or bad merge of adult and child literature, his texts, particularly *The Hobbit*, are multi-layered and semantically complex (p. 52). It is with such arguments that Chance and Burns try to defend Tolkien against all the accusations of simplicity, childishness and impropriety.

There are also critics, such as Jackson (2010), who believe Tolkien employs allusive, reflexive narratives denying the appearance of a single subject and thereby introducing many voices into the narrative. Accordingly, "the allusive nature of the text and its confluence of forms" transform the

literary representation from what Bakhtin calls the absolute dogma of a closed monoglossia into "a working hypothesis for comprehending and expressing reality" (p. 67). This is to say that although we are dealing with fairy tales and myths in Tolkien, he is not imposing his voice on the narrative and the reader. Moreover, through reflexive and allusive narration he provides an insightful look into the reality of his time. A Derridean observation can reveal more on the connection between the pastness of a work in the literary history and its current condition in the present. Saxton (2013) is another scholar who notes that both Tolkien and Bakhtin see "art and life as intimately" (p. 178) entwined and related. Saxton adds that these two authors perceive "aesthetics [as] inseparable from individual responsibility." Authorship for Tolkien, Saxton concludes, is a matter of being a living sub-creator (ibid.).

Lots of scholarly studies, as demonstrated, are either set to identify certain contexts and origins for Tolkien's works or address the role of the author and his relation to the past and literary heritage. However, a post-Derridean critical mind wishes to see more than this in Tolkien's works. A closer look at Tolkien's texts in the light of Derridean ideas will be fruitful in revealing the relationship between Derridean and Tolkien's views on literature (fiction). Accordingly, what justifies the scholarly value of the present study is mainly based on two arguments: one is the concept of the play of structure, and the other is viewing fiction as a liberal

institution. Thus, in its close reading, this paper will focus on play of structure and literature as a liberal institution as its main framework. As Derrida (2000) maintains, a structure always monitors, organises, and if necessary reorders its self-proclaimed centre with the help of its self-declared authority and authenticity (pp. 89-90). This center is nothing out of the structure, but it is just a part of the structure like the others with no inherently privileged status. Therefore, the panoptical centre's authority is only an illusion. This study, therefore, tries to uncover the underlying layers of Tolkienian cosmos, myth, and fantasy by focusing on three main trends: liberality of fiction, fiction as a liberal institution, and the play of the structure. Moreover, other Derridean terms will be employed to explain the main arguments of this study in a more convenient and fruitful manner.

#### **DERRIDA ON LITERATURE FICTION AS AN INSTITUTIONLESS LIBERAL INSTITUTION**

Delineating the line that could be drawn between literary and non-literary texts has always been a very challenging and controversial issue among authors and critics both. The significance of this issue made Derrida write extensively to clarify his position in this regard. Following Attridge (1992), one comes to the idea that Derrida's primary concern is the institutional, ethical, and juridical implications of questions such as "what is the law based on which a text is considered literary or non-literary?" (p. 1). Additionally, who and

what institution would have the authority to address such questions? (p. 2). Although a work of literature comes into existence by laws and rules, it shows the ability and power to destabilize and shake those very rules. In other words, text represents nothing beyond its net of words, but both Derrida (1992a) and Tolkien (1966, p. 39) affirm that literature moves beyond the net of words: "We are before this text that, saying nothing definite and presenting no identifiable content beyond the story itself, except for an endless difference, till death, nonetheless remains strictly intangible" (Derrida, 1992a, p. 211). Bearing this in mind and considering the concept of event, one can clearly see that Tolkien's fairy-stories, as products of literature, could disrupt centres and their entailed presence.

Ironically, the event of literature not only disrupts the authority of centres but also guarantees the free play of structure. It is this event of literature that allows us to conceive "the notion of a structure lacking any centre" which is "the unthinkable itself" (Derrida, 2001, p. 298). Being beyond this world, off the reality of everyday life, and yet having been read by millions of people in the real world, Tolkien's texts establish themselves to be both opening to readers and guarding themselves from any force that would claim to enter them and be centralised by a single force of ideology, theocracy or logocentrism.

There is a certain connection between the liberty that fiction offers and the issues such as democracy and the ability to say

everything without being prosecuted or censored. While arguing over the distinction of private and public, Derrida (2005, p. 82) points out that literature is an institution whose invention is aligned with the revolution of law and democracy in the European context. Thus, according to Derrida, literature under the pretext of fiction, is allowed to say anything (as a liberal institution). Moreover, Derrida remarks upon the fact that like democracy, literature has also been under the impact of imposed limits and oppressions. Although the right to say anything has never been fully concretised, literature has the upper hand to allow one to say things that are otherwise repressed to be said in any other context (Derrida, 2005, p. 82). This idea of literature as a democracy-to-come is the very secret of the institutionless institution of literature. As an institution, literature, like other institutions, sets up laws and rules within itself. However, the unending and unchallenged freedom and democracy of literature allows novelists, playwrights and poets to break these rules only to produce more texts.

The texts of literature also may be hybrids regarding the genres they belong to. In this regard, this strange institution can be also institutionless since its rules and laws give us the space and possibility to change, amend or even bend them. Moreover, literature is a liberal institution within which one can say anything. When this short inference is put adjacent to the fact that much of Derrida's canon has been

dealing with the ideals and phantoms of purity, it can be said that within literature lies the power to shake the foundation of ideas of logocentrism and metaphysics of presence. Derrida asserts that for ages there have been centers in the structurality of structure controlling and assuring a rigidity which is nothing but a phantom of ideal originality and legitimacy (2000, pp. 90-94). On a closer examination, these centres have no right and existence outside the structure; therefore, the claim that they are infrastructure, above the other compartments of the structure, is a phantom-like claim. The moment their legitimacy is questioned, they try to replace another centre for the previous one to cover a weakness and fracture in the authority of the centres.

Therefore, there will be a constant play in the structurality of structure; an on-going substitution play. This play in the structure would challenge logocentrism that claims and demands presence dismissing signifiers and seeking to eradicate them by introducing a phantom of unity between the signifier and signified. Eru Illuvatar might be origin, the ultimate One, of which and around which a whole structure of creatures, races, and myths is formed. He can serve as a presence and dominion of an overarching centre. Ironically, like the play in the structure emphasized by Derrida, throughout the narrative of *The Hobbit*, the purity, presence and authority of centres such as Eru Illuvatar would be destabilised and challenged.

### **INAUGURATION OF *THE HOBBIT*: THE UNDECIDABLE, THE KHORATIC, AND THE SUBJECT**

All of a sudden, only because an old wizard intervenes, Bilbo decides to leave the comforts and conveniences of his life and ventures to unravel the mysteries and perils of an adventure. He seems torn between staying and going on the quest. This unusual, mad decision for a Hobbit of the Bag End is intriguing enough to call for a new reading of this decision making. Rejecting the existence of only “one ‘proper reading of a ‘text’” Glendinning insists on the possibility of another reading, arguing that “‘Writing’ is such that it always offers itself to new readings, new responses – and, hence, new responsibilities” (2001, p. 152). Wolfreys too asserts that what lies at the heart of iterability is not mere flow of repetitive arrays. It has, in its core, an alterability that moves beyond the repetitions, and perhaps even, that idea itself about which all repetitions are made (2004, p. 121). Additionally, as Derrida observes: “...iterability is differential, within each individual ‘element’ as well as between the ‘elements,’ because it splits each element while constituting it because it marks it with an articulatory break, that the remainder [...] is never that of a full or fulfilling presence” (1988, p. 53). Moreover, iterability is “the ability of any mark to suspend reference, to mean otherwise, to be readable as a mark beyond the context of its inscription” (ibid). Thus, iterability gives the possibility to read a text over and over again in different contexts and yet have a fresh insight into it. This

endless repetition which each time is new, could remove the rigidity and authority of a single-dimensional reading.

To offer and justify different readings and interpretations of *The Hobbit* one needs to consider Tolkien’s own views of reading faeries. He asserts that any approach to the interpretation of myth and fairy tale could and must enjoy the act of allegorical reading (1999, p. xiii). Derrida too raises the issue that the fictitious institution of fiction can lend itself to many different readings, even transcendental ones, and if this is denied, fiction itself will be cancelled: “A literature which forbade that transcendence would annul itself” (1992, p. 45). This is the ground on which fiction, or faerie, has the liberality to lend itself to many readings by different readers in different temporal, spatial or ideological contexts. Moreover, with iterability, there can be a new insight and a new reading each time.

While reading *The Hobbit*, the reader is initially met by a character that is going to act and decide against his nature, heritage and history of his people (hobbits). Bilbo’s quest to the Lonely Mountain appears to be a simple act against one’s heritage and history; a revolutionary deed in its literal meaning. Bilbo’s decision is remarkable and outstanding since it sets in motion events and incidents in a way that constantly destabilises ideals of purity in his own world; and by extension, of course, Tolkien’s sub-created world, too. In this regard, we go through the concepts of khora, decision and subject, and finally undecidability.

Being alien to the subject, history and even myth, Khora eludes the logic of non-contradiction. It neither threatens nor promises, and belongs to a third realm or genus rather than the two of the sensible and the intelligible. It has logic of inclusion and exclusion never ruling out one for the sake of the other. Thus, Khora eludes naming and coming under any mark or name, and as Derrida emphasizes either excludes or participates, or does both at the same time. This alternation “stems perhaps only from a provisional appearance and from the constraints of rhetoric, even from some incapacity for naming” (1995, p. 89). Khora, therefore, has a transitional aspect, like that of a mother bearing a child. It is “something that is at once present and absent, alien and one’s own” (Norton, 2015, p. 106). It gives space to the subject to exist and forms its subjecthood in a state that, like khora, is impossible to be defined. This khora is the place of secret and revelation. It is also the place where the secret is kept along with the absent but unique body (ibid., p. 107). Therefore, khora is a hybrid realm of paradoxes. Like khora, searching for an origin of subjectivity, whether psychological, ideological, political, mythological, or so forth, is the ultimate search for the beginning of all beginnings (Derrida, 1991, p. 109). Khora, decision, and the subject seem to be at work in a context of the undecidable as Bilbo decides to start his quest. Finally, the inauguration of *The Hobbit* signals a rhetorical significance: the reading/writing experience is represented in the metaphor

of Bilbo being an author (probably Tolkien himself) and his venturing on a quest as the author begins composing his text whose outcome he would sign as blurred, massive, and intense.

Ironically, relying on the use of words and languages to grasp the exact meaning and nature of things, deeds, and people is a problematic issue that attracts our attention at the very beginning of the narrative. The discussion that Gandalf and Bilbo have over naming and marking makes the story’s beginning a surprisingly overwhelming start:

*Not at all, not at all, my dear sir!  
Let me see, I don't think I know  
your name?*

*Yes, yes, my dear sir, and I do know  
your name, Mr. Bilbo Baggins. And  
you do know my name, though you  
don't remember that I belong to it.  
I am Gandalf, and Gandalf means  
me! (Tolkien, 2012, pp. 6-7)*

Apparently, there is only a play of signifiers in naming since Gandalf’s name, in his own explanation, signifies nothing beyond itself but engages in more chains of signifiers. This excerpt also shows how the process of naming and marking one with a signature is difficult to be grasped in a net of words no matter how many signifiers are allowed to be used. Hence, though all the meanings seem to be transferred through words, they still render themselves to be unnamable; escaping to be captured fully and precisely.

Accordingly, the unnamable hybrid realm of Khora depends on the corrupted logic of both inclusion and exclusion of logos/mythos, and that is why Khora is considered something “set against, before, beneath, and perhaps after reason” (Norton, 2015, p. 107). The encounter between Gandalf and Bilbo and the simple conversation between them triggers a decision made by Bilbo that cannot be explained by the logic of logos or mythos behind the world of Tolkien or those outside the text. As an instance, if Bilbo’s identity is considered English or of Enlightenment reason, his aversion of perilous adventures is understandable. If he adheres to his reason, he will know his limits in his world and will surrender to the prevailing spirit of being a hobbit that presupposes each hobbit to be peaceful, non-curious, and interested in isolation and comfort. These qualities are not condemnable; however, they pile on the implications that would eventually represent Bilbo as a marginalised individual. Bilbo could be categorised under many generalisations implied by logos and mythos.

During ‘the Unexpected Party’ Bilbo is exposed to the playfulness and legendary songs of the beauties and enchantments of the lost Erebor. Suddenly, the apparently simpleton or marginalized Bilbo feels the magic and beauty running down the Dwarves’ songs of the Lonely Mountain. He makes the decision to take on the quest and signs the contract. It is almost impossible to assign Bilbo’s decision to some myths or logos, but it belongs to the

realm of Khora. He neither excludes the heritage of his people nor does he include and accept it. However, the decision would not have been made if he did not belong to that Tookish heritage sub-created by Tolkien. As Tolkien puts it:

*As they sang the hobbit felt the love of beautiful things made by hands and by cunning and by magic moving through him, a fierce and jealous love, the desire of the hearts of dwarves. Then something Tookish woke up inside him, and he wished to go and see the great mountains, and hear the pine trees and the waterfalls, and explore the caves, and wear a sword instead of a walking stick.* (2012, p. 16)

‘Beauty’, ‘magic’, and ‘something Tookish’ are the stirred emotions/semi-logics that cause Bilbo’s corrupted reasoning to accept the perilous adventure into the unknown. Bilbo’s semi-reasoning escapes naming and ascription. ‘Beauty’, ‘magic’, and ‘something Tookish’ are all preceding the subject and can be traced back to the birth of Tolkien’s cosmos and Eru Illuvatar’s creation. Derrida comments on subject/decision relation this way:

*...the decision, if there is such a thing, must neutralise if not render impossible in advance, the who and the what. If one knows, and if it is a subject that knows who and what, then the decision is simply the application of a law. In other*



*words, if there is a decision, it presupposes that the subject of the decision does not yet exist and neither does the object.* (2005, p. 84)

Bilbo's Decision and Gandalf's endeavour to trust Bilbo in such a great risk taking are both a priori to the subjects of decision and the object that is taking up on an adventure. Thus, the decision making process and the subjects' status and reasons to take such decisions are of the khoratic transition – a process through which the subject is created or born through its undecidable undertaking of making a decision. Thus the path of undecidability matters here; according to Derrida (2002) the scale of undecidability is a discursive one that allows many voices to be heard, and it is opposed to inflexible, yet fragile pre-decided structures that had already taken all the decision for a subject (p. 252). Bilbo makes a decision which is the exact opposite of the history and heritage of his own race. Thus, he does not apply a priori law or rule, but he makes his decision against all pre-established laws and out of madness.

It appears that the constant negotiations and revisiting between emotions, reasoning faculties, and logocentric/mytho-centric traditions would eventually lead to a state of undecidability in which subject is created after and not prior to the decision itself. The significance is how the khoratic and undecidable state and the context destabilize the rigid historicity and phantoms lying behind it. The scale of undecidability, a discursive one, allows a free decision making to happen which is

independent from boundaries and limits set by a fragile yet despotic structure of history. Moreover, Bilbo's signature at the bottom of the Dwarves' contract, after having made his decision, can be a metaphor of the author deciding to write and sign his text bearing the responsibility all along his story and even throughout generations whenever his text is being read. After the mark is put, there will be no turning back.

Much like Tolkien, the author of the narrative, Bilbo takes up a responsibility to which he will remain loyal even more than Thorin who represents a logocentric ideal of kingship. Bilbo must bear his responsibility until the moment that the story closes and opens itself for more markings (readings). Although Khora never promises anything, Bilbo sets himself under the burden of a responsibility which is, by laws of the history of Arda, not his to carry. Thus, he rebels, in a way, against all the generalizations and appropriations behind the race of hobbits. He goes through a rupture that he is never able to explain or define later:

*To the end of his days Bilbo could never remember how he found himself outside, without a hat, walking stick or say money, or anything that he usually took when he went out; leaving his second breakfast half-finished and quite unwashed up, pushing his keys into Gandalf's hands, and running as fast as his furry feet could carry him down the lane, past the great Mill, across The Water, and then on for a whole mile or more.* (Tolkien, 2012, pp. 28-29)

All characters in *The Hobbit* bear a rich heritage and tradition of culture, history, divinity, and ethico-politics (like the right of kingship and right to rule over inferiors). This rich heritage carries in itself phantoms of ideality. The simplest of these phantoms would be the claim that a hobbit should and must, by nature of his essence, avoid intervening in serious issues and risk-takings. Bilbo should remain in his hole underground and enjoy the comforts of his exceptionally ordinary life since he is no king, hero, warrior, or has no right and responsibility over the matter of the Lonely Mountain's treasure. From this ordinary life, a fracture would rise shackling many phantoms of ideality imposed by that heritage.

#### **PURE IDEALS, KINGS, AND SUBJECTS UNDER THE MOUNTAIN**

Whereas the augmentation of the narrative in *The Hobbit* has its energy and flamboyance from the concepts of khora and undecidability, a set of struggles between seemingly pure and one-dimensional bodies of good and evil makes it possible to challenge their self-presumed legitimacy and purity. If elevation of an idea would lead to degrading of another sign or idea, marginalizing it in the name of some never existed or identified ideality (Deutscher, 2005, p. 25), then the texts we are reading here are on a quest, like Bilbo himself, to deny such elevation/degradation for the sake of an already contaminated ideal. There are seemingly pure evil in the texts, however, instead of emphasizing the origin of evil

and ascribing the origin to exteriorities of characters and races, the main interest is to show how they are textually depicted. Consequently, self-appointed purities and self-declared rights and authorities are the target of destabilization. Examining characters' journey through these idealities and the alterity that each one goes through will be fruitful.

From the moment that Bilbo is offered the contract of a perilous, unknown quest, he enters a state in which he feels alienated from his self, his home, and ironically the adventure itself. When he rejects the contract at first, he knows he does not belong to such large risk-takings. He is alienated from himself and his natural residence. Alterity is what Bilbo goes through all along his adventurous journey, and it does not matter if Bilbo is considered a linguistic structure (structure being a construct here, not as it means in structuralism), psychological structure, or an aesthetic structure. As Joan Brandt (1997) maintains, Derrida marks the concept of alterity as an internal property of any closed structure, linguistic or other kinds. Since temporal and spatial deferral of presence are at work, the presence would be placed in relation to an 'other' which is situated in a different space and time in relation to the subject (p. 120). Alterity that allows spatial and temporal fluctuations as well as flux in subjectivity, is the essence of democracy and by extrapolation, literature itself (Thomson, 2015, p. 99). Bilbo is in constant spatial and temporal deferral throughout his journey. At certain

moments, his past and none-present (that are iterable in terms of remembering and textual depiction) states of identity find their way into his textual psych. He measures his current spatio-temporal state against a desirable past state of selfhood in the form of simple homesick statements:

*Far, far away in the West, where things were blue and faint, Bilbo knew there lay his own country of safe and comfortable things, and his little hobbit-hole. He shivered. It was getting bitter cold up here, and the wind came shrill among the rocks.* (Tolkien, 2012, p. 52)

This ideal of 'home', comfort, or the righteous place of Bilbo's presence and self is not restricted to only Bag End or even Bilbo for that matter. The way that Rivendell is depicted as one last homely house and the manner that dwarves' king, Thorin Oakenshield, tries to impose his authority and appropriation over the realm and treasure of Erebor (even at the cost of lives of others) as well as Smaug's fiendish endeavour to remain the only king under the Mountain are all examples of how subjects in *The Hobbit* try to obstruct the process of alterity and assumingly keep a state of purity or ideality. This obstruction is imposed by clinging to a phantom of ideal, full presence or right of one's own culture and ethnicity. Thus, beings such as Smaug and Thorin are trying to make their identities present and self-closed; something that is impossible for any structure of being. As Critchley (1999)

observes, "the very activity of thinking, which lies at the basis of epistemological, ontological and veridical comprehension, is the reduction of plurality to unity and alterity to sameness" (p. 29). Those subjects that seek to reduce the alterity try to climb up to the top of a structurality which is associated with logos and mythos and justifies their phantoms of authority by using an appropriated ontology or philosophy of culture, history and heritage.

In Tolkien's narrative, *The Hobbit*, the endeavors to find a full present identity and an indisputable centrality of power, purity, and legitimacy lie in the struggles over possessing, becoming native, or declaring a by-nature/blood right or origin. The search for such pure forms of identity and origin is as absurd as discussing culture and language and relating them to a single origin: "A culture never has a single origin" (Derrida, 1992b, p. 10). The story fluctuates between claims of purity and uncontaminated right to rule and possess.

### **COMPLEXITIES OF BEORN, GOLLUM, AND BILBO: HYBRIDITY AND THE LIBERALITY OF THE TEXT**

Beorn, Gollum, and Bilbo are interesting and memorable characters because of their hybridity. This is to say, these three characters do not exactly fall into the categories of ethnicity and race in Tolkien's world. Bilbo, as a simple hobbit, should have never left Shire, yet he has done so and defied his nature already. On the other hand, Beorn is both a man-like

creature and sometimes a bear-like beast. Ironically, what makes literature a liberal institution allowing one to say anything is the powerless power of being able to stand on the edges of other discourses and move beyond them. This is because literature would lend itself to other discourses almost liberally (Derrida, 1992a, p. 44). Fiction can challenge authorities and dogmatisms because the author can say anything within its space. On the other hand, it moves and stands on the edges of other discourses while none of them can claim it for themselves (ibid.). Before, we pointed out that as an institution, fiction can be open to changes and modification of laws and rules. Therefore, fiction challenges its own limitations and rules as well as those of other discourses. It has the power to do so while it never claims such power. That is why it can be called a powerless power or and institutionless institution.

Bilbo is not at all a character of great potencies and powers, not at least the powers and potencies that are found in other logo-like characters such as Smaug and Thorin. In Bilbo's own words "We are plain quiet folk, and I have no use for adventures. Nasty, disturbing, and uncomfortable things" (Tolkien, 2012, p. 6). It can be said, however, that his decision to undertake the great quest is the result of constant negotiations with his 'nature' and his desires. This makes him a hybrid, neither a hobbit of plain quiet folk nor a great king or warrior by blood or nature. He even becomes more than a hybrid hence he can be both a hobbit, like whenever he

desires his home and heart, and a non-hobbit, a non-Middle-earthian person at the same time, like when he appears to elevate above all the good, pure hearted characters in practicing forgiveness and liberality. This is particularly tangible in Bilbo-Gollum encounter in the chapter 'The Riddles in the Dark'.

Metaphorically speaking, meeting Gollum who had been a hobbit before the Ring found him, Bilbo met his own 'Other'; a creature that is not to be apprehended, present, or appreciated by the subject. In other words, Bilbo meets an altered person and cannot understand him in any sense because he is so different from his original race and culture. However, Bilbo negotiates with this cruelly altered Other. Waking up in the dark, he again feels that he has lost the comfort of being home as a plain, quiet hobbit. A desire of having an identity which was never pure and going on an adventure seem to be a contamination that is clearly rooted in the identity's own interior; that is, a pharmakonic contamination; something which is both remedy and poison. Then, a strong sense of non-belongingness appears:

*He thought of himself frying bacon and eggs in his own kitchen at home, for he could feel inside that it was high time for some meal or other; but that only made him miserabler. He could not think what to do; nor could he think what had happened; or why he had been left behind; or why, if he had been left behind, the goblins had not caught him; or even why his head was so*

*sore. The truth was he had been lying quiet, out of sight and out of mind, in a very dark corner for a long while.* (Tolkien, 2012, p. 65)

It is as if the story is enslaving the text, Bilbo, and the reader in its intrinsic web of words by cancelling spatio-temporal differentiation and through trapping Bilbo in a dark and inescapable place. The story tries to close itself to reading. Yet, the question remains: How to escape this dead end? The reader knows that at the beginning the key to the escape-door of this stalemate is put in Bilbo's pocket; the One Ring.

It may appear that Bilbo is in an impassable situation, thus he chooses to play Gollum's game of Riddles. However, he has the sword, so he could simply kill Gollum and make the way out (this is unlikely but not impossible), or threaten him to reveal the path. He chooses to play because Bilbo has had no claim over any sort of purity to perceive himself possessing a right to end Gollum's life by assuming that he himself is pure and Gollum is evil. Gollum "thought it was a riddle, and he was frightfully upset" (Tolkien, 2012, p. 74) while Bilbo was contemplating on the thing in his pocket a little bit loudly. The rules of the game are both broken and renewed by this probably happy misspeak or misunderstanding. The game is violated. Old, ancient central rules are violated and are replaced by the new context.

Gollum tries to kill Bilbo when he fails to win his own game of riddles. By accident, Bilbo wears the Ring and is saved by yet another hybridity. The invisibility

(the hybrid state) of Bilbo puts him in a state of being/none-being at the same time in Gollum's eyes. While he is safe from the torture of Ring's evil, Gollum has suffered it probably because he has succumbed to Ring's phantom of pure evil and power. Nonetheless, while wearing the Ring, Bilbo is acting like a crack in the act that story has put up to close itself to reader and the characters. Moreover, there is a hidden force in the text that tries to depict and ascribe Gollum as only and only a cruel thing deserving no chance of empathy, but Gollum defies this by remembering his previous self; his being a hobbit like Bilbo:

*He had been underground for a long time, and was forgetting this sort of thing. But just as Bilbo was beginning to hope that the wretch would not be able to answer, Gollum brought up memories of ages and ages and ages before, when he lived with his grandmother in a hole in a bank by river...* (Tolkien, 2012, p. 71)

It could be this game and riddle making that keeps Bilbo's hand from killing this 'wretch'. In fact, there is an opposing force, that of the authorial voice, that tries to mark Gollum as an enemy 'other'. Derrida (1997) observes that "War has its own rules and perspectives, its strategies and tactics but they presuppose a political decision ... naming who is the enemy" (p. 126). Nonetheless, Bilbo practices forgiveness which seems to be impossible to do by other pure light and good in the

story. Bilbo's decision, his hybridity, his not being attached to phantoms of ideality, and his being a subject that shackles and cracks rigidities of self-legitimacies help him to forgive his doom (Gollum) and spare his life by taking decision out of undecidability and madness. Accordingly, Bilbo does not succumb to a pre-decided decision that is under the control of a logocentric ontology which perceives Gollum as an enemy. Bilbo's hand is stayed and alterity is emancipated from being reduced to sameness.

The impossibility of a pure act of forgiveness is related to Bilbo's identity and being as impossibilities for the readers (because of their non-existence out of the text). It is quite possible to consider Bilbo's unconditional forgiveness as an impossibility that can exist in the text for the reader to encounter. This is a powerless power for Bilbo, a democracy or liberality to-come that enables him to challenge logocentric phantoms present in the history and creation of Middle Earth, and yet Bilbo's power and liberality is not and cannot be fully apprehended in words or in the reality of our world. Bilbo's being is textually established. For Derrida, as Deutscher (2005) observes, there is nothing out of the text and the text is but a massive game of differentiation and temporality (p. 33). Consequently, Bilbo is a literary power (the power of fiction and story-telling) that is able to practice a great number of liberal actions such as violating and defying his nature and the long-established, mytho-centric rules of an ancient game of riddles.

Beorn is another interesting fictitious construct of traditions and histories of Tolkien's sub-creation. As a shape-shifter, he has the ability to be of two identities and selves. As a strong man, he could represent intelligent race of civilized folks. As a beast, he may represent the wildness and originality of nature. However, his being a hybrid, very much like Bilbo and Gollum, but to a greater extent, challenges the rigidity and authenticity of culture/nature opposition. Even his language is alien to others. Additionally, his self is presented as a presence possessing an identity which is closed in itself:

*"And why is it called the Carrock?" asked Bilbo as he went along at the wizard's side.*

*"He called it the Carrock, because carrock is his word for it. He calls things like that carrocks, and this one is the Carrock because it is the only one near his home and he knows it well."*

*"Who calls it? Who knows it?"*  
*"The Somebody I spoke of, a very great person..." (Tolkien, 2012, pp. 107-108)*

In a clash of two forces, one force is trying to portray Beorn as a completely autonomous whole in his presence while the other force is trying to render him and his language as supplementary. In this excerpt, the language and the verbal construct's definitions of Beorn are postponed to signs after signs. As Derrida (1997) suggests, "Somewhere, something can be filled up

of itself, can accomplish itself, only by allowing itself to be filled through sign and proxy. The sign is always the supplement of the thing itself" (p. 145). Thus, Beorn may be initially deemed logocentric and even – due to his masculine apparels – a phallogocentric being. However, his hybrid identity and Gandalf's remarks about him and his place of life are the first challenge to his being an ideal phantom of rigidity and autonomy. The fact that he has power over nature and animals comes from the nature itself. In Gandalf's words, he himself is under a spell which is his spell and nothing out of his hybrid identity.

The hybridity of Beorn's character is ratified by his brewing and consuming mead. Mead brewing, crafting wooden things and producing dairy products mark Beorn as a creature of both nature and culture. This is well in parallel with what Dosse (1997) asserts reminding us of Lévi-Strauss's (1973) observation about transformation or passage from nature to culture that includes a variety of human activities from preparing cooked food and mead to making different ornaments and costumes (p. 258). As such, Beorn is not a mytho-centric or logocentric power over nature, but he is, in fact, a power from/of nature. Beorn does not simply try to rule and subdue nature. It is more likely that he cooperates with the natural elements as well as the elements that can be assumed cultural and related to civilization. Nonetheless, it should be noted here that Beorn's hybridity is a challenge to culture/nature opposition and its rigid pure distinction.

In another act of destabilising distinctions and oppositions, Gandalf introduces the company to Beorn one by one and through a performative act of storytelling that strikes Beorn as well as the reader. As simple as it is, Gandalf's improvised fiction challenges Beorn who at first appears to be a great ancient ideal of nature's authoritative wildness, grandeur, and influence. This could be observed as the powerless power of fiction practiced through the unbound liberality that literature possesses. Great and invulnerable Beorn proves to be powerless and submissive facing the powerless power of Gandalf's story. Beorn surrenders to Gandalf's storytelling while the story does not forcibly impose Beorn anything. However, he eventually offers the company the best of his hospitality.

#### **THE RESOLUTION OF THE QUEST: BARD/SMAUG, AND ARKENSTONE/BILBO**

Smaug's words to introduce himself are very telling because considering his description it seems really impossible for any power to challenge the King under the Mountain: "My armour is like tenfold shields, my teeth are swords, my claws spears, the shock of my tail a thunderbolt, my wings a hurricane, and my breath death!" (Tolkien, 2012, p. 207). However, it is the simplest and tiniest of cracks that makes it possible to dethrone this king. It begins with the Dwarves finding their way into his kingdom through a door which was always in his kingdom though neglected by

him and unknown to most of the Dwarves. Even the cypher to the location of the door is broken not by Thorin but by Elrond who is an ‘other’ to Thorin’s culture, language, and divine right to rule. Smaug, too, ignores the fact that there is no whole, pure, uncontaminated condition to a body; be it language or the right to rule.

Interestingly, Smaug’s weak spot, the unprotected point on Smaug’s chest, is detected by Bilbo. Then, the Old Thrush, again another marginalized minority to Smaug’s structure of power, overhears this when Bilbo is revealing Dragon’s fatal weakness to other Dwarves. The old Thrush finds Bard and: “Wait! Wait! it [the Old Thrush] said to him. The moon is rising. Look for the hollow of the left breast as he flies and turns above you!” (Tolkien, 2012, p. 228). Smaug’s death guarantees the replacements of the centers in the structure. Bard, literally meaning a poet, is the one who eventually dethrones the King under the Mountain. The role of Bard could be assumed as a metaphor of the role of the powerless institution of literature that is beyond and over any logocentric discourse even if the text of literature bears signs and traces of logocentrism, such as Smaug, Thorin, the Arkenstone, and so forth. Bard takes the great liberty bestowed on him by Tolkien’s fiction to depose the greatest, catastrophic logo of the text. Yet, one should not think that Bard or Bilbo is the sole destroyer of the logo for both of them are “acting within a community composed of the dwarves, Gandalf, and the men of Dale” (Jakupcak, 2014, p. 57).

Smaug’s death marks the appearance of another self-proclaimed king, Thorin. Thorin, is the true heir to the throne of Erebor by blood. However, his claim is not so different from Smaug’s claim. They are both interiorly contaminated and vulnerable in their claim of being pure. When Thorin breaks his promise in sharing the wealth of Erebor with ‘others’, he becomes obsessively preoccupied with the purity, legitimacy, and invulnerability of his decision and claim. Thorin gets obsessed over the Arkenstone which is a proof of his divine right to rule over Erebor:

*“The Arkenstone! The Arkenstone!”  
murmured Thorin in the dark, half  
dreaming with his chin upon his  
knees. “It was like a globe with a  
thousand facets; it shone like silver  
in the firelight, like water in the  
sun, like snow under the stars, like  
rain upon the Moon!” (Tolkien,  
2012, p. 213)*

Although Bilbo finds the Arkenstone, he hides it from Thorin and talks to no one about it. Thorin is eager to find the gem:

*For the Arkenstone ... is worth  
more than a river of gold in itself,  
and ... is beyond price. That stone  
of all the treasure I name unto  
myself, and I will be avenged on  
anyone who finds it and withholds  
it. (Tolkien, 2012, p. 244)*

Since the day dwarves lose their home and kingdom, they feel that they belong to nowhere but Erebor. This strong sense of



non-belongingness is flowing in Thorin's mind. Even when the Serpent is defeated, Thorin is so alienated from his own home that he wants to close the Door of the Mountain to everyone and thus keep the treasure all for himself. Thorin's obsession and his viewing himself as the sole owner of the treasure and the gem is because of the logocentric state he assumes for himself. Over all, the logo of an invulnerable, undisputable king once again threatens the play of signifiers in the structure of the narrative.

Not for the first time, the task of securing the play of signifiers in the structure (with none of them being purely superior to others) falls on Bilbo's shoulder who actually has a relation of non-responsible responsibility (since he is not a dwarf and his decision of accepting the quest cannot be explained by logical relations and traditional laws of Tolkien's world) to Thorin, other dwarves, other races, and finally the narrative itself. By sneaking out the Arkenstone and delivering it to the Elven King like a thief who can break all laws and limits, Bilbo metaphorically challenges Thorin's ideal claim and ownership over the gems, treasure, and the right of ruling Erebor. In being responsible, because of a contract he has signed and a promise he has made, for a responsibility that is not his in any terms of nature, blood, etc. Bilbo metaphorises the role of the author the moment *s/* he puts the quill on the paper and starts writing. Tolkien is both responsible and not responsible for the fictitious narrative he creates. The discourse of fiction goes

beyond all discourses. Similarly, Bilbo's role in this narrative belongs to no particular group or individual, thus he is able to act, talk, and move beyond all as a hobbit, burglar, thief, and any other role that might be imagined for him. The law of the text by which Bilbo is depicted denies a direct access to a clear-cut definition and description of Bilbo's linguistic construct regarding his acts and decisions. Although we can imagine Bilbo as a character with a charming subjectivity, "we do not know what it is, who it is, where it is. Is it a thing, a person, a discourse, a voice, a document, or simply a nothing that incessantly defers access to itself, thus forbidding itself in order thereby to become something or someone?" (Derrida, 1992a, p. 208). With his powerless power he destabilizes the last of logocentric stands in the text; that is Thorin's false claim over the Arkenstone and thus the right over the treasure and the kingdom of Erebor.

## CONCLUSION

A close study of Tolkien's text reveals that he has not created phantoms of pure bodies by elevating a concept at the cost of degrading the other. Instead of excluding 'others' that are dangerous to the uncontaminated bodies, Tolkien gives all characters and entities voices of their own. Thus, whatever appears initially to be invincible, totally authentic, and fully present to its 'self', gradually gives in to the play of the structure. The narrative itself comes to question and challenge the legitimacy of self-called centres. Within

this process of constant changes and challenges that befall characters lies a force that makes the narrative move ahead with a great amount of liberty.

The findings of this study on *The Hobbit* demonstrate that hybrid identities and marginalised creatures find their way into the claims of logos and mythos such as Smaug and Thorin. Furthermore, those who claim to be pure and omnipotent never remain unchallenged by the flow of the story's constant changes. Their power and identity are questioned and doubted by the most seemingly puny characters such as Bilbo. Therefore, the greatest power of the text lies in the fact that it is liberal moving beyond other discourses. Accordingly, by putting fiction against the real world and in terms of materiality, credulity, possibilities, and etc., the author is both responsible and not responsible for the narrative he creates. Therefore, his high epic fantasy, which is liberal to create a world remote and independent from the actual world, finds a greater potency to say almost everything while assuming no responsibility for what is said and portrayed. As a result, the non-responsible responsibility of the author makes him bear the story to a point that is ready to be read and marked by the readers while he keeps the narrative open for the reader to interact with. To do so, Tolkien introduces logo-like entities that replace each other constantly revealing their unstable and false claims. Hence, it is the power of fiction that ultimately triumphs over those who assume purity and authenticity. However, *The Hobbit's*

story does never claim over or appropriate the text; it just allows all the voices and possibilities to be heard.

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