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One Ring to Bring Them Both and in the Darkness Bind Them: The Shire as Frodo Baggins's Topographical Equivalent

Margarita Maira¹

This paper deals with the problem of identity and place in J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. It attempts to show that the main character's connection with his homeland is deeper yet than what is usually perceived. When comparing Frodo's journey and the Shire's development throughout the novel it is possible to see many coincidences in their paths. As a result, we may state that the Shire mirrors Frodo's evolution. This curious discovery prompted the creation of the term "topographical equivalent" to describe their unique relationship. This, in turn, affects the hero's journey, for when he reaches the Shire's doppelganger, the land of Mordor, he is also facing his own. This encounter not only affects Frodo as a near death experience. It results in a painful extension of consciousness too, since the world is capable of containing an evil so opposite to his and his homeland's natures. A change is produced from a local conception of place to a broader one of space. Both these traumatic events alter the hero. Furthermore, these consequences become quite revealing when trying to decipher Frodo's strange relationship and final abandonment of the Shire after the Quest of the Ring is over.

KEYWORDS: THE LORD OF THE RINGS, FRODO, THE SHIRE, DOPPELGANGER, TOPOGRAPHICAL EQUIVALENT

In J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, the hobbit hero, Frodo, sets out on a journey to the evil land of Mordor in order to destroy the One Ring in Mount Doom, where it was forged. As he fulfils his task as the Ring-bearer, he undergoes many changes. The innocent Frodo we meet in book one is radically different from the worn out one we see return to his country in book six. During the time he was absent, his paradisiacal homeland, the Shire, also suffered many alterations. Frodo's

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idyllic country—supposedly an invocation of Tolkien’s childhood England before industrialization—ceased to be a peaceful shelter while he was gone.

Taking Frodo’s transformation during his adventures and comparing them to his country’s, reveals an interesting resemblance of both processes, where it appears that the Shire changed along with him. One possible explanation may be found in the assumption that the Shire is Frodo’s topographical equivalent. Furthermore, if the Shire is taken as the land of good, Mordor may be identified as its doppelgänger and, by extension, also Frodo’s. This is to say that when our hero reaches Mordor it is an encounter of an individual and his doppelgänger. Apart from the direct effects this has on Frodo it also implies an extension of consciousness from local place to a broader conception of space; from a sheltered idea of home to one of a wide world that may also contain evil. The consequences this traumatic event produced in Frodo may suggest several answers for the hobbit’s mysterious relationship and abandonment of the Shire once his journey was over.

To begin this analysis, it is crucial to reformulate the idea of space as we apply it in everyday use. In her book *For Space*, Doreen Massey, social scientist and geographer, presents many arguments for rethinking this concept. Before discussing the main content of her book, she makes three opening propositions clear, two of which add much to the present study: first, that space is the product of interrelations, as constituted through interactions; and second, that space can be understood as multiplicity, where “distinct trajectories coexist. . . [or put more simply there is] coexisting heterogeneity” (9). The former is closely related to the first objective of this paper, that the Shire is Frodo’s topographical equivalent, while the second has more to do with the latter, that, as a consequence of his encounter with Mordor, his doppelgänger, we may find answers for Frodo’s abandonment of the Shire.

Halfway through her book, Massey discusses a person’s interaction with space when he or she travels. Giving as an example her own train ride to work every day, from London to Milton Keynes, she states that

[s]ince space is a product of social relations [when you travel] you are also helping. . . to alter space, to participate in its continuing production. You are part of the constant process of the making and breaking of links which is an element in the constitution of you yourself, of London (which will not have the pleasure of your company for the day), of Milton Keynes (which will. . .), and thus of space itself. (118)

Her main idea here is that, as we travel, we are affecting the places we visit. Yet the part where she states that we are also altering our own selves in the process must not go unnoticed. “The making and breaking of links,” in Frodo’s own journey, leaves many marks on his self and, as we will see further on, on the Shire (that does not have the pleasure of his company) as well.

Massey also argues that “[c]onquest, exploration, voyages of discovery are about the meeting-up of stories, not merely a pushing-out ‘across space’” (120). This is what Frodo and his



companions, The Fellowship of the Ring, may be said to do as they advance. They take their identities, their selves, their stories, to meet foreign lands which have their own narratives. Character evolution occurs as they absorb the different landscapes, foes and historic tales Middle-earth, their world, has to offer them. The ‘meeting-up of stories’ or ‘the making and breaking of links’ both refer to what Massey proposed space to be: interactions. Space is interrelations (Massey’s first proposition) because we make it and it makes us, as Frodo changes it and is changed during his quest.

To analyse Frodo’s journey, a few notions should be made clear and some parameters must first be established. The concept of topography, “the description of the surface features of the earth, including landforms and all other subjects” (Norris 470), comes from the Greek words *topos*, which means place or locality, and *graphein*, which means ‘writing’ (*Webster’s New Standard Dictionary* 2411). Quite literally, then, topography may be taken as ‘the writing of a place’ or even as ‘places that write.’ If we take writing as creation or as an addition which is bound to affect the status quo of a written page, we can say that Frodo writes the Shire’s fate, as his own is written by the places where he lands. For these reasons, the concept of topographical equivalent seems to fit the purpose of this paper fairly accurately.

It is also central for the second objective in this paper to comprehend what the double motif entails. The German word *doppelgänger*, “which is the usual literary term for this common phenomenon [of the double] and which literally means ‘double-goer,’ was brought into the language, and simultaneously, into the literary tradition—as a term only—by the novelist Jean Paul (Richter)” (Živković 122). The German novelist first used it in 1796 and, curiously enough, he applied it to refer to a person who sees his or her double, and not to the double itself as it is usually employed in the present (Dietz 210). He was very ambiguous on what it meant, specifically. In “The Double as the ‘Unseen’ of Culture: Toward a Definition of Doppelgänger,” Milica Živković warns us that “[f]or scholars seeking a precise definition, Jean Paul offers little help” (122).

A reason for this might be that he did not invent the term. Živković explains that “the fictional double is not a literary motif but a construction of traditional culture. . . the [d]oppelgänger can be traced not to a single authority, but to ancient myth, mysticism, folklore, fairy tale and romance” (122). As a result of its nature, so inherent to the culture, the concept of *doppelgänger* is usually taken for granted. Authors that deal with this subject in relation to the famous *doppelgängers* in literature, for example, assume the readers know they are referring to the idea of the double and do not bother to give descriptions. Because of this, the most precise and complete definition of the concept may be found in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, where *doppelgänger* means

[i]n German folklore, a wraith or apparition of a living person, as distinguished from a ghost. The concept of the existence of a spirit double, an exact but usually invisible replica of every man, bird, or beast, is an ancient and widespread belief. To meet one’s wraith, or double, is a sign that one’s death is imminent. . . The concept of double, as alter ego or moral counterpart. (625-26)



The place that most resembles a wraith of any kind in Middle-earth is Mordor, which literally means “Black Land,” and is often referred to as the Land of Shadow (Tyler 308). Even before the dark lord Sauron, feared enemy of the free peoples of Middle-earth, appropriated it, it was a “bleak and desert land, barren and infertile.” It is also said that its land mirrors Sauron’s fortunes (Tyler 309). It is surrounded by rocky mountains and in its vast plane rises mighty Orodruin (also referred to as Mount Doom), the volcano Frodo struggles to reach, the final goal of the trilogy’s quest. Mordor is a dry and lifeless country, made of nothing but stones and death. In the times of *The Lord of the Rings*, only orcs and other foul creatures inhabit it.

Before marking the parallels in Frodo’s and the Shire’s progresses during the novel, it seems necessary to clarify the circumstances in which the journey begins. Frodo, the hobbit, inherits a magic Ring which originally belonged to the powerful Sauron. He had forged it to embody his evil magic and, once he lost it, he could not regain the necessary strength to conquer Middle-earth. Fearing Sauron would overcome all barriers to possess the One Ring again, Gandalf, the wizard, commands Frodo to take it to Rivendell, an elven dwelling where the solution to this problem is found: Frodo, escorted by eight companions of all races—the Fellowship of the Ring—will take the indestructible jewel to the volcano where it was forged in the Land of Shadow. Mount Doom’s fire temperature is the only source of heat blazing enough to melt the powerful Ring. On the way, many unexpected adventures arise, and by the time Frodo accomplishes his task, only his loyal servant Sam is left with him.

During Frodo’s journey, his physical and his psychological conditions worsen. And while he is away from home, the Shire is also greatly damaged. Their equivalent processes can be traced all along the various stages of the quest in many specific details, such as: the slow and patient tainting of their innocent natures, the wounds (real or metaphorical) evil inflicts on them; the warnings they both receive against the dark powers; the simultaneous loss of their respective leaders and similar aftermaths of it; the corruption of characters related to them; the generous aid of elves; the timely appearance of more unexpected help; the darkness that covers their heads (and hearts); and their increasing deterioration during their final stages, just to name a few. In the following pages, all of these shared characteristics will one by one be described and contrasted in terms of Frodo’s and his homeland’s developments.

In order to fully grasp the changes our hobbit hero undergoes, it is necessary to deeply comprehend the hobbit way of life he leaves behind when he departs. Before his quest, Frodo lived like any other hobbit in the Shire. In the “Prologue” to *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien explains what this lifestyle consists of. He describes hobbits as essentially unobtrusive and adds that “they love peace and quiet and good tilled earth: a well-ordered and well-farmed countryside [is] their favourite haunt. They do not and did not understand or like machines more complicated than a forge-bellows, a water-mill, or a hand-loom” (13). He also says that they are generally shy of humans, a reason for which they have become masters of hiding. Their main characteristic is that of being a “merry folk,”



[t]heir faces were as a rule good-natured rather than beautiful, broad, bright-eyed, red-cheeked, with mouths apt to laughter, and to eating and drinking. And laugh they did, and eat, and drink, often and heartily, being fond of simple jests at all times, and of six meals a day (when they could get them). They were hospitable and delighted in parties, and in presents, which they gave away freely and eagerly accepted. (14)

And in case this description were not enough to perceive them as the epitome of peacefulness, Tolkien specifies that “[a]t no time had Hobbits of any kind been warlike, and they had never fought among themselves.” Weapons in the Shire were used as trophies, decoration or were gathered in their museum in Michel Delving (17-18).

And this merry folk’s land is just as mirthful. As if to highlight the Shire’s joyful character, the first approach to this country in *The Lord of the Rings* is in the eve of Bilbo’s grand birthday party, “an engrossing entertainment; rich, abundant, varied, and prolonged” (41). So many people had been invited that there was a lack of postmen to deliver the innumerable invitations and the feast was bound to suffice even for insatiable hobbits, because “Bilbo’s catering had depleted the stocks of most stores, cellars and warehouses for miles around” (41).

In fact, the Shire’s essence can be grasped in that first chapter, as it narrates, for example, that its inhabitants’ preoccupations involve the best technique for growing vegetables and gossiping about the queerest hobbit families (34-36). A few pages later, the Shire is revealed as a land of merriment; on the day the festivity finally takes place,

[w]hen every guest had been welcomed and was finally inside the gate, there were songs, dances, music, games, and, of course, food and drink. There were three official meals; lunch, tea, and dinner, or supper. But lunch and tea were marked chiefly by the fact that at those times all the guests were sitting down and eating together. At other times there were merely lots of people eating and drinking, continuously from elevenses until six-thirty, when the fireworks started. (39)

Recalling the definition of doppelgänger, deadly Mordor can be accurately labelled as the opposite to the hobbits’ homeland. To begin with, they are even placed in different extremes of the world. On one side of Middle-earth’s map, we have the western land of mirth, and on the other, the eastern land that “draws all wicked things” (72). As the Shire’s moral counterpart, Mordor plays its role outstandingly well, being the home of Sauron, who lacks only the Ring “to give him strength and knowledge to beat down all resistance, break the last defences, and cover all the lands in a second darkness” (64).

Exactly like an individual and his doppelgänger, in the Shire not much is known of the existence of Mordor. That name “the hobbits only knew in legends of the dark past, like a shadow in the background of their memories” (57). It is not until the same year that Frodo departs on his journey (unknowingly, towards Mordor itself) that the hobbits begin to hear that Mordor really



exists, when dwarves seek refuge in the West bearing news of the dark country (56). But even then, it is only a rumour.

Before his quest begins, Frodo has no reason to heed Mordor either. Until the Ring appears in his life, the Ring-bearer lives like any other hobbit in the joyful Shire. But the day his uncle leaves him this treasure, Frodo's quiet routine is subtly altered. The very first sign of this progressing disturbance takes place the day that follows Bilbo's departure. Frodo has to distribute many of his uncle's belongings and by late afternoon he can do it no more. He is described as looking "indisposed. . . [and] fidgeting with something in his pocket" (51). For the first, and certainly not the last time, Frodo's declining health is associated with the presence of the Ring. After this event, the matter is left brewing for many years, and it is not until our hero is in his fifties that the Ring is spoken of again. By that time, Frodo has developed some kind of relationship with the Ring, carrying it in his chain every day (60).

In the Shire, evil is also immediately introduced as soon as Bilbo's celebration is over. The fact that it coincides with Frodo's taking possession of the Ring is the first of many parallels that can be drawn in the mirroring processes of hobbit and land. Small signs of a disturbing nature are displayed by the hobbits. Bilbo has left many presents for his relations and a rumour is spread that Frodo is giving everything away. Hobbits arrive in large numbers to his house. Before long, Bag End is packed with people who have no business there, but that cannot be kept out. Labels get torn off and mixed, and quarrels brake out. Some people try to do swaps and deals in the hall; and others try to make off with minor items not addressed to them, or with anything that seems unwanted or unwatched (51). Anyone who knows anything about hobbits would be surprised to find them fighting, inflicting damage and stealing.

Years later, when Gandalf the wizard discloses to Frodo everything he knows about the Ring, how it is a condensation of the dark lord Sauron's evil power, the Ring-bearer surprises us with a peculiar connection and protective instinct towards it. For Frodo, the Ring "[feels] suddenly very heavy, as if *either it or Frodo himself* [were] in some way reluctant for Gandalf to touch it" (62, my italics). It is curious to note that, as soon as the second chapter of the book, the division between the object and his owner is already unclear, the slow fusion has already begun. Furthermore, when the sorcerer puts the magic properties of the Ring to the test by throwing it to the fire, Frodo feels "astonishment and distress" and then "[gives] a cry and grope[s] for the thongs" (63). Later in the conversation, Frodo also finds that he cannot destroy the Ring, "not without a great struggle. . . with an effort of will he [makes] a movement, as if to cast it away—but he [finds] that he [has] put it back in his pocket" (74). Having recognized that something must be done with the obscure jewel, Frodo decides to take it to Rivendell.

The years, and the ever closer creeping of evil, also pass for the Shire after Bilbo departs. An example of this can be seen in Bag End's following tenant, Frodo's mean cousin Lotho Pimple. Lotho does much harm, eventually, but it is interesting to take into consideration that even before Frodo is gone, he has already established a connection with the dark powers. Lotho had been "selling a lot o' the best leaf and sending it away quietly for a year or two" before occupying Bag



End (1049). As Frodo developed a relationship with the Ring, another hobbit was doing business with Saruman, the wizard that studied Sauron's power until he himself went astray.

Further on in the journey, the mirroring processes of Frodo and the Shire can also be seen in those who witness the increasing strength and consequences of these evil connections. When Frodo and his friends are staying at The Prancing Pony, in Bree, they drink and sing songs in the common room with many strangers. A somewhat drunk Frodo puts on quite a show singing on top of a table. As he is reaching the climax of "The Cow Jumped over the Moon," he falls and the Ring tricks him into putting it on. As the "audience all opened their mouths wide for laughter, [they] stopped short in gaping silence; for the singer disappeared" (176). All those who are present at that moment can bear witness to the strong power of the Ring, even if they do not know that that is the cause for Frodo's disappearance.

Similarly, when Frodo finally reaches Rivendell after many setbacks, the Council of Elrond meets. People from various races share pieces of information and together they decide what is to be done with the Ring's future. In Gandalf's account of his adventures, he mentions that another wizard, Radagast the Brown, had informed him in June (three months before Frodo's departure) that servants of the Dark Lord, the Black Riders, had been looking for a land called the Shire (274); i.e., the sorcerer could bear witness that the power of Mordor was steering towards the Shire, and the guests at The Prancing Pony could assert the same of Frodo.

Continuing with their corruption, in both Frodo and his Shire, it is possible to identify a point of no return down the path of the dark powers, which is the product of a tangible insertion of evil. Before reaching Rivendell, while resting in Weathertop Hill, Frodo is attacked by one of the Black Riders, the most faithful and dangerous of Sauron's servants (212). Not only is he pierced by a poisonous blade that leaves a small piece inside his shoulder, but also the one who attacks him is the Witchking himself, the powerful and fearsome leader of the Nine Nazgûl and Sauron's right hand man (if man he may be called, indeed). In this episode, we may recognize a palpable insertion of evil into Frodo, a knife that deeply wounds him. So far, Sauron's servants have chased him and certainly frightened him several times, but in Weathertop he is literally touched by them for the first time. In addition, as if to make clear that from this point on he would become ever more possessed by the Ring (and therefore akin to the Black Riders), the moment Frodo is wounded, he has just smitten the Nazgûl leader and there is a cry that the reader cannot distinguish whether it is the hobbit's or the Witchking's. Frodo "struck at the feet of his enemy. A shrill cry rang out in the night; and he felt a pain like a dart of poisoned ice pierce his left shoulder" (212).

Correspondingly, the Shire had been a very isolated and peaceful country, where no evil creatures of any kind dwelled. No malignant living thing had ever set foot on that innocent land. But then the Black Riders taint this untouched country with their hooves. The mark of the hooves in the ground, like Frodo's shoulder, would prove to be a much deeper wound than what it seemed at first. Later we learn that, from that moment on, corruption begins to take a hold of the Shire, as from Frodo's wound onward he is never the same pure and innocent hobbit again.



Concerning matters more involved with their essence rather than their corruption, there is a shared characteristic that we may recognize in both Frodo and the Shire: the profound sense of friendship and solidarity, the idea of people remaining together. This similarity should not turn as a surprise, since most hobbits, be it on a journey towards Rivendell or living quietly in the Shire, have it in their nature. In the case of Frodo, this can be seen very early in the novel. Frodo arrives in Crickhollow, where he has pretended he will live in order to hide his journey from the rest of the Shire, when a conspiracy is unmasked. Merry, Pippin and Sam, the other hobbits that become famous by playing different roles in the Quest of the Ring, had been attentively and secretly looking out for signs of Frodo's departure. Pippin reveals to Frodo all the information they had gathered, and adds "[y]ou must go—and therefore we must too. Merry and I are coming with you. Sam is an excellent fellow, and would jump down a dragon's throat to save you" (118). Furthermore, in the Fellowship of the Ring that is created later, the one race that goes together because they wish to remain as a group is the hobbits'. Only Aragorn and Boromir do not go as the sole representative of their people, but Boromir's intentions to travel with the Company are more practical than brotherly: the Fellowship's route coincides with his own, and a hidden desire keeps him as close as possible to the Ring-bearer. The rest of the Fellowship is composed by Gandalf, the only wizard, Legolas, the only elf, and Gimli, the only dwarf.

In the case of the Shire, this can be equated to the joining of forces of its hobbits in the end of *The Lord of the Rings*. An evil power takes over the Shire and, instead of thinking it undefeatable, they get together and drive Saruman and his men out. When the circumstances call for it, they become warriors and, together, fight for their community's liberation. This collective sticking together became what would pass into hobbit's history as the Battle of Bywater (1053).

Related to Boromir's aforementioned reasons to travel with the Fellowship and going back to the spreading of evil, another parallel can be established between Frodo's journey and the Shire's development in his absence. This is the unexpected shift of some characters to the dark side as a consequence of Sauron's evil power. In Frodo's path, it is the betrayal of Boromir, a man of noble blood from the southern country of Gondor, who is certain the Ring can mean the rise of his country against Mordor. After accompanying him on his way and being a great pillar for Aragorn in taking care of the Fellowship when Gandalf is believed to have died (a point which will be developed in depth further on), he resists the temptation no longer and assaults Frodo when he is by himself. Having uttered a useless persuading speech, Boromir casts away his mask. Everything in his discourse appeals to a very possible and logical way of thinking until sheer greediness slips through. He accuses Frodo: "It is by our own folly that the Enemy will defeat us. . . How it angers me! Fool! Obstinate fool! Running wilfully to death and ruining our cause. If any mortals have claim to the Ring, it is the men of Númenor [Gondor's ancestors], and not Halflings [i.e. hobbits]. It is not yours save by unhappy chance. It might have been mine. It should be mine. Give it to me!" (419).

A less dramatic dishonesty, but a major corruption in terms of hobbits nonetheless, can be perceived on the Shire after Frodo and his friends return. As soon as they encounter the first group of hobbits in the Shire, the travellers are warned to watch their words because Saruman,



whom they call “Chief,” might hear of it (1036). The following day, Sam recognizes Robin Smallburrow, an old friend of his that is part of Saruman’s band of Shirriffs (the force that sees all kinds of tyrannical rules are followed in the Shire). Robin confesses to them that “there’s a few as do spy-work for the Chief and his Men. . . they use the old Quick Post service, and keep special runners at different points” (1039-40). The Travellers, name given to the four returning hobbits, had already suspected it that morning, when they supposed that “[t]he new ‘Chief’ evidently had means of getting news. It was a good forty miles from the Bridge to Bag End, but someone made the journey in a hurry. So Frodo and his friends were soon discovered” (1037). This is proof enough that hobbits’ nature, like Boromir’s, can be affected by evil magic.

Also regarding the dark power’s approach, in Frodo’s and the Shire’s progressions we may distinguish moments of warning against the dangers of the creeping of evil. In Frodo’s journey, it is the moment of creation of the Fellowship of the Ring. In the Council of Elrond, elves, men, dwarves, a wizard and hobbits, come together to discuss the matter of the Ring. Not everyone is aware yet of the peril they are facing by allowing it to exist and after much discussion and fear, it is determined that the Ring has to be destroyed in Mount Doom.

In a much smaller scale, in the Shire, the hobbits are also warned to defend themselves after realizing the power of evil is upon them. Fatty Bolger, one of Frodo’s friends who stays behind, hears the Black Riders approaching his house, and “as soon as he saw the dark shapes creep from the garden, he knew that he must run for it, or perish” (192). Following his survival instinct, Fatty blows the Horn-call of Buckland, an alarm that stirred every hobbit in the area while shouting out “Awake! Fear! Fire! Foes! Awake!” (193). The alarm had not been blown in a hundred years and it soon spread throughout the country.

Those who heed the warnings and decide to fight evil must have someone to guide them, a leader. And a very precise parallel that can be drawn in the simultaneous processes of both hobbit and country has to do, indeed, with their leaders. When the Fellowship of the Ring crosses through the underground city of Moria, an abandoned dwarf settlement, they have the misfortune of meeting unexpected hordes of enemies for the first time in their journey. There is an encounter of races which ends in the loss of the Company’s guide: Gandalf the Grey falls against a Balrog on the bridge that finally led to the outside world (349). This occurred on January 14th, as Karen Wynn Fonstad clarifies on a map that follows the Fellowship’s journey day by day in her *The Atlas of Middle-earth* (172).

Somewhat less epically, the hobbits in the Shire also have a clash of races when “[m]en, ruffians mostly, [arrive] with great waggons [sic], some to carry off the goods south-away, and others to stay. . . felling trees and digging and building themselves sheds and houses just as they liked” (1050). These men had arrived under orders of Lotho, Frodo’s ill intentioned cousin. Old Will Whitfoot, the Mayor, was on his way to Bag End to protest for the foreigners’ behaviour when “[r]uffians laid hand on him and took and locked him up in a hole in Michel Delving,” where he stays until the travelling hobbits return a year later and free him (1050). Farmer Cotton, the old hobbit who tells the Travellers the events occurred in the Shire while they were gone, estimates this



happened “soon after New Year,” exactly like Gandalf’s apparent death (he reappears in Frodo’s path two books later). Frodo’s Fellowship and the Shire are left without a head to lead them on the same date, and both as a result of an encounter of opposing races.

In both cases, this lack of a leader brings consequences. For Frodo, it means finding a new, most evil, guide. In the beginning of “The Two Towers,” the second part in the *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, Frodo and Sam, his loyal friend and servant, have escaped from the rest of the Company and are lost at the feet of the Emyr Muil hills. In that moment, the former keeper of the Ring, Gollum, an interstitial creature that was once a hobbit but that has become a slimy orc-like monster, attacks them. He had been chasing Frodo ever since the caves of Moria, following his desire to hold the Ring once more. When he is subdued by the hobbits, Frodo, refusing to slay him, decides to pardon his life in exchange for his knowledge of the dark lands (640). Moreover, to trust Gollum, Frodo makes him promise to keep his word, displaying a new acquired power which he must evidently have drawn from the Ring. Sam notices this change; it appears to him that “his master had grown and Gollum had shrunk, a tall stern shadow, a mighty lord who hid his brightness in grey cloud, and at his feet a little whining dog. Yet the two were in some way akin and not alien, they could reach one another’s minds” (643). If the power of the Ring had not begun to take hold of Frodo, his new acquired power and his connection with Gollum would have never come to be.

From that point on, Frodo’s inner struggle, a fight of opposite forces, can be seen represented by his two companions and by the effect they provoke in him: Sam does him good and Gollum, harm. This same dichotomy occurs in the hobbits of the Shire, who hate seeing their land get destroyed but who also, as described, shift to the darker side.

Likewise, after the Shire is deprived of its Mayor, Lotho begins to call himself “Chief Shirriff” or just “Chief” and grows to believe he indeed has that kind of power over the population (1050). With this self granted authority, he locks all of his opponents in jail. It is this heightened idea of himself that leads him to perform even more evil deeds; and these deeds are, in turn, a weak spot that Saruman, his business partner, takes as an entrance into the Shire. Had it not been for Lotho’s rise after the Mayor’s imprisonment, the corrupted wizard would have never driven the Shire to its downfall.

Once Gandalf is gone, Aragorn, the future king of Gondor—who then has to play leader for the first time—decides to take the heart broken Fellowship to Lothlórien, golden woodland of the elves. The ethereal Lady Galadriel receives them there and gives them shelter from foes and pain. The Fellowship stays in the City of the Trees for as long as it feels necessary.

In a similar manner, elves prove to be of help for the Shire too while the Travellers are away. Frodo, Sam, Merry and Pippin gather from Glorfindel, an elf from the elven lord Elrond’s household, that some of his kindred, journeying through the Shire, “learned that things were amiss, and sent messages as swiftly as they could” (226). These elves are also willing to give a group of hobbits food and protection after hearing of the presence of Black Riders.



But elves are not the only light that shines on Frodo's and the Shire's paths. There are other noble figures that appear unexpectedly. After unsuccessfully trying to enter the hideous Gate of Mordor, Frodo, Sam and Gollum arrive in the country of Ithilien. The land grows prettier and the air, sweeter. There they meet Boromir's brother, Faramir, captain of the men in charge of clearing the land from orcs and other creatures. This man is very cold and suspicious at first, and he even interrogates Frodo in front of all his men, demanding answers (689-95). In their exchange of information, Frodo learns that Boromir has died, and he fears that the rest of the Fellowship might have suffered the same fate (698).

But Faramir is not as mean as he had seemed at first. He could well take advantage of Frodo's vulnerability and could try to take the Ring, but he chooses to act differently. He chooses goodness and to find honourable ways to save Gondor, his homeland: "I would not take this thing, if it lay by the highway. Not were Minas Tirith [Gondor's capital] falling in ruin and I alone could save her, so, using the weapon of the Dark Lord for her good and my glory. No. I do not wish for such triumphs, Frodo son of Drogo" (698). The ill news and the threat of ill actions do not stain Frodo's relationship with Faramir, and by the time the hobbit hero falls asleep, Faramir has grown so fond of him that he puts him to bed himself (708). He also provides him with the last provisions he and Sam will live off while in Mordor.

A similar figure, an honest and brave hobbit in the midst of ruin, may be found in the Shire. On the night of their arrival, old Farmer Cotton tells Frodo and Sam how things have been in their absence. Like Faramir, he is bearer of ill news, and, again, like Faramir, he chooses to always act rightfully, despite the imposed rules and the menacing men. He also rejects the greedy ways that might raise him from his situation. He is the only one who openly says he wants the evil out of the Shire, for he worries for his wife and his daughter (1045). He is also generous and brave enough to receive the newcomers as his guests, regardless of the lack of food and the rules that forbid him to open his house to them. As Faramir, his kindness is unspoiled and he tries to do good no matter the adversities.

But noble characters are scarce in the Ring-bearer's and the Shire's journeys. Like Frodo's shoulder wound and the presence of the Black Riders in the Shire, a second insertion of evil may be recognized in the hobbit's and his country's progressions, as the quest develops. In the case of Frodo, this can be clearly identified when, as they are about to enter Mordor, they meet an enormous, vile spider named Shelob. She had first blocked the way out of a never ending pitch dark tunnel that leads the way into Sauron's land. When the hobbits finally brake through her webs and reach the open air, they think they are free. As Frodo runs "heedlessly up the path, unaware yet of his peril," Shelob stings him from behind and immobilizes him with her poisonous claw (752-53). In dismay, Sam sees Frodo from a distance, "bound in cords, wound about him from ankle to shoulder, and the monster with her great forelegs was beginning half to lift, half to draw his body away" (755). The faithful servant fights the spidery monster and recovers his apparently lifeless master. Mistaken by the venom's effect, Sam finds no stir of life in him, nor can he feel the faintest flutter of the heart, "[o]ften he chafed his master's hands and feet, and touched his brow, but all



were cold” (757-58). After much indecision, he eventually abandons Frodo there, in the entrance to the Land of Shadow, to finish the quest on his own.

Not less deadly is the arrival of Saruman in the Shire. As Farmer Cotton recounts the awful events that have taken place while they were gone, he insists that the bad tidings were not really thus, only “[s]ince Sharkey [Saruman] came it’s been plain ruination” (1050). Apparently, after Saruman arrives, the men begin to “hack, burn and ruin” and even kill under his orders. Then “[t]hey cut down trees and let ‘em lie, they burn houses and build no more” (1050). He claims that there is no peace at night anymore and the rivers have been polluted because they “pour out filth on purpose” (1051), i. e. the Shire is only truly corrupted once Saruman takes control. Like Shelob’s sting, his is a noticeable second arrival of evil.

Yet evil does not only grasp our protagonists, but their surroundings as well. The mirroring processes of hobbit and country may also be pinned down in aspects of their environment. When Frodo departs from Ithilien, Sauron makes the world grow dark. Later he is defeated and light goes back to all Middle-earth except Mordor: “[d]ay was coming again in the world outside, and far beyond the glooms of Mordor the Sun was climbing over the eastern rim of Middle-earth; but here all was still dark as night” (952). This obscurity is the product of their menacing final goal, Mount Doom: “The light grew no stronger, for Orodruin was still belching forth a great fume that, beaten upwards by the opposing airs, mounted higher and higher, until it reached a region above the wind and spread in an immeasurable roof, whose central pillar rose out of the shadows beyond their view” (955). Frodo travels his last stretch in a country without light, as if the landscape were tainted with the same dark magic as him.

In the Shire too we can find an abnormal quantity of smoke that darkens the sky. When the Travellers go back to their land, “there seemed an unusual amount of burning going on, and smoke rose from many points. . . a great cloud of it was going up [and] far away” (1038). Soon they find one of its main sources, “looking with dismay up the road towards Bag End they saw a tall chimney of brick in the distance. It was pouring out black smoke into the evening air” (1041). This chimney plays the same role as Mount Doom in Mordor. In both parallel journeys there are specific sources for the fumes that bedim the lands (and the spirits of those who look upon them).

But darkness is more than just an environmental condition for Frodo and the Shire. Another, quite precise, parallel can be drawn between their precarious situations as they advance towards the end of the novel. By the time Frodo and Sam reach Mordor, they have very few provisions to survive. Thirst and hunger are a permanent and increasing condition as they draw closer to Mount Doom. Sam goes as far as to assert that if a chief orc himself offered him a glass of water, he would shake his hand (952). Even when they drink from the little water they find, thirst seems never to leave them. At some point they have to quit the road they are following, in which highway cisterns had been built and where they could drink muddied water. The situation becomes desperate; “Water, water!” muttered Sam. . . in his parched mouth his tongue seemed thick and swollen; but for all his care they now had very little left, perhaps half his bottle, and maybe there were still days to go” (971).



In the Shire, the situation is not a life or death matter, but it is desperate nevertheless. When the Travellers are informed that giving out extra food is forbidden, Merry rightfully asks if it had been a bad year while they were absent. The Shirriff, in turn, replies that “the year’s been good enough. . . We grows a lot of food, but we don’t rightly know what becomes of it. It’s all these ‘gatherers’ and ‘sharers,’ I reckon, going round counting and measuring and taking off to storage. They do more gathering than sharing, and we never see most of the stuff again” (1036). Farmer Cotton later adds that the real shortage began right before winter, and it made the hobbits really angry (1049-50). Beer and tobacco vanished from the hobbits’ every day life, too.

Close to the end of the quest, the situation is critical in more aspects than just food or drink. The accelerated corruption that takes over Frodo during his journey through Mordor can also be equated to that of the Shire’s last days before they return. The first time we see Frodo in Mordor, after having been kidnapped and stripped of all his possessions by a band of orcs, he is already noticeably changed. When he learns that Sam has the Ring, he becomes mad and speaks rashly: “‘Give it to me!’ he crie[s], standing up, holding out a trembling hand. ‘Give it to me at once! You can’t have it. . . you thief!’” He realizes that “[i]t is the horrible power of the Ring” speaking, but these side effects do not cease until they finish their mission (946). The Ring becomes ever heavier, and at some point Frodo begins to see it in his mind all the time, like a great wheel of fire (954). This burden has the luckless effect of slowing Frodo down, and making it more difficult for them to reach Mount Doom. It also makes him weaker, both physically and mentally: the Ring-bearer becomes pessimistic and exhausted. Frodo’s condition is pitiful. Sam “had noted how his master’s left hand would often be raised as if to ward on a blow, or to screen his shrinking eyes from a dreadful Eye that sought to look in them. And sometimes his right hand would creep to his breast, clutching” (971). As they draw nearer to Mount Doom, Frodo becomes so lame Sam wants to cry when “with a great effort of will he staggered up; and then he fell upon his knees again. He raised his eyes with difficulty to the dark slopes of Mount Doom towering above him, and then pitifully he began to crawl forward on his hands.” Sam looks at him and weeps in his heart, but no tears come to his dry and stinging eyes (975-76). The major demonstration of Frodo’s blackened soul, though, does not come until he finally reaches his objective. Standing on the edge of Mount Doom, he realizes he cannot let the Ring go: “‘I have come. . . But I do not choose now to do what I came to do. I will not do this deed. The Ring is mine!’”(981).

The Shire undergoes a similar darkening process that can be pinned down in two disturbing aspects that dismay the Travellers when they go back: the horrible “un-Shirelike” architecture that has been built in the last year, and the recently arrived pollution. It must not go unnoticed that this two traits can be said to characterize the change from rural lifestyle to industrialization that were key for Tolkien’s creation of the Shire. Tolkien himself admitted this in the “Foreword” to his trilogy, when he made clear that the “The Scouring of the Shire,” the chapter in which the Travellers go back to find the Shire completely changed, is not an allegory of England’s political situation during WWII, but that “[i]t has indeed some basis in experience, though slender. . . and much further back. The country in which I lived in childhood was being shabbily destroyed before I was ten, in days when motor-cars were rare objects. . . and men were still building suburban



railways” (12). It is interesting that the essence of corruption in the Shire, which is equivalent to Frodo’s decay as a result of the powerful One Ring, is the same thing that, in Tolkien’s opinion, destroyed the England he grew up in. This must be the only clear message Tolkien wished to imply in his novel.

As soon as in the first paragraph of “The Scouring of the Shire,” the hobbits see that “new houses [have] been built: two-storeyed with narrow straight-sided windows, bare and dimly lit, all very gloomy and un-Shirelike” (1035). As they ride on, they realize the inn they had been planning to sleep in had been pulled down and a dismal place had been built instead (1036). Another Shirriff house is described to have only one storey, but the same narrow windows, and it is built of ugly pale bricks, badly laid. Apparently, it is just as cheerless on the inside (1040). Further on, they discover that

[m]any of the houses that they had known were missing. Some seemed to have been burned down. The pleasant row of old hobbit-holes in the bank on the north side of the Pool were deserted, and their little gardens that used to run down bright to the water’s edge were rank with weeds. Worse, there was a whole line of the ugly new houses all along Pool Side. . . An avenue of trees had stood there. They were all gone. (1041)

Even the old museum of Michel Delving had been turned into a prison (1046).

Concerning the unexpected contamination, apart from the black smokes that have been mentioned above, Farmer Cotton tells them that Saruman and his men have “fouled all the lower Water,” that it is also occurring to the Brandywine River and that “if they want to make the Shire into a desert, they’re going the right way about it” (1051). The once paradisiacal homeland was now all dirty and dry. The true embodiment of this turn of events also has a root in Tolkien’s life experiences. The element that brings together both the new architecture and the filth, and in which a slow evil progression comparable to Frodo’s can be recognized, is the mill.

Describing his inspiration for “The Scouring of the Shire,” Tolkien mentions that “[he] saw in a paper a picture of the last decrepitude of the once thriving corn-mill beside its pool that long ago seemed to [him] so important” (12). Similarly, the mill in Frodo’s hometown had been bought by Lotho even before Frodo had left the Shire. Furthermore, he “knocked it down as soon as he came to Bag End. Then he bought in a lot o’dirty looking Men to build a bigger one and fill it full o’ wheels and outlandish contraptions. . . Pimple’s idea was to grind more and faster, or so he said. He’s got other mills like it.” And matters get even worse once Saruman arrives, for “since Sharkey came they don’t grind no more corn at all. They’re always a hammering and a letting out a smoke and a stench. . . and they pour out filth on purpose” (1051). An element that seemed so central to the young Tolkien is as slowly and as much tainted as Frodo is by the powers of evil.

It is important to note that in both processes the timing for this final blow could not have occurred sooner: Frodo’s health decays increasingly in the last twelve days of his journey (Fonstad



173), more because he is in Sauron's land than because the Ring has already taken a stronger hold of him (which is not an unimportant factor nevertheless). In the Shire parallel, we learn from Farmer Cotton that "Sharkey" arrives to their country barely more than one month before the hobbits get back, and they were gone for over a year (1050); i. e. in those few final days, the graveness of the matter is much increased in both Frodo's and his country's development.

Finally, the very end of both evil creeping processes conclude with the rescue of an external agent. Having accomplished the task—ironically, thanks to Gollum, who takes the Ring from Frodo and falls into the fire—Frodo and Sam think they will inevitably die from the volcano's explosion at Mount Doom's feet. At that exact moment, Gandalf, who is fighting hosts of Mordor at the Black Gate in order to capture Sauron's attention, feels a "drumming rumble, a roar, a long echoing roll of ruinous noise." He realizes the Quest of the Ring is finally over and that the two hobbits are shelterless in the succumbing land of Mordor. He turns to Gwaihir, the eagle Windlord, and asks to be borne with speed greater than any wind, outmatching the wings of the Nazgûl to save Frodo and Sam right before it becomes too late (985-86),

Gwaihir saw them with his keen far seeing eyes. . . two small dark figures, forlorn, hand in hand upon a little hill, while the world shook under them, and gasped, and rivers of fire drew near. . . he saw them fall, worn out, or choked with fumes and heat, or stricken down by despair at last, hiding their eyes from death. Side by side they lay; and down swept Gwaihir. . . and in a dream, not knowing what fate had befallen them, the wanderers were lifted up and borne far away out of the darkness and the fire. (987)

Correspondingly, the Shire would have never been relieved from its situation had not the Travellers arrived to restore the order. The seed of discomfort is present in the oppressed hobbits but they need to be aroused by someone to take matters into their own hands. Of the four returning hobbits, Merry is especially key in this sense. He is the first to incite them, he argues that "we have got to do something at once. . . Raise the Shire! . . . Now! Wake all our people! They hate all this. . . But Shire-folk have been so comfortable so long they don't know what to do. They just want a match, though, and they'll go up in fire. . . We've only got a very short time" (1044). Making use of his Rohirrim war horn, he calls the hobbits to fight.

They emerge victorious that night and the following day, when the Battle of Bywater is fought. Stage after stage, Frodo and the Shire reveal similarities. It is no surprise that even the end of their parallel processes coincide in that saviours intervene right before it is too late.

Having made it clear that the Shire is Frodo's topographical equivalent, it is possible to consider now in what ways this impinges on Frodo's psyche. All the consequences can be traced to the issue of Mordor being the Shire's doppelgänger. The first consequence this situation ensues in Frodo is directly linked to Doreen Massey's second proposition on space. Before going back to that, and to grasp the full force of this effect, another of her concepts must first be made clear, though. For Massey, space and place, apparently interchangeable in everyday use, are two different ideas. She



explains that place, or local place, “[f]or some it is the sphere of the everyday. . . the geographical source of meaning. . . For others, a ‘retreat to place’ represents a protective pulling-up of drawbridges and a building of walls against the new invasions. Place, on this reading, is the locus of denial, of attempted withdrawal from invasion/difference” (5-6).

This vision of place as locus of denial is present in (and even constitutive of, one may argue) Shire hobbits. Their ignorance concerning Mordor and their lack of interest in men and other races, to name examples given in this paper, are proof of this. Frodo, who lives like a regular hobbit until the Ring arrives in his life, is also part of this seclusion. Although he has heard Bilbo’s stories and has knowledge of other lands from books he has read, he had never left the Shire before he embarked on his quest. Like any other hobbit (except his uncle), he was submerged in the attempted withdrawal from invasion/difference Massey describes. The problem arises when he sets out on his journey, leaving his sheltered local place, to encounter the wide notion of space. A space that Massey proposes we interpret “as the sphere of the possibility of the existence of multiplicity in the sense of contemporaneous plurality; as the sphere in which distinct trajectories coexist; as the sphere therefore of coexisting heterogeneity. Without space, no multiplicity; without multiplicity, no space” (9). But this is a multiplicity that may contain all sorts of countries, even those a common hobbit cannot even imagine are possible outside nightmares and horror tales.

Before leaving the Shire, the closest Frodo could get to the notion of space as multiplicity or simultaneous heterogeneity was through his own curiosity. Prior to his departure, he “looked at maps, and wondered what lay beyond their edges: maps in the Shire showed mostly white spaces beyond its borders” (Tolkien 56). But conceiving space as multiplicity is not in him. The only moment he confesses to have looked at a map of Mordor was because it was shown to him in Rivendell (Tolkien 962). He is not active in his discovery of the world outside the Shire; it is something that simply occurs to him.

Even though he has the knowledge contained in the Rivendell maps, still he cannot really apprehend the concept of space as multiplicity. For, in maps, space is “a flat surface, a continuous surface. Space as the completed product. As a coherent closed system. Here space is completely and instantaneously interconnected; space you can walk across. . . it also offers. . . order; [makes it possible to] get a handle of the world” (Massey 106). In this sense, maps can even be deceiving due to the “much-maligned notion of ‘the view from above’” (Massey 107). This view suits the readers, who can follow Frodo’s journey through the maps Tolkien himself drew and attached to the novel. It offers them order and allows them to get a handle of Middle-earth. But this perspective is inappropriate for the character that, despite being immersed in the story, has access to similar maps that also enable this *view from above*. Doreen Massey explains that it can become a problem “if you fall into thinking that that vertical distance lends you the truth. The dominant form of mapping, though, does position the observer, themselves unobserved, outside and above the object of the gaze” (107). When Frodo sees the maps in Rivendell, it is inevitably through this vertical gaze Massey describes. It is a position where the multiplicity of space is not really represented, for “a map of a geography is



no more that geography—or that space—than a painting of a pipe is a pipe” (106). Furthermore, when this false space is looked at from above, it also looks conquerable.

It is during the course of his journey that Frodo learns otherwise. The multiplicity of space is available to him only once he has trodden the heterogeneous trajectories contained in the different lands he visits; lands that are, needless to say, less easy to dominate than when perceived from above. Frodo’s discovery of multiplicity reaches its apex when he encounters the Shire’s doppelgänger, i.e. a land which is the complete opposite to his local place, his geographical source of meaning and foremost parameter of reality: his *oikos*; what Georges Van Den Abbeele would describe as the “transcendental point of reference that organizes and domesticates a given area by defining all other points in relation to itself” (qtd. in Alford 623). Furthermore, Massey states that “[w]hat space gives us is simultaneous heterogeneity; it holds out the possibility of surprise” (105). This simultaneous heterogeneity or multiplicity of space means too much of an extension of consciousness for Frodo. More than a surprise, it is a shock for him. The world as he knows it is ruined, for it can contain a country so evil that it goes against everything that composes his own reality. In other words, Frodo’s *oikos* receives the full force of the blow.

Furthermore, having established the relationship of equivalence between Frodo and his homeland, if Mordor is the Shire’s doppelgänger, it is Frodo’s doppelgänger by extension as well. Put in the other possible perspective, we may also say that Frodo (as the Shire) is Mordor’s doppelgänger. Recalling its definition, when a person meets his doppelgänger, it is a sign that that person’s death is imminent; therefore, one of the two has to die. When Frodo arrives in Mordor, one of their deaths is indeed imminent and by the end of the novel, Mordor is no more than an inhabitable desert (Tyler 310). Despite the fact that it is not Frodo who dies, the encounter is nevertheless a palpable threat to his life. In Mordor, Shelob attacks him; Sam abandons him because he thinks he is dead; he is kidnapped by orcs; he is increasingly more thirsty and hungry, near starvation; he fights Gollum who manages to bite one of his fingers off; and, when Orodruin erupts, he is nearly caught by its flames. Mordor, for Frodo, constitutes a near-death experience.

Another of the ways that his topographical equivalent and the experience of his quest impinge on Frodo’s psyche is through the alteration of his idea of home. Even if his birthplace had remained exactly as Frodo left it, after everything that has been analysed so far, we can see that he is a very changed hobbit by the end of his journey, and, therefore, his conception of the Shire must also be. Frodo can feel this: “There is no real going back. Though I may come to the Shire, it will not seem the same; for I shall not be the same” (1026). Even though he is aware of this transformation, which is primarily due to the effects his and the Shire’s doppelgänger had on him, he does not expect to find his homeland as different as he eventually does. The problem is that “[m]igrants imagine ‘home,’ the place they used to be, *as* it used to be,” and since ‘home,’ in this case, is the deteriorated hero’s equivalent, they are both as ruined the next time they meet (Massey 123).

What Frodo does not consider is that “the returns are always to a place that has moved on, the layers of our meeting intersecting and affecting each other; weaving a process of space-time”



(Massey 139). He knows he needs to find rest, and a land full of wicked foreigners who have destroyed its essence, in contrast to the peaceful pasture filled country he remembered, is not the ideal place to look for it. In this sense, it proves true that “the imagination of going home. . . so frequently means going ‘back’ in both space and time” (Massey 124). Frodo knows he will not be the same as the day he left, but he expects to find the Shire as if a year, and a particularly evil year, had not passed at all. As a consequence, when he gets there, the Shire is no longer the quiet land of abundance he once knew, and he is deeply disturbed by that. He fails to adapt to what was once the only possible way of leading his life.

When order is re-established in the Shire and all evil is driven out, hobbits experience a rebirth and the Shire returns stronger than ever:

1420 in the Shire was a marvellous year. Not only was there wonderful sunshine and delicious rain, in due times and perfect measure, but there seemed something more: an air of richness and growth, and a gleam of a beauty beyond that of mortal summers that flicker and pass upon this Middle-earth. All the children born or begotten in that year, and there were many, were fair to see and strong, and most of them had a rich golden hair that had before been rare among hobbits. The fruit was so plentiful that young hobbits very nearly bathed in strawberries and cream. . . And no one was ill, and everyone was pleased, except those who had to mow the grass. (Tolkien 1061)

And except Frodo. In this context of sheer joy, he is often sick, especially in the dates he had been hurt during his quest. He also “took to a quiet life” and “dropped quietly out of all the doings of the Shire.” Furthermore, no one respects him for his courageous deeds and he feels he is so deeply wounded he will never heal (1063). In the end, he accepts the elves’ offer and leaves Middle-earth for ever. It becomes clear that Frodo cannot remake his old life for he and his dear country were simultaneously altered: they fit together no more, as if the once perfect pieces of a puzzle had been cut into no longer matching shapes without them realising it.

The sum of events that have been described to have happened to our Ring-bearer, all consequences of his relationship of equivalence with the Shire, are quite grave. His expansion of consciousness from the world being a local place to space as multiplicity is a heavy burden to bear, something which, by itself, is reason enough for him to feel dislocated when back in the Shire. Similarly, his encounter with Mordor as a near-death experience alone could have changed him forever. In addition, when he finally reaches the home he had longed for during his entire quest, he finds it as corrupted by the enemy as himself, and his expectations are shattered. All of these together, the blow each of these events meant for Frodo’s mind, compose our hero’s trauma. Together, they have the disastrous effect of destroying his sense of home.

And if home is the subject, it seems necessary to go back to the Greek term *oikos* that is so closely related to it, since it can be taken to characterize home as the origin and endpoint of one’s voyages. It is not a geographical location but an essential point of reference and a starting point



from where all existence is defined (Van Den Abbeele qtd. Alford 623). That is to say that, if Frodo experienced and placed himself in the world in relation to the Shire, after the traumatic events that drive him to lose his notion of home, he has no point of reference anymore. In line with the idea of the Shire as his topographical equivalent, when he loses his idea of home, he himself is lost too. This double loss deprives him of all comfort in his country; he is bereft of his place in the Shire. He has nowhere to belong and once he existed almost only in relationship to where he belonged. Unable to work through this loss, he prefers leaving the place altogether than continue to try to regain the impossible.

In conclusion, we may see that Frodo's intimate relationship with his homeland proves to be more harmful than helpful to face the adversities and consequences of his mission. Had it not been for this topographical equivalence, Frodo would not have had to feel the blow of a wide, evil filled Middle-earth as strongly as he did. Similarly, his encounter with Mordor might have been less harmful to his psyche had it not been an encounter with his doppelgänger. And the loss of the idea of home on his return could have been less rotund, for the destruction of his pure and innocent Shire would not necessarily have meant the loss of his own integrity.

Furthermore, it is also very interesting to finally find a logical explanation for an ending that has saddened and puzzled Tolkien fans for decades. It sounds reasonable that Frodo's departure in the end of *The Lord of the Rings* should be related to how he and his dear Shire, for which he had the courage to travel to Mordor and come back, are irreparably broken in his mind. It is only natural that having lost his one motivation to continue his mission and his source of all meaning, he should feel existentially disoriented and would try to find in the ancient lands over the sea the peace and comfort he once had in the Shire. We can only be left wondering whether such a deep-rooted sense of home could be regained anywhere else but the Shire.

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