

**To See Far and to Know All:**

**A Phenomenological Study of Sensory and Racial Hierarchies as Facets to  
Experiencing Reality in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings***

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Tämä pro-gradu-tutkielma käsittelee J.R.R. Tolkienin romaanin Taru sormusten herrasta (*The Lord of the Rings*) aistikokemusten käyttöä todellisuuden kuvailun lähteenä. Tutkielman tarkoituksena on osoittaa, että Tolkienin fantasiamaailman todellisuus rakentuu hierarkisesti ja että se voidaan esittää aisti- ja rotuhierarkioiden välillä tapahtuvan interaktion kautta.

Aistikokemukset käsitetään tutkielmassa fenomenologisina todellisuuden ilmentyminä ja niiden toimintaa pyritään selittämään kirjoista ilmenevien aisti- ja rotuhierarkioiden avulla. Tutkielma on jaettu kahteen analyysilukuun ja teoriaosuuteen. Teoriapohjana käytän ranskalaisfilosofi Maurice Merleau-Pontyn fenomenologiaa, jonka avulla pyrin selittämään, miten Tolkienin maailmassa koettu todellisuus perustuu aistikokemuksiin. Teoriaosuudessa käsittelen Merleau-Pontyn fenomenologisia konsepteja ja selitän, miten niitä voidaan hyödyntää kirjallisuusanalyysissä. Keskityn erityisesti siihen, miten Merleau-Pontyn teorioita aistikokemusten yhteenmuovautumisesta ja niiden välisten rajojen hämärtymisestä voidaan käyttää kirjallisuusanalyysissä.

Ensimmäinen analyysikappale koskee aistihierarkiaa. Tässä kappaleessa esittelen Tolkienin maailmassa vaikuttavat aistit ja selitän ne fenomenologian konseptien kautta. Pyrkimyksenäni on osoittaa metafyyssisten piirteiden tärkeys, joka ilmenee aistihierarkian rakenteessa. Tässä kappaleessa selitän myös Mahtisormuksen funktion Keski-Maan fenomenologian manipuloijana. Toinen analyysikappale käsittelee rotuhierarkiaa. Osoitan rotuhierarkian toimivan samankaltaisena rakennelmana kuin aistihierarkia, jossa metafyyssiset piirteet ovat aina empiiristen piirteiden yläpuolella. Osoitan myös, kuinka aisti- ja rotuhierarkia vaikuttavat toisiinsa ja ovat riippuvaisia toisistaan.

Tutkielmassani tulen siihen johtopäätökseen, että Tolkienin maailmassa vaikuttavat aisti- ja rotuhierarkiat ovat vahvasti toisistaan riippuvaisia kokonaisuuksia. Tutkimukseni osoittaa, että mikäli Tolkienin maailman fenomenologiaa pyritään analysoimaan pelkästään aistien tai rotujen kautta, saadaan pinnallinen ja funktionaalinen lopputulos, jonka syvempi analyysi paljastaa illuusioksi. Aistikokemusten monimutkainen todellisuus perustuu aisti- ja rotuhierarkioiden väliseen interaktioon, jossa käsitteiden rajat hämärtyvät Merleau-Pontyn fenomenologian kuvailemalla tavalla.

Asiasanat: Aistit, rotut, fenomenologia, hierarkiat, todellisuus, Merleau-Ponty, Tolkien, The Lord of the Rings.

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## 1. Introduction

*“Only one thing I have added, the fire that giveth Life and Reality, and behold, the Secret Fire burnt at the heart of the world.” -Ilúvatar (The Book of Lost Tales 53)*

The phenomenology of the senses refers to the way in which we use our physical senses to understand the world around us; how we experience reality. The French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty argued that “all consciousness is perceptual consciousness” (*Phenomenology* xvii), meaning that our understanding of reality is tied to the perception of phenomena. For Merleau-Ponty, the perception of phenomena is central to human existence: the human condition is realised through an interaction between perception and the intentionality which humans inevitably project around themselves through the act of focusing on specific phenomena. By applying phenomenological theory to literary texts, a mode of looking at fiction emerges that focuses on the sensory descriptions of the book, and on how perception shapes and is shaped by writing. This thesis will offer a phenomenological account of J.R.R. Tolkien’s (1892-1973) fantasy classic, *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-1955), demonstrating how the novel presents the senses as a hierarchy, and how that hierarchy is enforced and destabilised by external elements such as race and orientation (good/evil). The traditional five senses (sight, touch, hearing, smell, and taste) are used, not only to describe the surroundings and events of the story, but to accentuate relevance and lend specific meaning to those events and characters being described, essentially constructing the experience of reality in *The Lord of the Rings* (*LOTR*). The senses and the concept of race are used as tools of distinction that ultimately

divide themes and characters into orders of merit, creating hierarchies that are present throughout the work.

Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology situates itself between the realms of metaphysical and empirical reality, as his theory utilises key elements from opposing ontological viewpoints. He approaches reality from a perspective that is not focused on the centrality of metaphysical and empirical claims to reality. In other words, Merleau-Ponty does not classify reality as something that ought to be understood through a strict binary element, such as Plato's metaphysical claim through his 'Realm of Ideas'. For Merleau-Ponty, reality is detached from these binary distinctions: he approaches reality through combining elements from both empirical and metaphysical perspectives. Merleau-Ponty describes reality as something that is perceived, and thus empirical, but something that is also dependent of the internal (arguably metaphysical) processes of the human mind.

As a tool of literary analysis, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology is strictly neither for nor against metaphysical or empirical characteristics and must not be understood as an alternative to either of these. Instead, through combining and discarding elements from both metaphysical and empirical viewpoints, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology becomes a method of contrast and compromise that acts as a third agent between the empirical and the metaphysical. Chung Chin-Yi described Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology in her study titled *Phenomenology and Deconstruction*:

“his phenomenology is a phenomenology of embodiment and [Merleau-Ponty] explores the intertwining of mind and body [...] Merleau-Ponty is more interested in the intersection of mind and body and the interaction between them rather than the phenomenon of repetition Derrida is interested in [...]” (Chin-Yi 260-261)

This description reflects the viewpoint of this thesis, which concentrates on the interactions between the empirical and the metaphysical by analysing them from a phenomenological

perspective. Merleau-Ponty views reality as a site of self-realisation, consciousness, and intentionality, in which metaphysical and empirical viewpoints can be employed and analysed. The senses themselves are physical but they can never abandon the metaphysical aspects of the mental processes that they are entwined to, and only by assessing the senses as a combination of metaphysical and empirical qualities can a phenomenological analysis be introduced. Ergo, as the senses in *LOTR* are essentially linked to the interactions between metaphysical and physical realms, a phenomenological account of the books must function through those realms. Since the description of the senses in *LOTR* employs both metaphysical and empirical elements, the phenomenological analysis of the story must provide a suitable environment for their analysis within a single framework.

This thesis positions itself in the foreground of the academic discussion of phenomenology and literature studies. As noted before, the theoretical background will be centred around Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. It is vital to indicate that the theoretical framework used in this study is centred on Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, since the differences between phenomenologists are great and central concepts such as the intentionality of perception vary from one philosopher to another. According to R.R. Magliola, although Merleau-Ponty was never a member, he can be considered a follower of the Geneva School, which refers to a group of thinkers who were central to the development of Husserl's early phenomenology, and a place of development for modern phenomenology: Magliola posits that Merleau-Ponty's writing "provides needed theoretical support for the practice of the Geneva School" (Magliola 13).

The focus on the connections between the empirical and metaphysical aspects of phenomenology is transferable to the analysis of literature, as this thesis concentrates on the similar interactions between the empirical and metaphysical aspects of the senses in *LOTR*. By viewing the fantastical reality of *LOTR* as a reflection of our own, we can apply Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology in the analysis of the text. Although phenomenological literary

analysis is generally focused on the relationships between intentionality, the author, and the critic, this thesis aims to demonstrate that Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological theories can be applied to the direct analysis of the content of literature, instead of the 'meta-conditions' that surround phenomenology and literary analysis. As focus is completely shifted away from the meta-analysis of reading as a phenomenon and towards the analysis of the content in *LOTR*, this thesis will analyse the use of the senses in the books by applying Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological concepts.

There is a solid connection between Merleau-Ponty's thoughts on language and linguistics and the analysis of literature, since Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology is focused on the intertwining of mind and body, instead of the "meta conditions that enable metaphysical production in phenomenology" (Chin-Yi 261), and the interactions between the metaphysical and empirical. Thus, this thesis' analysis of the senses in *LOTR* will focus on the use of the senses and their interactions within the empirical/metaphysical axis. The discarding of the 'meta-conditions' allows for the expanding of the analysis of the senses, so that the senses are studied directly: sight is discussed through the direct description of events in *LOTR*, and the sense of hearing is expanded by studying the speech of people and the sounds of the environment, not through studying the senses and their constituents as separate things, but as aspects in the reality of *LOTR* that affect the characters and the experiencing of reality as they know it.

In this thesis, the senses will be arranged into a hierarchical order: each sense placed in its respective position due to the prominence and prestige it holds in the books. Sight is at the top of the hierarchy of the senses, as it is the most frequently used sense in *LOTR*, and it is the sense that holds the most power. Sight is continuously linked to the Elven race and to power through association with characters that are the most powerful, and who are the most able to affect their surrounding environment. Those with the most power, such as Lady Galadriel, operate within the realm of visual stimuli (as she does with her Mirror), but some senses are

opposed to each other (the water in the Mirror must not be touched). As Lady Galadriel is an Elf, a pattern of association emerges between the senses and the races, however, this does not apply singularly, as Men, Hobbits, and others can also see, but they may not see as much or with the same clarity. All races interact with the five senses, albeit in their own ways. Thus, the reality of the characters' is constructed through the various ways in which they employ the senses. The ways in which the senses present themselves to the characters affect their understanding of reality, through which individual perspectives emerge. In this way, the characters and races of the books are divided into an intricate system of two hierarchies which operate dynamically, each affecting the other.

Although the five senses of sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste form the basis of the grasp of reality for each character, the senses operate differently from one another in accordance to the value and merit attached to each sense and the position of the experiencers within the sensory and racial hierarchies. Some senses are used as tools with which to increase distance and to reduce the physical presence of the settings and events at hand, but others are used to make them immediate and palpable, and these qualities are in opposition to each other. Similarly, some senses are used to emphasise the power and control a character has over other people or the environment, whereas some senses indicate a desire, not to dominate and control, but to harmonise with the surrounding world. These opposing operations provide a framework through which *LOTR*'s portrayals of the senses can be organised into a functioning model. This persuasive initial model of the five senses in *LOTR*'s phenomenology is challenged by the theme of race, which alters the phenomenology of the books.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The hierarchy of the senses, as noted above, is a system in which the sensory descriptions and imagery evoked in *LOTR* is categorised into an order. This order is built around the merits each sense is shown to have in the story, such as prominence and prestige, ergo the frequency and the importance of the sense's use in descriptions. The sense hierarchy of this thesis will only deal with the five 'basic' senses, which are sight, hearing, taste, smell, and



Race in Middle-Earth and racial hierarchies in *LOTR* are subjects that have gained much attention in previous studies, such as Dimitra Fimi's *Tolkien, Race and Cultural History: From Fairies to Hobbits*, where the racial aspects of Tolkien's writing are studied by focusing on the historical background in which the books were written. Race in Tolkien's writing is often discussed from a symbolic point of view, comparing the representations of races with cultural stereotypes and discussing the implications of such racial portrayals from a societal perspective. Although this thesis accounts for these previous racial studies of Tolkien's works, the focus here is not on the portrayal of racial differences as anthropological and socio-cultural phenomena (*Tolkien Studies vol. VII: Strange and Free and Monsterized Saracens*). Instead, this study focuses on the connections between the senses and the races, and how these two categories specifically affect the phenomenological study of *LOTR*.

The thesis is situated in a context of ample study: J.R.R Tolkien's work has been eagerly studied for years, including the publication of an annual academic journal, *Tolkien Studies*, which focuses solely on the author's life work. Although previous studies offer a wide range of studied topics, and philosophical guides to Tolkien's world (such as Bassham's and Bronson's *The Lord of the Rings and Philosophy*) offer the reader viewpoints on various ethical dilemmas presented by the books, the phenomenological nature of Tolkien's universe has never been studied exclusively. Publications that touch on the use of the senses in *LOTR* (*Tolkien Studies vol. III 'Fitting Sense to Sound*) generally do so from linguistic perspectives, whereas works about the connections of a phenomenological analysis and Tolkien's fictional universe remain previously untouched. This thesis situates itself in that undisclosed space, and by

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touch. Although the study of the senses in fields such as epistemology has shown us that the world of senses is more numerous than the basic five senses, for example adding senses of spatial recognition (the ability to 'feel' space and directions) and other more complex mechanisms, this thesis will be using the classical 'five senses', as they are the most applicable to the case at hand.

combining phenomenological literary analysis with the study of the senses and races in *LOTR*, aims to demonstrate how the two themes of sense and race form dynamic hierarchical structures through which the phenomenology of the books is realised.

## 2. Merleau-Ponty: The Phenomenology of the Senses

One of the reasons for the use of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology as the theoretical basis of this thesis is grounded in a core similarity that his phenomenology holds with fantasy literature.

Rosemary Jackson discusses the nature of fantasy literature:

[Fantasy's] association with imagination and with desire has made it an area difficult to articulate or to define, and indeed the 'value' of fantasy has seemed to reside in precisely this resistance to definition. (1)

Similar to this characterisation of fantasy literature, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology is centred around the obscuration of the borders of phenomena, making the classification of experienced reality difficult: through considering the periphery of phenomena, the distinction between the perceivable and the unperceivable becomes a case of ambiguity. Phenomena are portrayed through a "resistance to definition", which relates to the description of fantasy literature. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology also shares this aversion to specificity through his use of phenomenological concepts that many critics consider essentially contradictory. Merleau-Ponty employs concepts from his predecessors (namely those of Husserl and Heidegger), but his theories combine ideas that many of his critics deem mutually exclusive. Ted Toadvine discusses Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological ideas in relation to his contemporaries:

Whereas the neo-Kantian idealism then dominant in France (e.g., Léon Brunschvicg, Jules Lachelier) treated nature as an objective unity dependent on the synthetic activity of consciousness, the realism of the natural sciences and empirical psychology assumed nature to be composed of external things and events interacting causally. Merleau-Ponty argues that neither approach is tenable: organic life and human consciousness are emergent from a natural world that is not reducible to its meaning for a mind; yet this natural world is not the causal nexus of pre-existing objective realities, since it is fundamentally composed of nested Gestalts, spontaneously emerging structures of organization at multiple levels and degrees of integration. (par.10)

Thus, in his approach to phenomenology, Merleau-Ponty compliments his theories by resisting clear classification and obscuring the borders between previously established norms. To make full use of Merleau-Ponty's contradictive phenomenology it must be addressed in relation to Husserl's and Heidegger's phenomenology.

Arguably the first phenomenologist, Edmund Husserl devised concepts that were to answer questions about human consciousness that he found inadequately answered. The two main notions of human consciousness prior to phenomenology were empiricist and idealist accounts, which posited human consciousness in two opposing extremes: the empiricists focused on the passivity of consciousness, whereas idealists emphasised subjectivity (a subject projecting objects). These two viewpoints both regard subject and object as separate, and "though opting for opposite horns of the subject-object dilemma, both idealists and empiricists agree that there is no bridge between thought and world" (Magliola 4). Husserl devised an early philosophical viewpoint that would bring the concepts of subject and object closer together through the realisation of consciousness as an act that has intentionality: "Consciousness is an act wherein the subject intends (or directs himself towards the object), and the object is intended (or functions as a target for the intending act, though the object transcends this act)" (Magliola 4). Husserl's consciousness is a form of rational action that is the central contrast between his thought and Heidegger's.

Martin Heidegger redeveloped and radicalised Husserl's concept of human consciousness: consciousness for Heidegger is not a static action, but a dynamic one, which envelopes human existence in its entirety. Heidegger focused on the 'meaning of Being'; the human experiencing of existing. For Heidegger, existence is the "reciprocal relation of subjectivity and world" (Magliola 5), which is the basis of the concept of *Being-in-the world (in der Welt sein)*. Human existence is realised through interaction with the world, which he calls *Dasein*. *Dasein* refers

to the human reflection of being and the human understanding of oneself as existing: understanding one's own *Being-in-the-world* (Mulhall 4). Heidegger's philosophy of self-hood is built around the rejection of subject-object dichotomies of existence: in his most famous work, *Sein und Zeit* (trans. *Being and Time*), Heidegger opposes the reduction of the world into restrictive categories "such as the Cartesian dichotomy between nature (*res extensa*) and mind (*res cogitans*)" that only serve to "reduce the richness of their differentiation" (Mulhall 6). Heidegger's phenomenology is centred on the rejection of rationality as a basis of human existence, instead opting for the centrality of 'mood' and subjectivity; a shift of "focus from intellect-consciousness to a more radical emotion-consciousness" (Magliola 5). Heidegger's turning away from the 'ontic' knowledge of physics and chemistry is aimed at the assessment of human existence that is distinct in the world, as the matter of human existence cannot be answered by 'ontic' sciences:

all ontology, no matter how rich and firmly compacted a system of categories it has at its disposal, remains blind and perverted from its ownmost aim, if it has not first adequately clarified the meaning of Being, and conceived this clarification as its fundamental task. (Heidegger 31)

Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology is situated in the context of Husserl's and Heidegger's works, as they both heavily influenced his thinking. And while this thesis is primarily focused on the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, it will inescapably draw on phenomenological ideas of both Husserl and Heidegger, especially the latter, whose Being-in-the-world is central to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. Merleau-Ponty redeveloped the ideas of Heidegger and Husserl by introducing the idea of human consciousness as a process where the subject and object are inseparable. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology stands in many ways in between Husserl's and Heidegger's: Merleau-Ponty declares himself "developing Husserlian phenomenology in the direction which Husserl's own "maturing" thought had led him toward the end of his life" (Eddie xvii). Merleau-Ponty is tied to Heideggerian phenomenology through concentrating on the

concept of self-hood as an active exercise of realisation of a human reality in the universe, as opposed to a passive self-hood. Merleau-Ponty's connection to both Husserlian and Heideggerian phenomenology is notable, since the two are often considered to be in stark opposition towards each other (Magliola 5). Merleau-Ponty's drawing on both Husserlian and Heideggerian phenomenology, and his remaining detached from either, emphasises the unique position of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology: by combining elements from opposing theories Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology resists strict definition.

Phenomenology was born from the rejection of some basic assumptions of understanding reality in prevailing models of thought. Merleau-Ponty continues this phenomenological legacy by indicating that the dominant notions of Western philosophy are direct descendants of a scientific approach to reality which understand perception as the impossible 'pure perception'. For example, Rene Descartes' famous concept of the 'cogito', which states "cogito ergo sum" (translated: "I think, therefore I am") (Sorell 1), essentially detaches the subject from the rest of the world, as thought is made the central notion through which the 'reality' of things is accounted for. This leads to the notion of thought/experience becoming a necessary predecessor to existence, which is a stance on reality Merleau-Ponty connects with 'scientific points of view'. This succession of thought and existence is inherently flawed for phenomenologists:

Scientific points of view, according to which my existence is a moment of the world's, are always both naïve and at the same time dishonest, because they take for granted, without explicitly mentioning it, the other point of view, namely that of consciousness, through which from the outset a world forms itself round me and begins to exist for me. To return to things themselves [the phenomenological method] is to return to that world which precedes knowledge, of which knowledge always speaks, and in relation to which every scientific schematization is an abstract and derivative sign-language [...]. (*Phenomenology* ix)

Merleau-Ponty argues that the Cartesian model of understanding reality leads to a reconstruction of reality, but not a 'description' of reality itself, which is precisely the phenomenological aim. In what Merleau-Ponty refers to as sensualist philosophy, where

sensation is the only basis of cognition, and in transcendental philosophy, which refers to Immanuel Kant's ideas on knowledge as a blending of empirical (physical) and rational (inherently metaphysical) experience, the understanding of reality is reductive. This is so because both approaches 'reduce' reality to a thought *about* reality but fail to describe reality itself. For Merleau-Ponty "Sensationalism [sensualism] 'reduces' the world by noting that after all we never experience anything but states of ourselves" (*Phenomenology* xv). Transcendentalists, just as sensualists, are reductive in their explanation of reality as they regard the world "as thought or consciousness about the world [...], with the result that it becomes immanent in consciousness and the aseity of things is thereby done away with" (*Phenomenology* xvi). So, where Kant's transcendental philosophy misplaces the 'essence' of reality by reducing it to a thought, phenomenology fills that void by trying to configure reality as it is experienced.

The distinction in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology is the focus of the human body, which is "at the heart of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy" (Reynolds & Diprose 111). Merleau-Ponty employs the five senses as the means by which reality is addressed (Lingis 92). Sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste are all given prominence in the discerning of information about the world and they stand at the centre of our perception of reality. However, the phenomenology of perception is a mode of description and experience, not of construction. Ergo, the world outside the body is real before the perception and the senses do not construct reality. As mentioned previously, Merleau-Ponty's theories posit reality as a describable experience of being, thus "all consciousness is consciousness of something" (*Phenomenology* xvii).

Although all consciousness is rooted in reality for Merleau-Ponty, all that which is perceived is not necessarily clear or certain to the perceiver, and his phenomenology is heavily influenced by the thought of the ambiguity of perception. It breaks away from the classical philosophical and scientific views which maintain perception as an absolute; as a window to the world which

is objective and leads to the instant realisation of the surrounding world where meaning is realised directly through ‘unproblematic’ perception. Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology changes the way perceiving is viewed: the stability and sensibility of reality is no longer a given, but rather open to reevaluation. As ‘sensation’ is as a unit of experience, Merleau-Ponty defines his use of ‘sensation’ as a concept: it must not be confused with the everyday notion that a sensation is a ‘feeling of something’, such as “of redness, of blueness, of hot or cold” (*Phenomenology* 3). Instead, sensation refers to the inner consciousness of a person, the experiencing of the sense experience (trans. ‘*sentir*’, *Phenomenology* 1). For Merleau-Ponty, reality is understood through a person’s consciousness, and is given meaning by the intentionality of the person perceiving. The world is realised through the senses, but the world is ‘real’, without the need of an experiencing body. However, what we call reality, according to Merleau-Ponty, is inevitably attached to the meaning-giving operations of a person’s consciousness. Therefore, “pure sensation” (*Phenomenology* 3) in which the sensation itself is an instantaneous transmission of information about the world to our consciousness, cannot logically exist. This is so, because our consciousness of a perceived ‘something’ is always attached to other things, ad infinitum:

The perceptual ‘something’ is always in the middle of something else., it always forms a part of a ‘field’. A really homogenous area offering a *nothing to be* cannot be given to *any perception*. [...] The pure impression is, therefore, not only undiscoverable, but also imperceptible and so inconceivable as an instant of perception. (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology* 4)

Merleau-Ponty describes reality through sensations as looking at “a white patch on a homogenous background” (*Phenomenology* 3): all the points in the patch have a distinct purpose in outlining the shape of the patch, and the borders of the patch belong to the shape which is distinct from the background. Thus, “each part arouses the expectation of more than it contains, and this elementary perception is therefore already charged with a *meaning*”



(*Phenomenology* 4). In other words, our consciousness shapes what it perceives into a meaningful whole. The sense experience is in an active relationship with consciousness, and the intentional aspects of our consciousness shape the perception into a meaningful whole. By intentionality, Merleau-Ponty refers to the meaning-giving processes of our mental faculty: just as the 'void' of pure perception is inconceivable, the perceiving of something without intentionality is impossible since perception and consciousness are inseparable. If perception is discussed, it is a necessity to include consciousness and intentionality as the central part of the meaning-giving process. In addition, since it is a 'meaning-giving' process, instead of 'meaning-making', Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology asserts that meaning is not tied to the world itself but to the perception of it. So, although the world itself must be present before our perception of it, the meaning of the world is inherently a process of our own making.

The perception of reality that a person has is thus grounded in sense experience. The perception of the world is 'real' and it is not an abstraction or a thought *about* the world, but it is the perception of the world itself from a specific point of view. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology thus rejects the metaphysical realm as an isolated, central concept for the discussion of a human reality. Instead, what can be considered the 'metaphysical qualities of existence', such as thought, are tied to the meaning-giving process that is inherent to human existence.

Much of Merleau-Ponty's writing is centred on the meaning-giving process of existence, and the expression of a human consciousness that is separate from the world, just as the imagined white patch stands out from the homogenous background. Here, the senses come to the fore: the senses are the integral part of the meaning-giving process because the affirmation of reality requires it to be perceived. However, unlike purely sensualist accounts of reality, the world is not simply tied to its experiencing, and the reality of the world is not reduced to our mere perceptions of it. The senses are placed at the centre of experiencing reality, but giving birth only to its meaning, not reality itself.

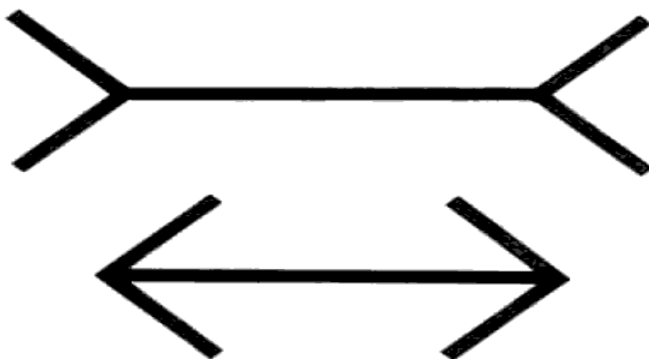
The meaning-giving processes of sense experience are also tied to language, which is one of the central themes of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. As sense experience indicates the interaction between the self and the world, language too is tied to the real world. Language, and thus speech, in phenomenology is not merely considered a representation of the experienced world; it has the potential of incarnating meaning. For Merleau-Ponty, language is not "independent of the speaker" (Magliola 13), nor is it "a mere sign of the speaker's mental activities" (ibid.). From a phenomenological viewpoint "[l]anguage is the interaction between the self and the world, which is the locus of emerging meaning" (Savolainen 4). Language expresses reality by focusing on words and text as things-in-themselves and not as arbitrary reconstructions of things that exist in the sensory world. Therefore, language does not represent but "makes present" (Moslund 61). Merleau-Ponty followed Heidegger's study of the connections between language and phenomena, as Heidegger proposed that language has the capacity "to cause phenomena to appear in the radical sense, that naming [...] presents a phenomenon with a *Gelassenheit*: a leaving-the-phenomena-be" (Moslund 61). A word is thus allowed to be just a word, unconstrained to the *Vorstellung* (intentionality) but instead existing as a *Darstellung* ('a-setting-there'). This phenomenological understanding of language relates to the central phenomenological idea of Being-in-the-world and posits the possibility of experiencing language "on *its* terms" through emotion and mood, and "without mediation" (Moslund 63). This leads to the experiencer becoming "more open to Being", when we "yield ourselves to the undisguised presence of a thing" (Moslund 63), which indicates a relationship between speech and the experience of reality that dismisses a subject-object dichotomy of the experiencing subject and the world.

Merleau-Ponty followed in this phenomenological classification of language, proposing that language is "an intentional act" (Magliola 13) and that the intentionality of language confers language not as "a sign of meaning, but an embodiment, an "incarnation" of meaning":

responding to de Saussure, Merleau-Ponty calls this *la parole* (Magliola 13). This potential of language to cause-into-being is demonstrated by the power that Saruman, Tom Bombadil, and Goldberry possess, who can achieve the *Darstellung* potential of language and bend physical reality (both beings and things) around them. This connection between Merleau-Ponty's 'parole' and the powers of speech in *LOTR* is complemented by R.R. Magliola's description of Merleau-Ponty, where he states that "*la parole* is a concrete projection of the whole person" and "*la parole* is at its richest in poetic language" (Magliola 37).

The relationship between reality and the experiences we have of reality are not unproblematic. Merleau-Ponty employs the use of the senses to posit a very crucial bit of evidence about the perception of reality; namely, the misleading nature of the senses. He uses example of an optical illusion, the Müller-Lyer illusion (Figure 1), to demonstrate how the senses are not a format of transferring objective truth from an external world to an inward consciousness, but that the meaning-giving process is dependent of the manner in which the world is presented to the senses. In a world that is filled with innumerable viewpoints, everything is altered by the position from which it is perceived.

Figure 1. The Müller-Lyer illusion



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The Müller-Lyer illusion depicted here (Figure 1) is an optical illusion that confuses the perceivers understanding about the length of the two horizontal lines. The shape of the lower formation makes the horizontal line look shorter than it is in the upper one, when in fact both lines are the same length. These abnormalities of the senses are used to convey the idea of the meaning-giving function of perception that emphasises the loss of superficial objectivity. By presenting paradoxical phenomena that are simultaneously objective (and thus truthful) and misleading, Merleau-Ponty begins to break away from “all scientific or naturalistic explanations of phenomena” (Toadvine par 19). Since subjective and objective ‘realities’ clash in this representation of phenomena, Merleau-Ponty strives to portray the senses from a viewpoint that is unburdened by what “such [scientific or naturalistic] explanations take for granted” (Toadvine par.19). His theories place perception as the central concept of consciousness, which in turn leads to the experiencing of reality subjectively through the senses. This thesis will use the structure of Merleau-Ponty’s argument by analysing *LOTR* through the multiple viewpoints provided by the differences between each of the senses and the races in the books.

Merleau-Ponty discusses the absurdity of some preconceptions of our sensory experiences, by questioning the validity of a ‘field of vision’. A field of vision is what is generally understood as the spatial capacity of our sense of sight: much like an orb around our head, or an angle of approximately 150 degrees, the field of vision is one of those casual concepts of our sensory world that is used unproblematically and unquestionably in everyday situations. Merleau-Ponty posits that the existence of a field of vision is an absurd notion: “The visual field is that strange zone in which contradictory notions jostle each other [...]” (*Phenomenology* 6). The use of a concept such as the field of vision is inapplicable to the phenomenological pursuit of sensed reality, because the field of vision, just as Kantian and Cartesian constructions of reality,

reduce the sensation of reality into a mere abstraction. Merleau-Ponty considers the function of a field of vision, debunking it promptly:

We ought, then, to perceive a segment of the world precisely delimited, surrounded by a zone of blackness, packed full of qualities with no interval between them, held together by definite relationships of size similar to those lying on the retina. The fact is that experience offers nothing like this, and we shall never, using the world as our starting-point, understand what a field of vision is. (*Phenomenology* 5)

The instantaneous transmission of information and the presenting of a field of vision as a fixed and strictly binary division of visible and invisible phenomena is what problematises the existence of such a concept. The phenomenological method is thus constructed as a mode of “describing, not of explaining or analysing” (*Phenomenology* viii), leading further away from a rationalistic abstraction of reality. After indicating this rejection of ‘common sense’ explanations of perception in phenomenology, Merleau-Ponty further discusses the ambiguity of perception: considering the Müller-Lyer illusion, he proposes that a societally prevailing psychological method of assessing reality is similarly lacking. According to Merleau-Ponty, psychologists understand the world as self-determined, and that the ambiguity of our perception rises from the inherent faultiness of our senses: “The object, psychologists would assert, is never ambiguous, but becomes so only through our inattention” (*Phenomenology* 6). Merleau-Ponty rejects this viewpoint, as it rests on the same rationalist assumptions of reality paradoxically confirming itself as ‘true’. He argues, that there is a moment when an object is on the verge of visibility, where seeing and ‘noticing’ do not intersect, and a thing may be fully visible but not noticed, so “the notion of attention [...] is supported by no evidence provided by consciousness” (*Phenomenology* 6), and that such an assumption is only trying to hastily fall on a proof of an objective world. Instead, Merleau-Ponty posits that the “We must recognize the indeterminate as a positive phenomenon” (*Phenomenology* 6). The unclarity of a landscape from afar is not a failing of the senses, but an aspect of our perception.

Phenomenology marks a movement away from the abstract object, leading to a “return to things themselves” (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology* ix), which means the return to true, experienced reality, instead of abstraction.

The critique of both the field of vision and the psychological understanding of perception is rooted in a common denominator: the immediacy of the effects of our perception. The field of vision is unknown to our experience of reality because the distinction between what is visible and what is not relies on the immediacy of its borders. The progression from the edge of visibility to invisibility, according to the concept of a field of vision, is a turn from visible phenomena to a surrounding ‘blackness’. Similarly, in the critique of psychological methodology, the shift from an indiscernible landscape to a clear image is instantaneous. The essential similarity between these two critiques is that the shifts between visibility and invisibility, or clarity and unclarity, are not gradual, but are portrayed as immediate results of a ‘pure perception’.

Instead, what phenomenology shows us is that the progressions from invisibility and unclarity to visibility and clarity are gradual shifts. The objects within our perception can at once be visible yet unnoticed, and the same applies to aspects in a landscape. Merleau-Ponty concretises this claim with a common example: we may be familiar with a person’s face but have no knowledge of the colour of their eyes. Alternatively, we may find ourselves surprised when we do acknowledge the colour of their eyes, as we realise that it is something we have not noticed before (*Phenomenology* 11). Merleau-Ponty indicates a similar relationship between humans and the world, by discussing the viewpoint of the self in relation to others: “There is a kinship between the being of the earth and that of my body [...] This kinship extends to others, who appear to me as other bodies, to animals, whom I understand as variants of my embodiment [...]” (*Husserl and the Limits of Phenomenology* 122). The observation of the blending that happens between humanity and the world in Merleau-Ponty’s argument is connected to the

obscuration of phenomena which refers to the difficulty of distinction between sensibility and non-sensibility. This concept of obscuration is thus extended to human existence in relation to other existing things and the muddling of borders between phenomenological categories. This thesis analyses the effects of the blending of conceptual borders of races and senses into each other by focusing on how both concepts are presented and how they function as portrayals of the reality of *LOTR* that propose, and challenge, hierarchical perspectives of the books' reality.

### 3. The Sense Hierarchy

#### Introducing the Sense Hierarchy: Metaphysical Sight

This chapter will discuss the use of the senses in *LOTR*, where I will introduce the sensory hierarchy and demonstrate how the senses function as a system of values which is dependent on factors such as prestige and prominence. The senses play a crucial part in the descriptions of Middle-earth in *LOTR* as they are the basis from which experiencing reality emerges. The reality of the books, from the perspective of the reader, is only understood through the sensory experiences of the characters and the descriptions used by the narrator.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty's theories of phenomenology are focused on the experiencing of reality through sensation and phenomena. Phenomenology, he explains, is the descriptive understanding of reality; how we understand our own consciousness and the surrounding world through the sensory processes of our body, and how some seemingly logical assumptions about the nature of reality are overturned by a phenomenological focus. These theories that apply to the world in which we live can also be applied to the literary world of *LOTR*. However, issues arise with the acceptance of the books' world, and therefore its reality, being identical to our own. If different sentient species experience reality differently, how can a unifying theory of phenomenology be applied to the many races within *LOTR*, or how can the races understand each other's existence if they vary radically from each other? By discussing the themes of sensory and racial hierarchies, I aim to demonstrate that we find the basis of a phenomenological reality within the novels that operates through the intersections between socio-racial distributions of power and sensory phenomena.

The correlation between sensory phenomena and power is most clearly present in the way sight functions in *LOTR*: definitions of power in the books arise from the capability to wield the



power of vision in some form. Thus, the most powerful beings in the story, both good and evil, are expressed as powers that can control vision in the books, thus affecting the experiencing of Middle-Earth. These, of which the most notable are the Maiar, immortal spirits such as Gandalf and Sauron, that have been sent to Middle-earth by the Valar (*Silmarillion* 31). They possess powers of foresight and illusion, although “even the very wise cannot see all ends” (*LOTR* 59), suggesting they are not the omnipotent masters of the sense, but have the power to manipulate what can be seen and what cannot. For example, Gandalf can light the Fellowship’s way in the darkness of Moria through his magic (*LOTR* 315), Saruman can use his Palantir to see far (*LOTR* 598), and Sauron uses birds and beasts to know the movements of his enemies (*LOTR* 286,630, 635).

The general pattern of the sense hierarchy posits a movement from the metaphysical towards the empirical. The highest forms of power in the sense hierarchy are those that affect the visuality of the world, rendering things either visible or invisible. Sight not only affects the physical realm but heavily influences the metaphysical as well: sight confers knowledge of the world, and thus power over what is seen. The metaphysical aspects of sight refer to the quality of sight that reaches ‘beyond physicality’: seeing things that are not physically present, seeing the future, seeing another’s mind, and knowing through seeing (in this case, to see is to know with certainty) are all examples of these qualities. The highly metaphysical aspects of sight are followed by the more tangible aspects of hearing, smell, taste, and touch, as these senses gradually withdraw from metaphysicality and introduce aspects of reality that are close and tangible. The metaphysical/empirical axis is also demonstrated in measures of distances: sight is used to sense far away, whereas touch presents the mind with only the most immediate phenomena.

The primacy of sight is not a unique concept for *LOTR*, but depictions of sight as the supreme sense that governs human life were introduced to the western world at least as early as Classical

Antiquity. Charles T. Wolfe writes of the history of the sense hierarchy: “The choice of a particular sense in the construction of a metaphysical hierarchy, a rank-ordering of the world, is a classic motif” (Wolfe 2). Historically, sight has thus often been regarded as the ‘ruling sense’ in classical hierarchies of the senses, with thinkers such as Plato referring to it as the “site of entry of *enthusiasmos*” (Wolfe 1), or ‘divine inspiration’. Sight is thus connected to ideas of divinity, and historically sight has often been “indicative of our higher side, closer to the divine” (Wolfe 2). Sight is also connected to ideas about truth, knowledge, and light. It “is the most philosophical, or the purest sense: it is closest to light” (Wolfe 8). The visuality in *LOTR* has clear roots in these historical branches of thought, as throughout the story there is a predisposition of sight as a ruling form of sensing, and thus experiencing reality.

*LOTR* is full of dual-representations of sight and power, such as Sauron being symbolised by a great Eye of fire (*LOTR* 401,632, 942), or the Galadriel’s gift to Frodo, an Elven phial that “will shine still brighter when night is about you.” (*LOTR* 376). The supremacy of sight is demonstrated by the choices of characters that represent the sense as Galadriel and Sauron are the rulers and undeniable masters of their respective factions. Elves are the primary race that is associated with sight, and they use the power they have over the sense in many instances. When the astounded hobbits question how the Elves know so much about them, Gildor Inglorion, the leader of the party replies: “We know many things [...] We have seen you often before with Bilbo, though you may not have seen us” (*LOTR* 80). The Elves can see others from afar, as well as making themselves invisible to others if they so wish. They can thus manipulate the visual ability of other beings and bend their own visibility to others’ eyes. Characters of other races can also use stealth and remain unseen to some extent, but few can remain unseen by the Elves, or reversely see the Elves, if the Elves so choose.

As well as being the most prominent, sight is also the most abstract of the senses. It affects different characters individually, and sight is presented as a subjective expression of reality.

The clearest example of this is the Mirror of Galadriel: the magical mirror shows visions to whomever looks into the clear water of its surface, but what is perceived differs with the perceiver, and the visions reflect the thoughts, desires, and fears of the beholder: “What you will see, if you leave the Mirror free to work, I cannot tell” (Tolkien 362). When Sam looks into the Mirror, he sees The Shire, and the travesties that are bound to take place there, whereas Frodo sees visions of Sauron, and the Eye. Sight as a facet of reality leads to individuality, and as such, sight is something that ought not to be trusted in all cases, as Sauron the Deceiver always lies through illusions, trying to evoke fear or corruption in his adversaries. The untrustworthiness of sight is also indicated by Sam’s vision in the Mirror, when he believes he sees an image of Frodo asleep. He later realises that he was mistaken, when he sees the limp body of Frodo after the attack of Shelob when he exclaims in grief: “Not asleep, dead!” (*LOTR* 731). Similarly, when Sam is later bearing the Ring in the pass of Cirith Ungol, Sauron tries to persuade Sam to use the Ring, by showing him dreams of “Samwise the Strong” (*LOTR* 901) conquering armies and raising gardens the size of kingdoms in Mordor.

These visions explore Merleau-Ponty’s thoughts on sight in artistic creation where visions are portrayed not as the objective reflections of events that may or must happen, but the consequence of the human capacity of ‘looking at things’: “[...] only a human being is capable of such vision which penetrates right to the root of things beneath the imposed order of humanity” (*Sense and Non-sense* 16). Just as Merleau-Ponty’s artistic vision ultimately depicts something that arises from the interaction between the artist and an external world, revealing in its aftermath something more of the artist himself than of an objectively true reality, visions granted by The Ring and the Mirror of Galadriel reveal more about the perceiver and their understanding of reality than about any objective truth about the world. These visions of *LOTR* are highly phenomenological, reflecting the “preconscious” (*Sense and Non-sense* 88) elements of a perceiver’s intentionality: through vision, the perceiver sees things that reflect

the truth of matters for them, though they themselves may not be conscious of their own realisation of the world themselves. The truth that is assigned to visions is unclear to the perceiver because the reality that visions present are views that alienate the perceiver from the world and the usual 'meaning' of things. Thus, whatever is seen through visions cannot be understood as representations of an objective reality, leading to the ambiguity of visual reality.

Although sight is an untrustworthy source of knowledge, those with great power use sight to know things with perfect clarity. Galadriel says that she can "perceive the Dark Lord and know his mind", and that Sauron "gropes ever to see [her] and [her] thought" (*LOTR* 365). Thus, the ones who have great mastery over sight can use its power against others to "know" them and their intentions, but there is always a risk of being overpowered by someone else even more powerful. Sight as the source of knowledge and truth is a Classical conception (Wolfe 5-6) that Tolkien uses in his works, connecting sight with higher forms of life. In *LOTR*, sight is a source of knowledge, but the knowledge that can be gained through sight is susceptible to manipulation by beings more powerful than the perceiver. The Eye of Sauron works in a similar fashion: Sauron searches for the Ring and tries to locate it with his sight. If he can see the Ring, he will "know just exactly where [it is]" (*LOTR* 401). This function is portrayed by Merleau-Ponty's essay *Eye and Mind*, where he discusses the nature of sight and the reciprocal element that is embedded in sight: "The enigma is that my body simultaneously sees and is seen. That which looks at all things can also look at itself and recognize, in what it sees, the "other side" of its power of looking" (*Eye and Mind* 283). The "power of looking" is in this passage tied to the reciprocal nature of sight: that which sees can also be seen. By introducing another perceiver, the situation becomes a struggle for dominance within the realm of vision, with the more powerful 'vision' conquering the lesser one.

The connections between sight and power are complicated by Sauron's chief minions, the Nazgûl. The Nazgûl were once great kings of Men, who were corrupted by the Nine Rings

(originally forged by Elves deceived and tutored by Sauron). Once Sauron forged the Ring of Power, the One Ring, he could dominate the owners of the Nine and bend them to his will, turning them into eternal servants of his cause. The Nazgûl are no longer Men, but wraiths, and their relationship to reality is unique since they are made up of 'nothingness'. They wear black cloaks that give them a physical form, but underneath their hoods they are formless and invisible. When Frodo puts on the Ring during their clash at Weathertop (also referred to as Amon Sûl), Frodo can see the true form of the Nazgûl. Gandalf explains the existence of the Nazgûl to Frodo:

'You were in the gravest peril while you wore the Ring, for then you were half in the wraith-world yourself, and they might have seized you. You could see them, and they could see you.' 'I know', said Frodo. 'They were terrible to behold! But why could we all see their horses?' 'Because they are real horses; just as the black robes are real robes that they wear to give shape to their nothingness when they have dealings with the living.' (*LOTR* 222)

The Nazgûl thus primarily exist in another realm, as they are most powerful within the 'Shadow Realm'. This demonstrates how sight is used to convey attributes of metaphysicality and power simultaneously. The 'Shadow Realm' is never expanded on in detail but is referred to as the 'Unseen' and as 'The Realm of Shadow'. The Unseen, as the name implies, is a subcategory of sight and it can only be accessed through sight. Thus, as the other senses are barred to the unseen, sight enjoys a privilege over the other senses. The relationship between Sauron and the Nazgûl is also one of unity as the Nazgûl are a reflection of Sauron's consciousness and power. They are connected to Sauron and the Ring by their phenomenology, as their sense experience is tied to Sauron's intentionality. They see what Sauron directs them to see, and their sense experience is dependent of the 'guiding hand' of Sauron. Similar to the way a person is at all times relatively conscious of the positions and movements of the hands and fingers, Sauron is conscious of the Nazgûl and the One Ring, because they are all essentially a part of the same

sense experience. Sauron is the consciousness behind the actions of the Nazgûl and he is always conscious of the presence of the Ring, which allows the Nazgûl to feel the presence of the Ring. The representation of the Nazgûl as an extension of Sauron is crucial to the phenomenological account of the books: as the Nazgûl inhabit two realms at once, they exhibit a transcendent mode of existence. This relates to the Elves, who at once may inhabit the Seen and the Unseen: “They do not fear the Ringwraiths, for those who have dwelt in the Blessed Realm live at once in both worlds, and against both the Seen and the Unseen they have great power” (Gandalf describing Glorfindel to Frodo, *LOTR* 223). The ability to simultaneously experience reality through both ‘the Seen’ and ‘the Unseen’ connects the Elves and the Nazgûl to a metaphysical existence that is central to the story’s phenomenology.

### **Hearing: A Turn Towards Empiricism**

The sense hierarchy posits a movement from the metaphysical towards the empirical. Thus, the highly metaphysical sense of sight is followed by a movement towards more tangible sense experience through the sense of hearing: the sounds of nature, actions, and of voices and physical action are presented through auditive phenomena. The notion of space is important to hearing as the sense is used specially to further the immediacy of featured events. The sense of hearing is thus related to distances, as the sounds of Orcs shrieking somewhere near (*LOTR* 533), the distant booming of the enemy’s war drums (*LOTR* 313, 325, 326, 329, 332), or the muffled sound of “stealthy movements” following the fellowship (*LOTR* 345) are descriptions that shape the physical spaces of the story by extending the reach of consciousness of the characters. The mode of hearing in *LOTR* is always the same. In other words, the characters of the story all hear in the same way, and there is no change in what is being perceived through

sound, unlike with sight, where the experiencing of reality through the sense is more differed. Thus, much of the subjectivity of sight is absent, and hearing is presented as a less divided facet of reality. However, although the auditory experiencing of reality affords similar ‘building blocks’ to different characters and races, the strength of one’s capability to perceive through hearing is varied between characters, with some hearing more keenly than others. The keenness of one’s hearing in *LOTR* is strongly connected to the race of Men, whose reality is primarily experienced as auditive. Aragorn is on several occasions described as one who has “quick ears”, (*LOTR* 161, 413, 426) and his use of hearing is an important gift that aids the Fellowship, much like Legolas’ sight and Gandalf’s knowledge. Thus, the movement from sight to hearing is complemented by a transition from Elves to Men.

The sense of hearing is not only connected to the perception of sounds, but also to the themes of speech, song, and language, which ties the sense especially to the phenomenological concept of intentionality. Intentionality is one of the focuses of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology, where his concept of *la parole* is especially relevant: language for Merleau-Ponty is an intentional act that conveys the projection of its speaker, thus reflecting their reality.<sup>2</sup> This is exemplified by characters such as Saruman, Tom Bombadil, and Goldberry, whose ‘power’ in Middle-Earth is focused on the use of their voice and the words they speak: this is directly emphasised by the books, as chapter 10 from book three is titled ‘The Voice of Saruman’,

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<sup>2</sup> At this stage it is relevant to consider the role of imagination/memory and empiricism: I argue that memory is an empirical device, and not a metaphysical, as what is being remembered is done so through experience. Experience is a physical process, as it is only in relation to sensing that we may gain experience, and thus memory is essentially an empirical concept. This is a counterpoint to imagination, as imagination better exemplifies another ‘realm’ through which a mental process is acted out. Since no actual experience is necessary, making the use of imagination (as in songs, where characters imagine places and events foreign to them) a metaphysical action. Naturally, these are topics of great debate, and in-depth propositions of the overlapping between imagination, experience, and memory are suitable for a study of epistemology, but for this thesis, we will use this definition.

which concentrates heavily on the description of Saruman's voice, and his power over the minds of others through hearing.

Hearing acts as a mediator between metaphysical and empirical realities: affecting the physical world and other people through speech makes the intention of the speaker a physical force. The intentionality behind an action is inherently a metaphysical quality which descends towards the tangible world through the expression of a powerful speaker who may change their surroundings by speaking or singing the changes. This attribute of speech/hearing relates to the theme of power discussed in relation to sight: where sight is portrayed as the ultimate form of power in Middle-Earth, the control over an auditive reality is the secondary realisation of power conferred to those with great, but not absolute, power. The supremacy of sight over speech is indicated by the characters the powers are linked to: for example, Sauron is identified as Saruman's "master" (*LOTR* 583).

The voice used by characters like Saruman demonstrates the metaphysical qualities of hearing that are second only to sight: by commanding surrounding people and the environment to their control, the power of speech affects the physical world from a metaphysical position. The intentionality of the speaker is immaterial (it cannot be sensed although it is present) but is made concrete through interaction with the physical world. The intentionality of the speaker is reflected by the manner of the speech act and the emotions that drive it, as Saruman's voice ranges from gentleness to violent hisses, which makes Men shudder "at the hideous change" (*LOTR* 581), demonstrating the action of intentionality changing the physical world. As an audible reality is thus heavily based on speech and songs, the sense of hearing is shown to be partially connected to the metaphysical and acting through metaphysical qualities, but simultaneously bonded to the empirical world. This paradoxical relationship is also demonstrated through the functions of speech and sounds as indicators of time.



Time that is *now* is tied to empiricism just as times that are not *now* are tied to metaphysics. The present moment is open to the senses, whereas the future or the past are only accessible through imagination and memory and are thus non-empirical. Although the hearing of sounds is related to the present moment, speech and the songs of many characters are tied to the portrayal of past and future times. Characters discuss the future with anxiety, and many of the songs sung during the story are about ancient days of glory: the immediate present is momentarily overtaken by past and future as the songs and speeches offer a mirrored view of reality that does not arise from the present but is attached to it by voice and speech.

The relationship between speech/song and the metaphysical is further demonstrated by Tom Bombadil, who can shape present reality through song, thus enacting through Merleau-Ponty's *parole*. Tom Bombadil rescues the hobbits twice during their travel through the mysterious 'Old Forest' near the Shire. In one case, the hobbits are trapped by a malevolent old tree and in the other by a barrow-wight, and at both times Tom Bombadil rushes to the scene and delivers them from their predicament by using the magical power of his voice, with which he sings the surrounding reality to his control:

*Old Tom Bombadil is a merry fellow,*

*Bright blue his jacket is, and his boots are yellow.*

*None has ever caught him yet, for Tom, he is the master:*

*His songs are stronger songs, and his feet are faster. (LOTR 142)*

Tom Bombadil's wife, Goldberry, also has the 'power of voice': she uses her voice differently than Tom, as her speech is wondrous and soothing to hear, and has a healing effect: "Then

another clear voice, as young and ancient as Spring, like the song of a glad water flowing down into the night from a bright morning in the hills, came falling like silver to meet them” (*LOTR* 122). Thus, the intentionality of the speaker can be directed to different causes but always acting in the physical world through a metaphysical intention.

These representations of power through voice and speech exemplify the use of Merleau-Ponty’s *parole*: Saruman, Tom Bombadil, and Goldberry achieve this phenomenological level of speech as their voice has power over the surrounding world and can bend the empirical facts of reality. In this way, the metaphysical aspects of hearing that dislocate the present through past and future reference are over-ridden by an emerging empirical reality. Unlike sight and Elves, hearing is not divided into two separate ‘realms’ of reality and an ultimately transcendental existence, but as songs and speech are thematically tied to past and future events, and thus things that are ‘beyond the physical’, the metaphysical is not completely abandoned. Much like with the case of sight, where footsteps can indicate what ‘once was there’, songs and speech also describe things not present. However, the power of speech demonstrated by Saruman, Tom Bombadil and Goldberry functions as a gateway between the metaphysical and empirical realms as these characters can shape the physical reality around them through their voice. The borders between the metaphysical and physical qualities of hearing are thus blurred, as the clear distinctions between perceptual concepts are muddled, reflecting the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty and his concept of perceptual ambiguity. The connections of song and speech in both metaphysical and physical realms demonstrate the central transition in the sense hierarchy; a movement from the metaphysical towards the empirical.

The blurring of metaphysical and empirical aspects in hearing is complemented by the representation of the Maiar, which complicates the representation of power through the senses: Maiar (such as Gandalf, Saruman, and Sauron) are immortal beings that are the servants of

their spiritual superiors, the Valar. The Maiar are mostly portrayed through their power over the visuality of Middle-Earth: Gandalf's light, Saruman's Palantir, and Sauron's Eye. They are thus strongly represented as visual agents, which would tie them to the Elven race. The Maiar are not Elves, however, but are a distinct group of beings set apart from the races of *LOTR*. The matter of their race is further complicated by the fact that most Valar choose to present themselves as Men: Gandalf, Saruman, and Radagast, three of the Five Wizards in Middle-Earth, are all immortal beings that live in the 'bodies' of Men. From the perspective of the sense hierarchy, the Maiar thus complicate the linearity of the structure, as they control both visual and auditive facets of reality and are at once like and unlike Men. In *The Silmarillion* Maiar are said to walk among Elves sometimes as "one of them" (*Silmarillion* 33). Tom Bombadil and Goldberry share in this complication of sense experience, though their role is left unclear: it can be assumed that they are both humanoid and appear to be Men, but their immortal nature and power over the senses proves otherwise. Tom's great power over the senses is indicated by the fact that the Ring has no hold over him: he can see Frodo when he wears the Ring, and nothing happens to Tom when he wears it himself (*LOTR* 133). As with the case of sight where a seeing body can always be seen itself, Tom Bombadil is detached from the equation: the dominance that is conferred in sight does not affect him. Instead, Tom's existence is realised only through the auditory senses. Thus, Tom and Goldberry are unique beings whose power is not represented through sight, but hearing, as they can affect reality around them with their voices and are themselves unaffected by the powers of sight that others may possess.

Language and hearing do not offer a transparent window to the world and phenomena, nor are they a mere representation, but the presenting of a phenomenon: Goldberry, Tom Bombadil and Saruman can achieve this use of speech. "Restored to its poetic origin a word or image opens toward a prelinguistic sensation that compares with the sensation of the wordless thing

outside language: a sensory or sense-derived effect of the thing is catalysed by the poesis of the word before its reduction to an object by any conceptual knowledge” (Moslund 65-66). The speech used by these three characters can alter reality as their words can touch the thing-in-itself. Less powerful users of language cannot reach this use of language in *LOTR* but operate within the post-linguistic mode of sensation where their words can only express a representation of phenomena instead of presenting phenomena as they are in the world.

### **Smell and Taste: Projecting Outer and Inner Realities**

The experiencing of phenomena as representing reality is accentuated by the senses of smell and taste, which move further towards an empirically focused reality. In contrast to sight and hearing, “[t]aste has always ranked low on the philosophical hierarchy of the senses as a means of ingress to the mind” (Gigante 3). Taste and smell offer projections of the physical qualities of what is being perceived. This is evident with the two senses as elements of reality in the books: smell and taste offer the characters knowledge of events that are very imminent or are happening during the time of the observation. In other words, the ‘mapping’ type of experiencing of reality that is present in hearing is also present in the olfaction and taste, but only to a far lesser extent, as the two senses cannot extend the reach of the characters consciousness very far. In this thesis, olfaction and taste will be regarded as a single unit, as the two senses are connected to identical themes, and are used very similarly to one another. Discussing the philosophy of taste in her book *Taste: A Literary History*, Denise Gigante writes:

Whereas sight and hearing allow for a proper representative distance from the object of contemplation (hence for the regulating principles of consciousness and

morality), taste, like its closest cousin smell, is bound up with the chemical physiology of the body. (Gigante 3)

Smell and taste are very similar in their functions to us, as our sense of taste is greatly affected by smell, so it is sensible to treat them as one. However, it must be observed that where the two senses differ in the books, the sense of smell is to be regarded as the higher-ranking sense in the hierarchy, although the difference between the two is otherwise minimal. The supremacy of olfaction is due to its association with the mental faculties. Where taste offers an immediate realisation of reality, smell is more often projected further into the thoughts surrounding the sense experience. Although both senses are primarily focused on the perceiving of the thing-in-itself, olfaction can project a measure of distance that taste cannot.

Taste and smell are the senses of objectification in *LOTR* and indicate the definite movement away from metaphysics. Taste and smell are thus almost centred in the empirical world and have few metaphysical qualities. The two senses being the senses of objectification means that they are chiefly related to moments in the story where what is being perceived is reduced to a portrayal through smell and taste, and other forms of perception are cut off. Phenomenologically, smell and taste offer a description of the thing in-itself by focusing on the phenomenon of the taste as it is presented to the senses. Thus, according to Heidegger's phenomenology, they are primarily focused on the thing-in-itself as a *Darstellung*, independent of intentionality.

The aspects of taste and smell that describe things in-themselves are not, however, an unproblematic certainty. By tasting food, such as lembas, characters are focusing on the aspects of that taste that remind them of something, such as bygone days, and the "return to the things themselves" (*Phenomenology* ix) that smell and taste represent is complicated by the process of memory. When Merry and Pippin escape from captivity near Fangorn forest, they stop to eat some lembas to regain some strength before leaving:

The taste brought back to them the memory of fair faces, and laughter, and wholesome food in quiet days now far away. For a while they ate thoughtfully, sitting in the dark, heedless of the cries and sounds of battle nearby. Pippin was the first to come back to the present. (*LOTR* 457)

This passage indicates that the taste of food mentally ‘transports’ the two hobbits to another place and time for a short moment. Therefore, although smell and taste offer a simplification of the thing perceived and a return to the ‘thing itself’, they also have the contradicting quality of dislocating the perceiver from the present moment through memories. It is also relevant, that an Orcish presence cannot interfere with the hobbits’ metaphysical reflections through taste: it can only be overridden by the ‘higher presence’ of Elves.

The reason for this contradiction is to be found in the racial aspects of the books: all such passages that lead to the metaphysical affirmations of food are related to Hobbits. The senses of smell and taste function in the same way as sight does, as the strength of the sense experience correlates with the importance of the sense for the perceiver. Hobbits are naturally inclined to be interested in food, which is why everyday life in Hobbit culture is based on a timetable governed by periods of feasting, and Hobbits are always looking forward to their next meal. Thus, as Elves have keener sight and are predominately visual perceivers, Hobbits are keenest in the senses of smell and taste, as these are the foundational senses of their reality. Passages involving Hobbits are often filled with descriptions of foods, such as “bread, surpassing the flavour of a fair white loaf to one who is starving” (*LOTR* 82). The only thing that can distract Hobbits from food is Elves: “Pippin afterwards recalled little of either food or drink, for his mind was filled with the light upon the elf-faces, and the sound of voices so various and so beautiful that he felt in a waking dream” (*LOTR* 82). Here, the higher-tier senses of sight and hearing are active in the substitution of taste as the predominant mode of expression since the passage is affected by the presence of Elves. The Elvish presence indicates the phenomenological transition from taste to hearing and sight, as the Elves themselves are rooted

in the expression of reality through the metaphysical qualities of hearing and especially sight.

The description of events and surroundings is most frequent through visual stimuli unless two circumstances are evoked: either there is something particularly significant about the mentioning and noticing of the smell or taste of what is being described, or the higher senses are in some way distracted, blocked, or preoccupied. This is the case on a few occasions in the book when members of the Fellowship are blindfolded during their travel through Lothlórien: “Being deprived of sight, Frodo found his hearing and other senses sharpened. He could smell the trees and the trodden grass” (*LOTR* 349). The deprivation of the superior sight leads to the focusing of other senses. However, the choice of sense varies. When Merry and Pippin are captured by Orcs, the blindfolded Pippin is “carried like a sack once more, and darkness grew about him: whether the darkness of another night, or a blindness of his eyes, he could not tell.” (*LOTR* 450) This passage, where sight has been blocked, focuses then on those senses that are available to the characters, describing the feel of the binds and the hands of the Orcs: “Hard hands with rending nails gripped and lifted him (*LOTR* 450). The latter excerpt is focused on the heightening of the sense of touch, as it is the primary sense of the Orc, as will be shown in the section concerning touch.

Smell is slightly superior to taste in the sense that it offers a larger zone of perception, and therefore a larger projection of reality. Characters may only taste what is in their mouths, but their sense of smell can offer them a better grasp of their surroundings. The distinction of smell over taste is also shown by the way the Nazgûl use the sense:

They themselves do not see the world of light as we do, but our shapes cast shadows in their minds, which only the noon sun destroys; and in the dark they perceive many signs and forms that are hidden from us: then they are most to be feared. And at all times they smell the blood of living things, desiring and hating it. (*LOTR* 189)

The Nazgûl use their sight to guide themselves through the ‘Unseen’, but for the ‘world of light’, they must use their sense of smell. Here, again, the metaphysical and the tangible are used as counterpoints to each other, with olfaction allowing for an objectification of sensory stimuli, after the mentioning of the metaphysical ‘Unseen’. The Nazgûl cannot navigate the physical world with the use of sight alone, as that sense is preoccupied with the metaphysical, but with the help of olfaction they can find what they seek.

What separates the senses of smell and taste from sight and hearing is the certainty of perception through them. Unlike sight and hearing, which are prone to untrustworthiness because they can be manipulated by higher powers (such as Sauron or Saruman, respectively), the senses of smell and taste are presented as unambiguous in the books: smells either are present or not, and there is never any uncertainty concerning the taste or smell of any phenomenon. In this way, the two senses are used as a means of attaining certainty, especially between what is good and what is evil. The connections between olfaction and the distinguishing between good and bad things as ethical values are demonstrated by Hans. J Rindisbacher’s *The Smell of Books*:

smell [...] can be instrumentalized in a project of the social encoding of (ethical) values [...] In fact, [...] there is strong theoretical evidence of evolutionary and anthropological developments that establish good and bad smells as an ancient classification [of good and bad tastes as good and bad values]. (22)

Smell is thus intertwined with distinctions between good and evil. The land, air, and water within Mordor are poisonous and corrupt, and have “an unpleasant taste, at once bitter and oily” (*LOTR* 921), and similarly Orcs, Trolls, and anything built by Sauron’s evil power are often described as “foul” (*LOTR* 422). Similarly, whatever is attributed to be good or fair, is also described through its taste or smell, and such things are often sweet and “refreshing” (*LOTR* 336).



The pureness of nature versus the dirtiness of industry is one of the underlying themes in the books and is related to the distinctions of good and evil. This is also connected to the sensory representation of those places and things that embody the natural or industrial themes, as their descriptions rely heavily on olfaction. Here, the sense of taste is also relevant, as it is used to describe the foods and drinks of various factions within the good/evil duality: the food of elves is always wondrous: “[...] we call it *lembas* or waybread, and it is more strengthening than any food made by Men, and it is more pleasant than *cram*, by all accounts.” (*LOTR* 369), and “As soon as Frodo had swallowed a little of the warm and fragrant liquor he felt a new strength of heart, and the heavy drowsiness left his limbs. The others also revived and found fresh hope and vigour” (*LOTR* 290), whereas the foods of the Enemy are foul even when they have healing properties. Pippin and Merry are given Orc medicine during their capture and it is described as “some burning liquid” (*LOTR* 448), which does heal them and give them strength, but is nonetheless unpleasant and just as foul as its creators, and the hobbits’ first wish after escaping their captivity is to “get a drink of water to wash away the thought of it” (*LOTR* 458). The relationship between taste and memory is therefore one of superimposition: only one taste can be perceived and remembered at once, and the introduction of a new taste can be used to erase the memory of a previous taste. This supports the phenomenological proposition that taste in *LOTR* concentrates on the thing in-itself, since the taste of water replaces the previous taste of the Orc liquid. The purpose of taste to concentrate on one sense experience at a time contrasts with the phenomenological description of all the other senses, where the borders between phenomena are made unclear by the blending of sensory experiences. Taste and olfaction do not contest with the other senses in this regard but instead, the combination of metaphysical and empirical qualities of the senses complicate their position in the sense hierarchy. The complexity that arises from the combination of metaphysical and empirical elements contrasts with the sense of touch, which functions solely as a physical component.

## **Touch: Experiencing the Physical World**

Touch is the most concrete of the senses, as it operates only within the material realm, and thus defines reality purely on an empirical basis. All that happens in the realm of touch is the experiencing of the immediate reality. Like taste and smell, the physical feeling of things in *LOTR* is heavily focused on the division and distinction between good and evil. Things that are good are often felt through the Elves and their magic, and it is usually related to a closeness with nature. The fluidity of water, the shining of stars, and the warmth of sunlight, which relate to the birth of the Elves (see *Elves in Racial Hierarchy*) are always present in their skills and their very presence. Similarly, Sauron's evil and Saruman's machinations are also felt, but the connotations with these are of sharpness, industry, corruption, cold, and pain. Frodo's wound "throbs with pain and a great chill spread towards [his] heart whenever the Nazgûl are near (*LOTR* 706). These phenomena represent the attributes of reality that the evil in *LOTR* possess, which is most clearly exemplified by Orcs, whose reality is constructed around physical pain and dominance.

Touch also acts as a counterpoint to sight, its opposite in the hierarchy of the senses. This is evident by the portrayal of those two as an opposition, most notably through two examples: Saruman's Palantir and Galadriel's Mirror. Both are objects of foresight that lend knowledge and power to its user through vision. However, the concentration on the sense of sight is opposed by the opposing power of touch: Galadriel issues the same warning twice to Frodo and Sam: "Do not touch the water!" (*LOTR* 361 & 364). In a similar vein, the Palantir is dangerous in the wrong hands: it is activated by touch, and for those who do not know what they are meddling with, touching the Palantir can be a deadly mistake. When Pippin looks into the Palantir he is almost killed by Sauron, who is 'on the other end' of the device (*LOTR* 593),

as the Palantir operates as a tool of communication as well as foresight, much like a magical telephone. The sense of touch is again portrayed through an antonymic function in the Barrow-downs, where the Hobbits are given ancient swords for their protection: “by some virtue that lay on these sheaths or because of the spell that lay on the mound, the blades seemed untouched by time, unruined, sharp, glittering in the sun” (*LOTR* 146). Here, the other qualities that are at play are used as an antithesis of the sense of touch. The introduction of a sight-related attribute, the ‘glittering’, is here again used to strengthen the opposition of the two senses. Similarly, the touch of time has not affected the blades through “some virtue”, connecting the idea of virtue to the concept of being untouched which necessarily evokes the contrary, faulty nature of touch. However, this description also questions its own validity, by introducing an uncertainty of the reasons for the blades’ untouched nature, demonstrated by the addition of “or because of the spell that lay on the mound”.

Touch in *LOTR* is mostly used to describe the physicality of a given item or event, and the sense of touch is similar to taste in this way. Thus, as the realm of tactile experience is in the closeness of those events, the experience of reality through touch is open to a narrower spectrum of events. The way in which touch is portrayed in the books is centrally connected to the portrayal of physical pain, or otherwise unpleasant experiences. For example, when Frodo is struck by the leader of the Nazgûl at Weathertop, the passage focuses on the diverse description of Frodo’s physical sensation of the pain: “and he felt a pain like a dart of poisoned ice pierce his left shoulder” (*LOTR* 196). The wound inflicted on Frodo at Weathertop is referred to throughout the story whenever evil is near, or something terrible is about to happen. His wound is thus used as an indicator of evil, which burns with ‘cold pain’ in those situations.

## **The One Ring: Altering Sense Experience**

The analysis of the hierarchy of the senses cannot be complete without the analysis of the One Ring, which is the most influential phenomenological element that affects the sensory world of *LOTR*. The One Ring, or The Ring of Power, is related to Sauron: it is a symbol of visual perception and acts as an agent of the visual field. The Rings of Power, of which there were 19, were crafted by the Elven smiths of Eregion and their lord Celebrimbor, who were aided by Sauron, only to be deceived by him. Ten years after the completion of the Rings of Power, Sauron created the One Ring, with which he could manipulate the owners of the other Rings. The three Elven Rings, however, were crafted without Sauron's influence, and he would never have power over their Bearers (*LOTR* 1083). Already the origins of the Rings of Power, and especially The One Ring establish a connection between Sauron and the Elves. This connection between them affects the phenomenological influence of the Ring, and the power of the Ring that is reflected on those who either possess or wear the it.

The One Ring is a creator of change within Middle-Earth, and all sentient creatures who are in contact with the Ring are in some way altered by its power. The Ring affects the phenomenology of its bearer to such an extent that they may never be the same again. This is the case with all those who carried the Ring at some point during their life, namely the three Hobbits: Bilbo, Frodo, and Sam. As the phenomenology of a Ringbearer changes the shift of their phenomenology places them elsewhere on the sense hierarchy. These three Ringbearers thus experience reality differently than others, and the intentionality that they reflected towards reality is inevitably altered as their phenomenology is changed by the Ring. Gollum, another noteworthy bearer of the Ring, has been utterly twisted by the power of the Ring during the centuries that he had it to himself. Gollum, who was once a Hobbit-like creature has been

transformed by the Ring. His perception has enhanced: he primarily perceives through a heightened olfaction (*LOTR* 613) but he can hear as keen as Elves (*ibid.*). Sauron's presence through the Ring has caused Gollum to despise Elvish attributes: light from the Sun and Moon hurt his eyes (*ibid.*), and Elvish crafts seem to cause him pain (*LOTR* 616). The transcendental nature of 'higher beings' that is imbued in the Ring thus affects those who bore the Ring at any point.

The power of the Ring functions through a reciprocal relationship of power with the wielder: The Ring gives power to the wielder and exerts its own power over the wielder simultaneously. When Sam and Frodo use the Ring to escape, they become invisible to most eyes, but visible to Sauron. Sauron also can use his power to misguide the wielder through visions: he tries to corrupt Sam by showing him vision of himself as a great and powerful hero (*LOTR* 901). Sauron uses his power to manipulate Frodo's thought and auditive consciousness when he puts the Ring on at Amon Hen: "[Frodo] heard himself cry out: *Never, never! Or was it: Verily I come, I come to you?* He could not tell" (*LOTR* 401). Extended periods of contact with the Ring will eventually exert more of Sauron's essence, as is the case with Gollum. The reciprocal nature of the Ring is discussed by Katz in relation to the passage where Tom Bombadil puts the Ring on his finger. Nothing happens to Tom, as "it has no power over him, and he gains no power from it" (Katz 15). This nullification of The Ring's power shows that the Ring has no power over those who do not gain the power over phenomenology that it bestows on the bearer. In other words, those who gain nothing from the Ring are also immune to the power it projects. The phenomenological descriptions of the One Ring are predominately visual, which is not only portrayed by the Eye of Sauron, but in the ways the Ring changes those possessed by its power. When Frodo puts on the Ring to escape Boromir the narrator notes "his burning eyes" (*LOTR* 400). The focused description of Boromir's eyes in the (*LOTR* 369,382,397,398,399), indicates the effect of the power of the Ring on Boromir. Boromir's

possession is portrayed through his eyes, which ties the sense of sight again to power and the One Ring.

The description of phenomena in relation to the Ring of Power are central to the passage at the Hill of Sight, where the clarity of sense experiences affected by the Ring is problematised. When Frodo slips on the Ring, he runs towards the old throne of Amon Hen where he is struck by visions: “there was no sound, only bright living images” (*LOTR* 400) which pinpoints the shift of the phenomenological focus from hearing to sight. Cowering on the throne on the Hill of Sight, Frodo sees many things: he sees at once all of Middle-Earth, and the signs of war in all the land (*LOTR* 400). Then, “suddenly he felt the Eye” (*LOTR* 401), and the gaze of Sauron becomes a multi-sensory tool that at once searches with both sight and touch: “It [The Eye] leaped towards him; almost like a finger he felt it, searching for him. Very soon it would nail him down, know exactly where he was” (*LOTR* 401).

The power of Sauron and his Eye is primarily visual, but as noted in the scene at Amon Hen, Sauron’s mastery over the sense of sight is different compared to the Elven counterpart. The craft of the Elves and “the deceits of the Enemy” (*LOTR* 362) are explicitly noted to differ from each other, though the difference is difficult to grasp for other races. This difference is accentuated at Amon Hen as the power that Sauron has over sight is also connected to touch, the antithesis of sight which is also the primary sense of the Orcs. In this sense, Sauron’s power over sight complicates the sense hierarchy as sight and power are connected to the antithetical theme of touch. The passage also complicates the connection between sight and knowledge, as the knowledge of Frodo’s position is found through the Eye that will “nail him [Frodo] down”, further proclaiming the difference between Sauron’s visual power to the Elves’. The passage unites the senses of sight and touch into a single sense experience: although elsewhere the two senses are used as an antithesis of each other, here the abstractness of sight is combined with the concreteness of touch, which signifies the essential phenomenological difference

between the Sauron and the Elves. The combination of sight and touch in this way is thus a trait unique to Sauron, but both Sauron (who is a Maia) and Elves share influence within the realm of sight, so they are at once similar and different phenomenologically.

This passage complicates the relationship of touch and the phenomenological experience of reality, as the physical aspects of touch are combined with the metaphysical qualities of sight. This problematisation of touch is related to Merleau-Ponty's thoughts on the relationship between a touching consciousness and a thing that is being touched. Merleau-Ponty uses the example of a person using their right hand to touch their left hand: the experience of touching is combined with the experience of being touched, and Merleau-Ponty confirms the necessity of considering the act of touching in relation to the tangibility of the human body and its potential of not only being the 'one who touches' but also being 'what is touched' (*Primacy* 93). According to Merleau-Ponty, the tangible perception is reciprocal within itself and in relation to the world where one exists: the self "touches itself touching; it is [...] sensitive for itself" (*Eye and Mind* 283). Consciousness is therefore not a consciousness through transparency: "it is a self [...] that is caught up in things" (*Eye and Mind* 284). Thus, the reciprocal power of the Ring does not only affect the phenomenological connection between the Ring and its bearer, but also the bearer's phenomenological relationship to the world and experienced reality.

Herein also lies the separation of two types of 'self' that are both found in *LOTR*. For Elves, life in Middle-Earth is transparent, and like a thought. Their self is the consciousness that is far away, as the subject that has an object. The other races, who are generally considered 'lesser' than Elves, do not experience reality through the same definition of self-hood: for them consciousness is the self that is at the centre of it all and 'caught up in things'. They cannot distance their reality from themselves as they are fully present, unlike Elves. This distinction in the expression of self-hood is the phenomenological manifestation of the essential difference

between Elves and the other “Children of Ilúvatar” (*Silmarillion* 48-49), which denotes how they understand reality and interact with the world.

The phenomenological effects of the Ring are diverse. The Ring confers invisibility to its wearer, but with the cost of becoming distinctly visible to Sauron. When Sam uses the Ring to avoid being captured by Orcs, he feels “horribly and uniquely visible; and he knew that somewhere an Eye was searching for him” (*LOTR* 735). This duality of invisibility and visibility works in accordance with the sense hierarchy: the supremacy of sight is underlined by the connection of the sense and great powers that can affect the visual field. Although the Ring is primarily connected to visuality it also operates within the sense hierarchy on a broader level. During his time as the Ringbearer, Sam uses the Ring twice. On both accounts Sam’s “sight of things of this world seemed thin and vague” (*LOTR* 898). This reflects the metaphysical power of the Ring, as Sam’s visual experience of the world is being expanded by the Ring, granting access to higher levels of sensory experiences. Specifically, Sam’s sight does not become ‘worse’, but as the sight of the Ringbearer is altered, he is granted access to the Unseen, the transcendental realm of being where the power of Sauron is the strongest. This is the same Unseen that Frodo experiences earlier in the story, when he puts the Ring on during their fight with the Nazgûl. The power of the Ring is thus tied to the same realm in which the Nazgûl primarily dwell, and by putting the Ring on one’s finger the Ringbearer’s sight is altered to a level that is beyond empirical experience. As the power of the Ring alters the sight of its wielder, their phenomenology changes irrevocably, indicating the reason for the Ringbearers’ leaving Middle-Earth and transcending the physical realm by sailing for the Undying Lands to join the Elves.

The passages where Sam wields the Ring also reveal an integral detail of the validity of the sense hierarchy within *LOTR*. When Sam puts on the Ring, the narration does not only describe the altering of his sight, but his hearing also improves drastically: “At once he was aware that



hearing was sharpened [...]” (*LOTR* 734). This is due to the fact that Sam, being a Hobbit, has his phenomenology primarily rooted in the lower senses of the hierarchy, namely smell and taste. When Sam wields the Ring, its power enhances his phenomenology: the power of the One Ring removes Sam from the sphere of smell and taste, and positions him in the category of hearing, which is now greatly improved. Thus, Sam’s sensory consciousness is heightened and improved within the hierarchy of the senses and his understanding of reality is shifted along that sensory axis to a higher position. This change is identical to the descriptions of Gollum’s sense experience, which has been enhanced by centuries of contact with the Ring.

The sense hierarchy in *LOTR* thus revolves around the presentation of sense experience and how the senses are affected by themes such as power and the One Ring. However, the sensory hierarchy is an isolated system: the ‘powers of perception’ presented through characters such as Gandalf, Galadriel, Tom Bombadil, and others cannot be sufficiently explained without further considering the source of the differences in experiencing reality. Therefore, this thesis will turn to the theme of race in *LOTR*, an aspect of the phenomenological analysis of the books’. Race in *LOTR* is presented through a hierarchy that mirrors the hierarchy of the senses, providing a fruitful counterpoint to the portrayal of sense experiences.

## 4. The Race Hierarchy

### Introducing the Race Hierarchy: The Primacy of the Firstborn

This chapter will focus on the five most central races in Middle-Earth, which are Elves, Men, Dwarves, Hobbits, and Orcs. Other races, such as the Maiar, are also included in the analysis of the racial hierarchy where suitable, as the Maiar are involved in the problematisation of superficially distinct borders between the races. The racial hierarchy works as a counterpoint to the sensory hierarchy as they both place primacy on metaphysical aspects of experiencing reality. This places the metaphysical Elves as the primary race, and the tangible Orcs at the bottom of the hierarchy. However, the Dwarven race is detached from the racial hierarchy of the other races, and their analysis will provide a contrast to the other races, as the analysis of the Dwarves withdraws from the racial bonds that connect other races. The phenomenological analysis of *LOTR* is dependent on the analysis of the racial hierarchy, since the two categories interact with each other inseparably: the analysis of the sense hierarchy without the inclusion of the analysis of the racial hierarchy leads to an inaccurate simplification of the phenomenological account of *LOTR*.

In the context of Middle-Earth's chronology, the events of *LOTR* take place during a great transition of power and responsibility for the free races of Middle-Earth: the time of the Elves is ending, and Men are to be the next ruling race in Middle-Earth. This transition not only marks the shift of the ruling phenomenology but also places emphasis on the aspect of race in the books, as the Fourth Age of Middle-Earth will be led by Men.

The category of race in *LOTR* works through a system of power and social prestige: Elves are regarded as a more important race than the others due to historical and mythological reasons, and the power that they possess which is imbedded in their presence. The concept of a hierarchy

of the races is something that arises from *LOTR* itself, as Tolkien's construction of the races is characterised by a nineteenth-century tendency for hierarchical structures through which Middle-Earth is organised (Fimi 132). According to Fimi, "Tolkien's mythology was always hierarchical where the different beings of his invented world were concerned [...]" (Fimi 141). This ordering of the races is directly referenced in *LOTR* when Merry and Pippin meet Treebeard: the Ent does not know of Hobbits and, to prove his point, begins to go through a poem which categorises all living things:

Learn now the lore of Living Creatures  
First name the four, the free peoples: Eldest of all, the elf-children;  
Dwarf the delver, dark are his houses;  
Ent the earthborn, old as mountains;  
Man the mortal, master of horses: [...] (*LOTR* 464)

The racial hierarchy suggested by Treebeard in this instance places emphasis on the order in which the beings were created. Therefore, Dwarves and Ents have primacy over Men in Treebeard's list. However, the concept of racial hierarchy applies to *LOTR* also through the categorisation of the races by the prestige and power. This correlates to a high degree with the hierarchy of the senses, which posits a movement from the metaphysical towards the empirical. Fimi discusses the hierarchical nature of Tolkien's races, noting the prevalence of the metaphysical over the empirical: "The more 'spirit' and less 'matter' a form of life contained, the higher it was in placed on the chain" (Fimi 141).

Four of the five races discussed in this thesis are related to the god Ilúvatar, who is primarily known as the creator of the Elves. Three races (Men, Hobbits, and Orcs) are also connected to the same god through thematic and biological relations: Men are later creations of the same

god, Hobbits are distant relations of Men, and Orcs are the end-product of Elves mutilated by Morgoth and Sauron. The connections between these races is made explicit in the books<sup>3</sup> but the relationship of the races from a hierarchical perspective are generally left untouched, and the fifth race, Dwarves, is very separate from the others, as their origins differ entirely from the others'. The boundaries between the distinctions of the four races become blurred, and the identification of one race over another is problematised by deeply conjoined origins.

The Elves are continuously presented to the reader as supreme beings who are 'beyond' all other races in Middle-Earth. They prefer their own company, even to the point of rejecting the company of other races, unless necessary. When the hobbits ask to join a group of Elves that they run into on the road to Bree, the Elves reply: "But we have no need for other company, and hobbits are so dull" (*LOTR* 80). They often wish to avoid contact with other races, especially the Elves of Lothlórien, who "do not willingly have dealings with any other folk" (*LOTR* 343), seldom allowing them to even enter their own realms. Inter-racial communication with any Elves is uncommon, for when the Fellowship are granted gifts in Lothlórien, an Elf remarks, that "never before have we clad strangers in the garb of our own people" (*LOTR* 370).

The appearance of the Elves ties them to the divinity in the portrayal of the race in *LOTR*. Elves are described as lean, tall, and beautiful. They are blessed by their creator and in their presence is "a shimmer, like the light of the moon above the rim of the hills before it rises" (*LOTR* 80). The origin of the Elves is explained in *The Silmarillion*, where Tolkien writes that after Ilúvatar created them, the first things they perceived were the light of stars in the night sky, and sound of running water: these would remain holy for the Elves for all eternity (*Silmarillion* 55). This portrayal of the birth of the Elves yet again places emphasis on the

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<sup>3</sup> The connections between the races are explained in *LOTR*, when the prologue describes Hobbits: "It is plain indeed that in spite of our later estrangement Hobbits are relatives of [Men]: far nearer to us than Elves, or even than Dwarves" (*LOTR* 1). The connection of the Children of Ilúvatar is thus present in the books, though these relations of the races are otherwise left untouched, except for the clear linearity of Elves and Men, where Elves are 'The Firstborn' and Men 'The Followers' (*Silmarillion* 53 & 125).

senses of sight and hearing, and as the Elves are in this way connected to light, they are tied to the sense hierarchy.

The Elves represent godly beings who walk amongst mortals, which is indicated by the description of their presence. When Frodo meets Arwen, the Elf lady is described: “such loveliness in living thing Frodo had never seen before nor imagined in his mind” (*LOTR* 227). Not only is Frodo in awe of Arwen, but the beauty, and divinity of presence of the Elven maiden is tied to themes of metaphysics and sight. The inclusion of sight as the sense which Arwen is perceived with, points towards the phenomenological reading of the Elves as beings of sight. The theme of imagination is also evoked (which surpasses the realm of experience and leads to transcendence) combining both sight and transcendence in the portrayal of Arwen. The transcendental nature of the Elves is accentuated by their immortal existence, for the Elves never age and never die, unless physically killed. If an Elf is killed, their ‘soul’ makes for the Blessed Realm of their creator, where they will be reunited with their kind for all eternity, or in a rare case like Glorfindel’s, the soul is sent back to Middle-earth to aid in some great event (*LOTR* 223). The Elves experience life through these two realms, which affects their understanding of reality: living a life that is divided necessarily detaches them from Middle-Earth to a considerable extent. The detachment of the Elves from the physical plane is exemplified by their relationship to time: as the Elves are immortal, they experience time differently, which in turn results in an entirely different experience of reality. Upon leaving Lothlórien, the members of the Fellowship realise they have lost count of the days. Sam guesses that four days had passed, when in truth over a month had gone by. This is due to the Fellowship temporarily experiencing time as the Elves do: “There time flowed swiftly for us, as for the Elves” (*LOTR* 388). The sleep of Elves is also metaphysical: when Elves sleep, they do not need to rest physically in the way Men, Elves, and Dwarves do. Instead, when Legolas is

sleeping, he is “resting his mind in the strange paths of Elvish dreams, even as he walked open-eyed in the light of this world” (*LOTR* 429).

The timeless nature of the Elves is acknowledged in their descriptions: they are “grave and beautiful” and “no sign of age was upon them, unless it were in the depths of their eyes; for those were keen as lances in the starlight, and yet profound, the wells of deep memory” (*LOTR* 354). The connections between the appearance of the Elves and their mastery over the sensory world is a glorification of Classical ideals in *LOTR*, and the physical appearance of Elves is rooted in Norse mythology, where they are “inferior to the Gods, but still possessed of great power” (Bulfinch 432), and “exceedingly fair, more brilliant than the sun, and clad in garments of delicate and transparent texture” (Bulfinch 432). The physical appearance of the Elves and their sight-related powers are also reminiscent of Classical conceptions of perfection and divinity, which relate to the formation of the hierarchies of sense and race. Divine ideals in the Greco-Roman sense entail a mastery of the senses and a detachment from mortality. The glorification of the Elves’ characteristics is connected to the sense hierarchy and its historical background, as Tolkien’s works place sight and aspects of the visual and metaphysical over the tangible and empirical. <sup>4</sup>

The Elves not only represent a timelessness and a detachment from the bind of mortality, but they also have the knowledge and power to affect nature and all of Middle-Earth through their presence, lending the land a potential to reach the otherwise impossible. Much like the Elves

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<sup>4</sup> The Greco-Roman concepts of divinity and perfection are portrayed in the literature that concentrates on the legends of Greek mythology. In Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, which focuses on the stories of transformation, the characteristics of the gods are connected to the ideal of perfection, and the gods are the Feuerbachian reflection of human perfection during that time. This ‘divine perfection’ is represented by the power of the gods that they have in the world, and the position of the gods in relation to mortals. The Greek gods are considered perfect in the Greco-Roman sense because they are not bound to the mortality of humans. They possess great powers that humans do not have and are thus exempt from the ethics of mortals. *Metamorphoses* is focused on the interactions between gods and humans: over-ambition and the disrespect of the divine nature of the gods leads to the punishment of mortals, such as in the cases of Arachne, Icarus and Actaeon (Ovid 48, 111, 157). The concepts of divinity and perfection are in contrast with the concept of humanity, which is inherently flawed. This idea of a flawed humanity is a part of the foundation of the sense hierarchies of Classical Antiquity, which place the metaphysical aspects, that are inherent to the gods, above tangibility (Smith).

themselves are not bound by the circularity of life, the Mallorn trees of the Elves do not abide the usual cycles of nature (*LOTR* 350-351). The effect of the Elves upon their world remains largely enigmatic, and the other races regard them as doing Elven magic. When Galadriel asks Frodo and Sam to look into her Mirror, she says: “For this is what your folk would call magic, I believe; though I do not understand clearly what they mean [...]” (*LOTR* 362). As shown, the Elves themselves are confused by this notion, as their effects on their surroundings are essentially linked to their existence, not something they consciously have to participate in.

This power is present in the ways in which the Elves can manipulate the phenomenological experiences of themselves and others: Elven cloaks make you invisible to unfriendly eyes (*LOTR* 370), and the Elves themselves can see across many leagues with absolute precision (*LOTR* 426). The awe that Elves inspire in other races solidifies their position as a governing race. Moreover, as noted previously, the presence of the Elves is the only thing that manages to attract a Hobbit’s attention away from food. Other races are thus captivated by the Elves, and the presence of the Elves overrides even the central phenomenological aspects of other races, evidenced through all the races and their respective senses: Hobbits cannot recall the taste of food (*LOTR* 82), Orcs and other evil things are burned by the touch of Elven craft (*LOTR* 617), Men know of Elves through their voice (*LOTR* 438), and a Dwarf declares an Elf fairer than “all the jewels that lie beneath the earth” (*LOTR* 356).

Although Elves possess great power over the sensory aspects of the world and have a strong hold over other races, the reality of the Elves is phenomenologically problematic due to the division of their existence into the Seen and Unseen realms. Their existence posits a subject-object dichotomy which the other races do not experience. As reality for the Elves is divided into a Seen and an Unseen realm of existence, the relationship between Elves and Middle-Earth becomes a subject-object relationship which rejects the phenomenology that is central to the other races. The reality of Elves is primarily realised through the ‘Blessed Realm’, or the

Unseen, and as such the real ‘spirit’ or presence of the Elves is not in Middle-Earth. Elves experience Middle-Earth as thinking subjects within an objective world. An Elf is “the perceiving subject [...] which interprets [...] deciphers or orders a sensible matter according to an ideal law which it possesses” (*Primacy* 196). Thus, although the Elves possess the power to control the phenomenology of others, their own experience of reality is detached from Middle-Earth, as they fall outside the self-hood of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology for which a “subject and object are analytically inseparable” (Magliola 13). The transcendental detachment of the Elves from the other races places them outside the phenomenological realisation of Middle-Earth. This is supported by their leaving Middle-Earth, as by returning to the Blessed Realm they will be united with the reality that always was more present to them. By returning, the Elves will lose their subject-object realisation of life, embracing a unified existence once more as they go to where they ‘truly belong’.

### **Men: The Bringers of a New Age**

As the race hierarchy also functions through a movement from metaphysics to empiricism, the Elves are followed by the race of Men. Men are the symbolic inheritors of Middle-Earth from the Elves. As the age of the Elves is passing and they are leaving Middle-Earth to go to the Undying lands, Men are the ones who will rule next (*LOTR* 1082). This progression indicates a phenomenological transition that accompanies the shift of the controlling power. There are some critical differences between the two races that affect their phenomenology, the most important factor that separates Men from Elves is their mortality. Unlike Elves, Men age, and die. Some Men are linked to the Elves through their ancestry, as descendants of the ancient Kingdom of Númenor in the North, (such as Aragorn) are called ‘Dúnedain’, who have far



longer lives than “lesser Men” caused by being distantly related to Elves. (*LOTR* 292). Men were also created by the same god, Ilúvatar. (*Silmarillion* 17) The difference between immortal Elves and mortal Men is vital for a phenomenological reading of the books as the theme of divinity ties the Elves to metaphysics. Since Men are mortal, they lack the divine and transcendental qualities of the Elves. Men in *LOTR* do not experience life through division into two realms but only through the physical qualities of their senses, and thus Middle-Earth and not the Unseen. The consciousness of Men is therefore undivided into a subject-object dichotomy and Men are Being-in-the-World, as they only experience the singular reality of Middle-Earth undisturbed by the Unseen.

However, the Elvish qualities that ‘better Men’ have makes the distinction between Elves and Men a less sharp contrast in comparison to the difference Elves and Dwarves, who are separated already by their origins (*LOTR* 1080). Thus, the shift from Elves to Men is a gradual change rather than a clear distinction, as the Dúnedain are closer to Elves than other Men are, but they are still Men. The gradualness of a shift, in contrast to an immediate change, plays with the phenomenological concept of distinction in perception according to Merleau-Ponty (*Phenomenology* 6). Just as the change from invisibility to visibility is not an immediate change but a gradual progression of phenomena, the boundaries between the races in *LOTR* become indistinguishable

The race of Men is essentially linked to the sense of hearing in *LOTR*: when the Fellowship needs to see far, they turn to Legolas the Elf, but when they have need of great hearing, they turn to Aragorn (*LOTR* 161, 396, 413, 426). Aragorn’s reliance on hearing is exemplified by his words to Frodo asking him not to “stray far or out of call” (*LOTR* 396). The idea of being far away is juxtaposed to loss of audible contact, and Aragorn experiences reality primarily based on his hearing, which is why he uses his ears as the main tools of navigation. Similarly, when Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli are tracking a band of Orcs, Aragorn listens to the “rumour

of the earth” (*LOTR* 426) to track the Orcs and realises the absence of sound in the land that was a “silence that did not seem to be the quiet of peace” (*LOTR* 427). The race of Men is also connected to the sense of hearing through the symbolism of Boromir’s equipment: he carries the large ivory horn that has been in possession of the Stewards’ family for generations that represents the kingdom of Gondor. (*LOTR* 423).

An audibly perceivable reality is the strongest for Men connected. As previously discussed, Saruman is one of the notable characters who possess great power over audibility through speech. When Saruman is confronted by the Men of Rohan, he uses his voice to lull them into a daze. For a moment, all the Men who hear his words find his ideas incredibly alluring, and whatever Saruman suggests appears wise and just. Saruman’s voice leaves “none who were within hearing unmoved” (*LOTR* 581). But the spell is broken, not by a Man, but by Gimli the Dwarf, who is unaffected by Saruman’s voice. This scene ties the sense of hearing to the race of Men, and underlines the separateness of Dwarves, who experience reality differently than the other races (see Dwarves). Men who serve Sauron are also distinguished through the same sense. Evil Men will try to dissuade, corrupt, and intimidate others with their voice. When trying to intimidate others, their “fell voice” is “like the hiss of snakes”, and when trying to appear friendly, they will try to “sweeten it if [they] could” (*LOTR* 241).

The phenomenological connection between Men and hearing is also present when the Fellowship is making its way southwards after departing from Lothlórien, as they make their way towards Amon Lhaw and Amon Hen: The Hills of Hearing and Sight. Amon Lhaw and Amon Hen are used to personify the two senses, and here, in the Kingdom of Men, the central interactions the Ringbearer has at Amon Lhaw are with Aragorn and Boromir. At the Hill of Hearing, Aragorn tells Frodo not to stray “out of call” (*LOTR* 396). During the ensuing battle with the Orcs, Boromir uses his horn to call for aid, but none reaches him in time: thus, the Hill of Hearing betrays him. Men are demonstrated as the second race in the racial hierarchy, a

position that primarily rises from the connections they share with Elves. The third race in the hierarchy, Hobbits, share a similar connection to Men as Men do to Elves.

### **Hobbits: Harmony of the Physical World**

Hobbits are a race of small people, who look much like Men, but are only much shorter, and have comparatively large feet. They are distantly related to Men, and lived, at a time, under a king of Men for centuries. During the time of the events in *LOTR*, however, Hobbits have already been in a state of solitude for several centuries, and they know little of the events of the world outside the borders of their own lands. Hobbits offer a logical racial movement from Men (see footnote 3), much like the Dúnedain offer a link of relation from the Elves. Few others even know Hobbits exist, other than in legends and old songs (*LOTR* 557). As Hobbits desire no power and have no interest in greatness or empire, they are often misunderstood and underestimated by those races that covet power and influence. Since the Hobbits are related to the race of Men, their following Men in the hierarchy may seem superficially logical. However, as they are far less influential beings in Middle-Earth, their description through the sensory realm of the story is concerned less with the power to change reality than other races, but more with reaching a state of harmony and blending into the environment. Hobbits, who are naturally interested in tilling the earth, have a natural fondness for growing things. Their way of life is centred on agriculture, and they experience reality as a blending-into the world. The “unobtrusive” (*LOTR* 1) presence of Hobbits is described as follows:

They possessed from the first the art of disappearing swiftly and silently, when large folk whom they do not wish to meet come blundering by; and this art they have developed until to Men it may seem magical. But Hobbits have never, in fact, studied magic of any kind, and their elusiveness is due solely to a professional skill

that heredity and practice, and a close friendship with the earth, have rendered inimitable by bigger and clumsier races. (*LOTR* 1)

This gift of remaining unnoticed is not the same as the gift the Elves possess when they shape the visible realm through their presence, but rather Hobbits blend themselves to fit the reality around them, not vice versa. Hobbits are thus unlike the other races on two accounts: their aversion from political power is also reflected in their phenomenological aversion to power, as they do not seek to master a sense, but to shape themselves accordingly to their surroundings.

Just as their relationship with the surrounding world is centred on harmony, a Hobbits' phenomenology is focused on similar ideals: a Hobbit's *Dasein* is unlike an Elf's, which is indicated through their relationship to the physical world: Elves affect and alter the world around through the 'Elvish magic' that is tied to their presence. This gift of their presence shapes their surroundings to fit their ideals, which is demonstrated by their effect on nature. For example, Lothlórien is a forest of "Mellyrn" (*LOTR* 342), great trees that do not follow natural cycles, that will eventually dwindle and die once the Elves leave Middle-Earth. Hobbits, on the other hand, blend into reality by altering their own presence to accommodate the world around them. The relationship of mastery towards the world that the Elves have is reversed. Even the Hobbits' relationship to technology indicates this, as it is one of avoidance: "They do not and did not understand or like machines more complicated than a forge-bellows, a water-mill, or a hand-loom, though they were skilled with tools" (*LOTR* 1). Progress happens very slowly in the Shire, as the Hobbits care more for good food and traditions than technology, power and progress, and much of the Hobbits' leisure time is spent with good food or smoking their special pipe-weed. Their culinary-centred, agricultural way of life, which is based on harmony within the experienced reality (rather than mastery over it) and their aversion from political supremacy and sensory power connects the Hobbits to the 'humble' senses of taste and smell.

The Hobbits are in many ways at the centre of the books, as four members of the Fellowship are Hobbits, and Frodo the Ringbearer decides the fate of all life in his quest. Despite their small frame, Hobbits show a distinct strength against the corrupting powers of Sauron, and they are nearly impossible to bribe. This reflects the phenomenological assertion of the Hobbits' existence: they are strongly rooted in their own lives and cannot be persuaded easily. Hobbits experience reality through their senses, and are 'present' in the reality that they live in. This is a contrast to the Elves, who experience reality as a concept divided to the divided realms of Middle-Earth and the 'Blessed Realm'.

Frodo is the protagonist of the story and the most central Hobbit for this analysis, as the progression of Frodo's character in *LOTR* demonstrates a transition from a Hobbit's phenomenology to an Elven phenomenology. The corrupting influence of the Ring, and the events he experiences along the journey, shape his understanding of reality. Frodo's phenomenology is first altered at Weathertop, where a Ringwraith stabs him in the shoulder and a shard of the enchanted blade remains inside the wound. When the War of the Ring is over, Frodo is no longer a Hobbit in the phenomenological sense, as his experience of the world has been permanently altered, which is indicated by Frodo no longer feeling at home in the Shire. When Sam pleads Frodo to stay, wishing that he would remain and enjoy the Shire for many years, Frodo replies: "So I thought too, once [of staying]. But I have been too deeply hurt, Sam. I tried to save the Shire, and it has been saved, but not for me" (*LOTR* 1029). The wound on Frodo's shoulder never fully heals, which shows the lingering effect of contradicting realities within Frodo: the immaterial existence of the Nazgûl and the Elves endures within Frodo, although physically he is very much still a Hobbit. The wound will also never heal, which exemplifies the permanence of Frodo's shift in his reality (*LOTR* 223).

Frodo's leaving Middle-Earth (*LOTR* 1029) further supports the fact that he no longer experiences reality through a Hobbit's phenomenology, as Frodo leaves with the Elves to the

Undying Lands. From a phenomenological perspective, Frodo has already half-existed in this realm, just as the Elves do, and the Elven desire to leave Middle-Earth lives within Frodo: to find peace he must leave with those who are now ‘his kind’ This shift of Frodo’s is exemplified by the descriptions offered of Frodo after the Nazgûl stabbed him. When Gandalf wonders about Frodo’s healing wound, he notices that “there was a faint change, just a hint as it were of transparency, about him”, and that Frodo “may become like a glass filled with a clear light for eyes to see that can” (*LOTR* 223). Also, Sam notes that Frodo appears different or is changing on several occasions: Frodo may surprise Sam with his sternness and power (*LOTR* 640), or with his voice having become “clearer and more powerful than Sam had ever heard him use” (*LOTR* 945) and at times Sam only remarks that a “light seemed to be shining faintly within” (*LOTR* 652), to the point where Sam sees Frodo as a vision of “a being robed in white” (*LOTR* 944). Faramir, the Captain of Gondor also notices Frodo’s gradual change as he remarks: “there is something strange about you, Frodo, an Elvish air, maybe” (*LOTR* 668). Frodo’s changing presence gives him a newfound “Elvish beauty” (*LOTR* 733) to his appearance. These passages all portray the effects of the phenomenological change that is going through Frodo as his grasp on reality is transforming from a Hobbit’s phenomenology to an Elves’ one.

### **Orcs: Expressing Self-Hood Through Violence**

The last position in the racial hierarchy belongs to the Orcs, whose reality is bound to physical and mental violence. The reality of Orcs, which is a diminutive projection of Sauron’s will, is shaped by violence. This is shown in the inter-relations between the Orcs themselves, who can barely work together to achieve goals and must be constantly supervised by more powerful

generals (*LOTR* 926). When the mistrust between Orcs and their bandleaders, or greed over loot, reaches a high point, it results in a brief skirmish where the stronger Orcs massacre the weaker Orcs until the survivors again submit to the dominant will of their suppressors (*LOTR* 904). The relationship between Orcs and violence is further established by the fact that killing is a form of ‘sport’ for them, as they discuss the fate of the captured Merry and Pippin, lamenting the fact that they do not have enough “time to kill them properly [...], no time for play on this trip (*LOTR* 445). However, as Orcs are cowardly by nature, they only enjoy killing those who are weaker, and doing so at leisure. They do not enjoy fair fights, as the prospect of harm towards them causes them great fear. As Orcs mainly understand reality through pain and violence, they also struggle to understand motives other than their own: when considering what to do with the captured hobbits, one chief among the Orcs, Uglúk, tells the others that the prisoners are not to be harmed. The others are displeased by these orders, and question these motives: “What are they wanted for? [...] Why alive? Do they give good sport?” (*LOTR* 445). The relationship of the Orcs towards their creators and masters (Morgoth, Sauron, and Saruman) also exemplifies the violent reality of the Orcs, as the only thing they feel towards their masters is the fear of domination and punishment (*Silmarillion* 57).

The existence of Orcs is tied to Sauron and the One Ring, as Sauron’s desire steers the Orcs. When the Ring is destroyed the Orcs do not die outright, but the passage describes a process of loss of existence through loss of intentionality: “his slaves quailed, and his armies halted, and his captains suddenly steerless, bereft of will, wavered and despaired. For they were forgotten” (*LOTR* 946). The fact that the Orcs “were forgotten” implies that as their connection to Sauron is severed they cease to have meaning. The Orcs are no longer a ‘race’, for their existence was tied to the intentionality of Sauron’s will, which is now lost. They become “mindless” and lose their meaning, and thus from a phenomenological perspective cease to exist as perceiving agents, as they no longer hold to the distinct *Dasein* of existence.

## **Dwarves: A Contrasting Phenomenology**

The sense hierarchy functions through the categorisation of the races into an order, however, Dwarves fall out of this order altogether. The Dwarves are very distinct from the other races and they represent a detachment from the phenomenological axis that connects all the other major races. The Dwarves are not a part of the same thematic link that unites Elves, Men, Orcs and Hobbits. Thus, as Tolkien writes: “Dwarves are a race apart” (*LOTR* 1132). Where the Elves are born to a fondness of starlight and running water, the Dwarves are all born with a natural love for the ground, mountains, caves, and all the mineral riches that are to be found in the earth: this reflects their creator, Aulë, who is a god of the earth (*Silmarillion* 47). The separation of the Dwarves’ origin reflects the phenomenological isolation of the Dwarves. The Dwarves do not experience reality through the same terms as the other races. This is represented in the isolationism of the Dwarves, and by their continuous misunderstandings with other races: a central theme in the representation of Dwarves in *LOTR* is the difficulty of understanding other races, and the failure to ‘connect’ to other races. This is represented by the interactions between other races and Dwarves in the books: during the Fellowship’s travels through Lothlórien, Where the other races are given gifts that need no counsel, the Elves cannot think what a Dwarf might value. The Elves cannot fathom what a Dwarf would value. Since they cannot understand what a Dwarf would value but have no trouble understanding the values of the others, the race is set apart: the values, and thus the reality of the Dwarves, does not correspond with that of other races.

These passages that highlight the phenomenological differences between Dwarves and the rest are noticeable throughout the story. When discussing the relationship between life and memory, the difference between the Elves and Dwarves is again highlighted:



True words doubtless; yet all such comfort is cold. Memory is not what the heart desires. That is only a mirror, be it clear as Kheled-zâram. Or so says Gimli the Dwarf. Elves may see things otherwise. Indeed I have heard that for them memory is more like the waking world than to a dream. Not so for Dwarves. (*LOTR* 378-379)

Although Dwarves portray *Dasein* and are thus fully ‘Being-in-the-world’, the Dwarves are not connected to the same experience of reality as the Elves. Other races do not share this situation with the Dwarves: they understand the phenomenology of the Elves and embrace it as a transcendental version of their own. While Hobbits and Men do not often fully understand the Elven ‘presence’ and their gifts, they recognise Elves as somehow similar to themselves, and regard them as a form of higher beings. Dwarves are the only race who do not hold the Elves as a ruling race, but instead they concentrate on their own existence and their own ways of living, which is the reason for the isolationist preference of the Dwarves. Their creator made them headstrong and proud, so that they would not suffer domination by other races (*Silmarillion* 47). It is unlike the isolationism of the Elves, who keep to themselves out of a sense of superiority and may shun the company of other races (*LOTR* 80). Dwarves also keep to themselves, but I argue that the reason for their isolationism is due to the conceptual phenomenological differences to other races. The Dwarves do not experience reality within the same parameters as the other races, so they prefer the company of their own kind, to avoid a sense of alienation.

The phenomenology of language posits itself as the “incarnation of meaning” (Savolainen 3-4), which is central to the experiencing of reality. The isolation of the Dwarves as a “race apart” is strengthened by the linguistic isolation of the Dwarves. The languages of Elves, Men, Hobbits, and Orcs are connected to each other in the same way as their phenomenology. The Elves have two branches of their own tongue (Quenya and Sindarin), Men mostly speak variants of Westron (which has Elvish influence), Hobbits adopted Westron (with no record of what they spoke before that), and Orcs speak Black Speech, which was created by the Orcs

who “had no language of their own, but took what they could of other tongues and perverted it to their own liking” (*LOTR* 1131). Dwarves have a secret language, which they do not teach to outsiders lightly: this differs from every other tongue in *LOTR*, which are taught openly and gladly to those willing to learn: when Frodo greets Elves in their own tongue, the Elves are delighted and name him “Elf-friend” (*LOTR* 81). The isolated Dwarven language thus posits an isolated ‘meaning’ for reality, unconnected to other languages and other races.

Although the Dwarves experience reality through a separate phenomenology than the other races, it does not mean that Dwarves experience reality through a different set of senses. The senses of sight (*LOTR* 297), hearing (*LOTR* 316, 431), smell/taste (*LOTR* 369, *Hobbit* 12), and touch (*LOTR* 229) are present in passages concerning Dwarven sense experience. However, the senses of the Dwarves do not occupy the same sense hierarchy as the other races. The Dwarves place greater emphasis on touch, as is noted by their affinity of working with their hands (*LOTR* 229, 304, 317, 322, *Hobbit* 16), and their battle prowess (*LOTR* 322, 325, 441, 586). The Dwarves are described as “lovers of stone, of gems, of things that take shape under the hands of the craftsman rather than things that live by their own life” (*LOTR* 1132). Dwarvish metaphors are also often related to hands, as in the case of Pyrrhic victory: “If this is victory, then our hands are too small to hold it” (*LOTR* 1075).

Dwarves are not as keen in hearing or in sight as the other races, for when riders of Rohan approach the Company “[at] length even Gimli could hear the distant beat of galloping hoofs” (*LOTR* 431). Although hearing in *LOTR* is presented as a relatively trustworthy facet of reality that contrasts with the manipulability of sight, the fact that Dwarves are not affected by Saruman’s powers of speech suggests that there is some underlying difference between the hearing of other races and the hearing of Dwarves: the races have the same sense experience of hearing, as there is no confusion regarding what is being heard or the meaning of words, but the effect of hearing is different to the Dwarves. Thus, the values of each sense are different,

and the way the senses are reflected to a Dwarf's consciousness differ from other races. The Dwarves are thus a "race apart" not only socially, but also from a phenomenological perspective.

The races are thus divided into a hierarchy which places the Elves as the prominent leaders, and the Children of Ilúvatar as their 'followers'. This racial hierarchy indicates a similar movement as the sense hierarchy as it places primacy in metaphysics, which is connected to ideals such as truth and divinity. This primacy of metaphysics is opposed by the tangible reality of the 'lower' races, especially Hobbits and Orcs. The Dwarves are placed outside the racial hierarchy, as their reality is essentially too different to the other races to make a sensible comparison. The role of the Dwarves in the study of races in *LOTR* is to create a contrast to the 'Children of Ilúvatar' by introducing a juxtaposition of differentiation.

## 5. Conclusion

The phenomenological analysis of *LOTR* is built on transitions from metaphysical realities to empirical ones, and vice versa. The functions of racial and sensory hierarchies both demonstrate a progression from a tangible reality towards a transcendental one: The senses of sight and hearing portray most metaphysical qualities, as through sight, the characters give us accounts of things that may or may not take place even in their reality. We are invited to peer inside the inner workings of the characters mind by, for example, being allowed to know of the vividness of the dreams the hobbits see in the house of Tom Bombadil, and to know how the sight of “hobbit’s footprints” are seen and understood by Aragorn (*LOTR* 424). Through the expressions of sight, the narration describes the experiencing of reality of the characters which often lead to strong attachments to metaphysical attributes: through sight one can ‘see’ something that is not present, either as a reminder of an event that has physically passed that site, such as footprints signifying that Hobbits have been there, or as visions into a realm that is not physically present, such as with the Nazgûl, who are made of “nothingness” (*LOTR* 222). Taste, smell, and touch, in contrast to sight, are mostly used to make the described event more immediate by focusing on the physical aspects of what is being perceived, focusing on the phenomenon as the thing-in-itself. The focus on the sensory phenomenon as a thing-in-itself is connected to the empirical qualities of the sense: the immediate present offers the reader an empirically focused perspective that momentarily abandons the metaphysical. Thus, the sense hierarchy indicates a movement that leads away from the intangibility of metaphysics, towards a palpable and present empiricism.

The metaphysical/empirical axis of the senses is complemented by the portrayal of the races in *LOTR*. The difference between the two extremes in the racial hierarchy, Elves and Orcs, is

evident in the way their phenomenological realities are experienced: one primarily through sight, the other through touch. Similarly, the races of Men, Hobbits, and Dwarves all portray distinct aspects of the racial variations of sense experience: the ‘children of Ilúvatar’ are connected to each other through themes which necessitate the similarity of their phenomenological experiences, and Dwarves contrast with them through a unique experience of the world, causing their isolation.

Frodo’s perspective of the story supports this progression, as the story depicts his transition from a Hobbit’s tangible reality to an Elf’s metaphysical one. The Ring’s effects on the Ringbearer are continuously underlined as aspects of Frodo’s phenomenological metamorphosis, describing the increasing ‘Elvish-ness’ that is depicted in Frodo as the journey progresses. The fate of Middle-Earth itself is the opposite of Frodo’s progression: Middle-Earth is on the brink of change that is indicated in the racial hierarchies of the book. As the rule of the superior Elves is ending, the coming Fourth Age marks the era of Men taking the position of ruler in Middle-Earth. From a phenomenological perspective, this shift from Elves to Men portrays the more tangible reality of Men becoming the norm, and the loss, or at least, the displacement of pure metaphysicality. When Elves leave, the ‘magic’ of their presence will eventually fade away, and all trace of them will be gone in time. The metaphysical aspects of the Elves are not completely overthrown, however, as the successors of the Elves are those who are closest to the Elves phenomenologically. Men, and especially the Dúnedain, are related to the Elves through their unique presence and ability to see and read the ‘signs of the world’. The return of Gondor’s king represents the renewal of that bloodline that connects the rulers of Men with the Elves, which also legitimises the rule of Men.

The hierarchy of the races demonstrates a movement from metaphysical qualities towards empiricism. As indicated by this analysis and supported by works concentrating on race in Middle-Earth, such as Fimi’s *Tolkien, Race and Cultural History*, the hierarchical inter-

relations of the races place the Elves as the ruling race. The Elves of *LOTR* are continuously described as vastly superior, and their godliness marks their separation from the other races. The progression from the lowly empirical towards the superior metaphysical is supported by the arrangement of the two hierarchies: Elves are the primary race because they exhibit the suitable transcendental and metaphysical characteristics. Their mastery of sight (and the connections between sight and metaphysical values, such as truth, light, and divinity) place them in the primary position. In contrast, the Orcs are the lowliest of the races, as their reality functions primarily through the sense of touch, which is the sense that is furthest removed from divinity and truth. Thus, the two hierarchies seem to form a very neatly organised structure (Figure 2), that suggests an unproblematic formula throughout the books: elements related to metaphysicality are desirable, and tangible traits are deficient and crude.

Figure 2

Sight	Elves	More metaphysical	
Hearing	Men		
Smell/Taste	Hobbits	More empirical	
Touch	Orcs		
<table border="1" style="margin: auto;"> <tr> <td>Dwarves</td> </tr> </table>			Dwarves
Dwarves			

This fixed model is interrupted by analysing the interactions that occur between the senses and the races, and how the boundaries between sense experiences and races are blurred through overlapping of themes, connecting with Merleau-Ponty's theories about the obscuration of phenomena. The simplified construct is achieved by analysing the senses as separate entities that operate in vacuums and have no relationship with each other. However, further analysis of

the books' phenomenology indicates that the simplified linearity of a superficial analysis becomes an illusion: the separateness of sight and touch is transgressed by the analysis of the Eye of Sauron, which operates in both realms. The origin of the Orcs connects them to the Elves, but their phenomenology is still strongly rooted in the physicality of violence, as opposed to the metaphysicality of Elves. Hobbits, whose phenomenology primarily revolves around taste and smell also surpass their phenomenological boundaries with the power of the One Ring: the effects of the Ring allow them insights to the phenomenology of Men, as they momentarily experience reality primarily through hearing. The Ring also grants the Ringbearers access to the Unseen, the transcendental realm of vision. The effects of the Ring on the Ringbearers changes their phenomenological viewpoint considerably, detaching them from an empirical reality and moving them towards a metaphysical 'Elvish' reality. Similarly, the relationship between the metaphysical and empirical qualities of hearing are challenged by the powers of voice present in Saruman, Tom Bombadil, and Goldberry, who can bend empirical reality using the primarily metaphysical intentionality of song and speech. Every linear connection that was introduced (Figure 2) is problematised by further analysis of the relationships between the senses, the races, and their metaphysical/empirical distinctions.

Thus, the strict distinctions made through a superficial phenomenological analysis are undermined, as the progression of the study reveals that the boundaries between the senses and the races become hazy and problematic. These effects of unclarity and obscuration of phenomena are the key progressions for the phenomenology of *LOTR*. By connecting Merleau-Ponty's theories with the sensory and racial hierarchies that operate in the books, a phenomenological analysis of *LOTR* becomes an intricate set of connections that are not always linear and simple, but dependent on parallel themes that affect the analysis of experienced reality in the books. The themes of sense and race are interwoven to the extent that one cannot possibly be explained without referring to the other, and the reality of *LOTR* is thus realised

through interwoven themes where the in-between lying borders are blended to unclarity. The analysis of the books' phenomenology is assimilated by presentations of the reality within: as the One Ring distorts the experience of reality for the Ringbearer, the analysis of any experienced reality in *LOTR* is distorted by the phenomenological blending of the presented phenomena and the gradual shifting between perceptibility and obscuration that is at the heart of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology.



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