

**'HALDIR/OFC': THE CREATION OF ORIGINAL FEMALE  
CHARACTERS IN ROMANTIC HALDIR FAN FICTION**

by

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## **Abstract**

This study examines romantic Haldir fan fiction in the *Lord of the Rings* fandom and how original female characters (OFCs) in it are created and portrayed to invite identification among its female readers. It is argued that this leads to a direct engagement of the fan reader with the character of Haldir as the object of the fandom in a variety of ways. Previous studies in this field have focused on the reasons and circumstances of fan fiction writing as fan productivity but the content of such fan stories has mostly been neglected.

The study involves a text and narrative analysis of ten of ten popular romantic Haldir fan fictions combined with interviews with four successful authors of such fiction. It is suggested that the role of the original female character is just as important as the role of Haldir in fan stories on him, and that the OFC mostly determines his character portrayal rather than vice versa.

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## Introduction

Although there has been growing research interest in the field of fan studies and fan productivity in the last thirty years, only few works have been done on the actual products of fan engagement and fan productivity. Particularly the field of fan fiction as product of fans' engagement with their object of fandom has mostly been looked at only in the contexts of 'slash' fiction centring on a homosexual couple (Jenkins 1992, 2006; Allington, 2007; Pugh, 2005) or with regards to female fans' responses to strong female characters within their respective fandoms (Somogyi, 2002; McGrath-Kerr, 2006; Scodari, 2003) and within their respective female fan communities (Bacon-Smith, 1992). While there were also analyses of fan fiction narratives which assessed the self-regulatory nature of fan writers and how they negotiate canon (i.e. the fandom's original source material) and their own creations (Pugh, 2005; Kaplan, 2006), hardly any research focused on the way in which fan fiction authors and readers engage with fandom characters through original characters inserted into the established canon of a fandom. However, it can be argued that such research would be significant to the entire field of fan fiction studies as it could provide academics with insights into the relationship fans establish with their objects of fandom; relationships of which the fans might not even be aware of themselves. Until now, fan productivity studies have mostly focused on interviewing fans about their practices which is of course essential when assessing the implications of their fan identity; however, even if the fans' statements are critically considered by researchers and researched the like, it limits the scope of fan identity assessment to the aspects highlighted by the

interviewees. Consequently, this study aims to diminish such limitations by focusing on the way in which fan engagement takes place through fan productivity in the *Lord of the Rings (LOTR)* fandom and more specifically, through romantic fan fiction on the minor character of Haldir. The study will particularly examine how original female characters (OFCs) are portrayed in this type of fan fiction and how its authors and readers use these characters to establish a link between their object of fandom and themselves, reflecting on their own relationships with their object of fandom.

Due to the fact that the subject of this research is romantic Haldir fan fiction, the study will inevitably focus on female authors and readers as they compose the majority of Haldir fans (see Methodology chapter for more details). Nevertheless, by analysing primarily the texts and narratives of a sample of fan fictions and by complementing my findings with interviews from a sample of Haldir fan fiction authors, I hope that my study will in the end be able to inform all types of further research on the nature of fan object engagement through fan fiction and thus complement and expand the existing research in this field.

In terms of the fandom that I will be looking at, it can be said that most *Lord of the Rings* fan fiction focuses mainly on one or more of the nine walkers from the first book and film as well as the Rohirrim from the second and third film (i.e. Frodo, Sam, Pippin, Merry, Boromir, Gandalf, Gimli, Legolas, Aragorn, Eomer and Eowyn; Barker, 2006). The plot of such fictions mostly contains action/adventure or romance, both of a homosexual (“slash”) and heterosexual nature (Allington,

2007). Other minor characters from the films and the books seldom feature as protagonists within *Lord of the Rings* fan fiction unless they play a significant role regarding one of the actual protagonists, for example as their love interest. That is not to say that minor characters do not feature in any *LOTR* fan fiction at all, but the total of fan stories written about them is significantly lower than the total of stories written about the main characters (FanFiction.Net, 2009). The minor character on which my study is based is the Elf Haldir of Lorien, who has acquired a growing fan following online in the last few years. In the *Lord of the Rings* books, the Fellowship of the Ring and the reader encounter him only twice and very shortly in the first book when the Fellowship arrives at Lothlorien (or Lorien), the Northern borders of which are guarded by Haldir and his troops (Tolkien, 1954). After the fellowship leaves Lothlorien, Haldir is never mentioned again in the *LOTR* books; Peter Jackson, however, ascribed Haldir a bigger role in his *LOTR* film trilogy, and so Haldir is not only shown to protect the borders of Lorien in the first film, but also as leading a small army of Elves to Helm's Deep in the second film in order to assist the humans in their battle against the forces of Saruman and Sauron, a fact that is never mentioned in the book trilogy by Tolkien (Jackson, 2001). As will be seen in my analysis and discussion of my research findings in Chapter 3, the differences between these two canons is not a major issue in romantic fan fiction on Haldir; as a matter of fact, his portrayal in fan fiction differs from his portrayals in the book and films once more due to his position as the fan authors' and readers' object of fandom.

However, the details on this and my other findings and their evaluations will be preceded by two other chapters relating to my study: Chapter 1 will provide a literature review situating my research in greater detail and pointing to recurring themes in both fan productivity studies and my study in particular, while Chapter 2 will present the methodological structure of the research I conducted and the ethical issues relating to it.

**Chapter 1:**  
**Literature Review**

There has been a lot of academic interest regarding fan productivity from the second half of the 20th century until today. While the beginning of it was defined particularly by approaches to fan studies as a whole such as 'poaching', academics soon began to narrow down their researches to focus on particular aspect of fan productivity, especially fan fiction, as will be set out in this chapter.

**Early Approaches to Fan Studies and Fan Productivity**

One of the earliest assessments regarding fan appropriation and reworking of texts can be found in Michel de Certeau's *Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) in which he criticises the belief that "reading" a media message means "deciphering" it; instead, he claims, reading a media message is based on the reader and their expectations, anticipations and assimilations of it. He sees receivers and readers of media texts as "poachers" that will take in what they receive selectively, accepting and appropriating only some aspects of the initial text and discarding others, depending on their own interests and likings. This idea was as later taken up by Henry Jenkins who in his book *Textual Poachers* (1992) assesses fan practices as 'poaching', particularly focusing on how fans of fandoms like *Star Trek* not only resist producer-receiver power relations regarding media texts but also how they

“... appropriate popular texts and reread them in a fashion that serves different interests, as spectators who transform the experience of watching television into a rich and participatory culture.” (Jenkins, 1992: 23)

Jenkins especially examined how this phenomenon led to fan productivity in the *Star Trek* fandom, such as fan art (drawings of scenes involving *Star Trek* characters), fan tapes with juxtapositions of scenes and characters, and fanzines, fan magazines containing mostly fan fictions, i.e. stories written by fans featuring *Star Trek* characters and events. In Jenkins’ opinion, these forms of participatory culture enabled fans to become “active producers and manipulators of meanings” (1992: 23) as it allowed them to resist or change the dominant readings of *Star Trek* and to instil it with their own readings expressed through their fan products.

In the same year, John Fiske (1992) also looked at fan productivity and fan participation, classifying them into three main categories: semiotic productivity, enunciative productivity, and textual productivity. He based these categories on the different types and levels of media engagement fan productivities stemmed from, and in the context of my research, Fiske’s “textual productivity” is probably the most relevant, as it is the one found in fans only and involves the production and distribution of texts among themselves “crafted with production values as high as any in the official culture” (Fiske, 1992: 39). Referring to Roland Barthes’ (1970) theory of “readerly” and “writerly” texts which require to be the reader either passive or active when receiving and consequently ‘reading’ a text, Fiske claims

that fan productivity such as fan art and fanzines/fan fiction is most likely to occur when media texts are “producerly”, meaning that they “have to be open, to contain gaps, irresolutions, contradictions [...] to invite fan productivity” (1992: 41). As will be seen in Chapter 3, this theory can also be applied to the Haldir fandom as it too is full of gaps, making its source text very “producerly”.

Some time later, Elana Sheffrin (2004) and Mia Consalvo (2003) investigated how in the cases of *The Lord of the Rings*, *Star Wars* (Sheffrin) and *Buffy* (Consalvo) fan productivity and participation via new media like the internet increased fans’ influence on the production of new media texts within their fandoms. While Sheffrin specifically looked at how online fan participation was explicitly invited in the development of the *Lord of the Rings* film trilogy by Peter Jackson (2001-2003) and how it led to a very positive reception of the films among *Lord of the Rings* fans, Consalvo focused on how *Buffy* copyright holders and production companies tried to prevent fan productivity and activity on the Internet but were met with increasing levels of fan resistance.

Such power relationships between fans, media producers and society have also been the subject of studies by Cornel Sandvoss (2005a) who in his work on the ‘One-Dimensional Fan’ examined the belief in fan, media and cultural studies that media texts have polysemic meanings and so can be decoded differently by fans and audiences. Nevertheless, Sandvoss himself believes that it is not only the polysemy of meanings but also the “absence of meanings” (“neutrosemy”) that should be paid attention to particularly in fan texts, as fan productivity does not

necessarily have to be compliant with or resistant to dominant meanings in media messages but can simply ignore these, too. This ties in with his psychoanalytical approaches to fandom in his book *Fans* (2005b) in which he investigates the highly personal relationship fans have with their objects of fandom, in many cases making the fan object an “extension of the self” and instilling them with their own personal values, characteristics or features while also adjusting their own personalities in accordance with the attributes of the fan object. With the fans thus being so focused on only one or two characters within the fandom, it is possible that the general texts within the fandom become secondary and not featured in fan productions, leading to neutrosemy, an absence of meanings. While such a psychoanalytical approach to fan productivity would generally fit well into the context of my study, I will not draw on it directly in my analysis as it would require a more in-depth engagement with fan authors rather than textual analysis as primary analytical tool.

This psychoanalytical assessment of fandom has been paralleled by Matt Hills’ book *Fan Cultures* published in 2002. Examining how fan cultures seem to be caught between “fantasy and reality”, Hills argues that most approaches to fandom show a “lack of playfulness” and refers to the way in which fans purposely create their own boundaries that differ from cultural ones “as a way of maintaining mental/psychical health” in order to evade the overwhelming power of socio-cultural restrictions (Hills, 2002: 112). Consequently, for him, being a fan and participating in a fandom should be seen as a sign of “good health” (*ibid.*). This playfulness paired with seriousness regarding one’s own fandom will also become

apparent in the course of my study as it will highlight the way fans actively engage with a world that is not the one we live in, shifting boundaries purposely but also creating their own in the process.

### **Overall Approaches and Research Regarding Fan Fiction**

A very important key area of fan productivity that has been looked at by several scholars is that of fan fiction. According to Sheenagh Pugh, these can be defined as

“writing, whether official or unofficial, paid or unpaid, which makes use of an accepted canon of characters, settings and plots generated by another writer or stories.” (Pugh, 2005: 25)

Fan fiction thus includes any written pieces by fans including poems, short stories, longer stories such as novels and excerpts which centre on the characters, happenings and stories of a certain fandom. Nevertheless, studies regarding fan fiction have mainly focused on fan fiction community formation and how these regulate themselves, creating rules and conventions that control the use of ‘canon’ (“the [fandom] source material accepted as authentic and [...] known by all readers”; Pugh, 2005: 26) and creative additions by the fan authors themselves that have become accepted as part of the canon (‘fanon’). Sheenagh Pugh’s study (2005) on the self-regulation in the Jane Austen fan fiction community, for example, examines how fan readers and authors demand “respect” and “truthfulness” to Austen’s original work in fan fiction relating to her literature, while at the same time

trying to appropriate Austen's characters into their work with slight changes.

Margaret Mackey and Jill McClay (2008) conducted a similar study regarding the *Pirates of the Caribbean (POTC)*, particularly investigating how the "Protectors of the Plot Continuum Patrol" is universally accepted as a regulatory force categorising *POTC* fan fiction as canonical or non-canonical, and thus communally acceptable or unacceptable.

Other frequently examined aspects of fan fiction are its use and implications in other, non-fandom related contexts. An important piece of work here is Rebecca Black's 2005 'Access and Affiliation' study in which she examines how English fan fiction and fan fiction communities can help learners of English as a second language develop their English interactive writing skills and how this could be put to use in curricula in schools. Less pioneering but equally important for fan fiction within a general social context was Rebecca Tushnet's (2007) work on fan fiction and copyright law in which she examines the many legal disagreements on a global scale that have been fuelled by media producers' attempts to prevent fan fiction as participatory fandom, claiming fan fiction infringes their copyright.

Nevertheless, Tushnet concludes that fan fictions are primarily a form of human interaction and exchange regarding media content as it happens orally everyday, and even though fans do publish their stories online and in fanzines, they rarely do so for money but for their own and others' entertainment. Thus, she argues, it would be in the interest of the people and democratic society if fan fiction were made legal.

## Common Fan Fiction Research Themes

Whereas fan fiction studies like those mentioned above take a more general approach to fan fiction and look particularly at the technicalities of it, the majority of academic fan fiction research has focused on particular aspects of fan fiction writing itself, mostly in relation to fan fiction authors and their communities. A frequently investigated aspect is, for example, female authors writing slash fan fiction. One of the pioneering works in this area has been done by Henry Jenkins (1992, 2006) who claimed that slash fan fiction demonstrates the “development of more egalitarian forms of romantic and erotic relationships” bringing about a “transcendence of rigidly defined categories of gender and sexual identity” (1992: 219) and thus can be seen as a type of resistance to mass culture values and readings from fans. Whereas some academics like Victoria Somogyi (2002) have argued that slash fan fiction is particularly a phenomenon when women cannot find “equal” pairings not influenced by our “sexist world” in media texts, Daniel Allington (2007) has introduced a new framework regarding slash fan fiction, seeing it as homosexual readings of media texts which are not clearly demarcated as either homosexual or heterosexual. According to Allington, slash fan fiction should thus be seen as part of reading and interpretation play amongst fans who try and test established boundaries, an approach which complements Jenkins’ theory of slash as re-arranging traditional boundaries.

Another common subject of fan fiction research is that of women and online fan fiction as assessed by Milly Williamson in her book *The Lure of the Vampire* (2005). Williamson focused particularly on how female fan fiction communities use

fan fiction not only as a means of sharing fandom-related experiences but also to guide each other when writing fan stories. Similarly, Sara Gwenllian-Jones (2003) examined how in the case of the *Xena: Warrior Princess* fandom the advent of the internet changed shared female fan experience through online fan fiction and fan fiction community, granting them easier access to the two and thus to “a place free of today’s obsessions” with political, social and cultural identity (2003: 185). This type of escapism is another theoretical framework which can be applied to Haldir fan fictions as will be seen in Chapter 3 with regards to fan identification with the OFC.

Focusing more directly on women as fan fiction authors, Victoria Somogyi (2002) furthermore analysed how in the *Star Trek: Voyager* fandom female fan fiction authors deal with the romantic relationship between Captain Kathryn Janeway and Commander Chakotay that is hinted at in the TV series. Due to the fact that Janeway holds a higher military rank than Chakotay, their relationship is a rather unusual one on screen, causing Somogyi to examine how fan fiction authors appropriated the involvement of the two and how they are able to “avoid [...] ‘one partner’s inferior sexual rank in a sexist society’” due to the futuristic setting and stressing the “subordinate” status of the male, Chakotay (Lamb and Veith quoted in Somogyi, 2002: 400). However, while Rachel McGrath-Kerr (2006) also looked at the way in which female fan fiction authors represented a strong woman on screen in fan fictions on Sam Carter in the *Stargate SG-1* fandom, she found that fans were actively ‘degrading’ Carter in professional and social ways as they felt that the producers of *Stargate* had done a bad job in her representation. According to

McGrath-Kerr, the fans claimed that Sam Carter had in the course of the series been turned into an unrealistic “superwoman” (“Super Sam”) which repelled them instead of causing admiration.

Also looking at female resistance in fan fiction writing was Christine Scodari (2003) who claimed that the absence of strong female characters in fan fictions authored by women is not a sign of lacking resistance against the absence of strong women in the mass media but an “enthusiasm for a greater diversity of representations of female characters” (2003: 125). She particularly calls on so-called ‘Mary Sues’ (super-human and thus unrealistic female characters with unmatched beauty, intelligence and fighting skills, often as a super-version of the author themselves in a story) in fan fictions to prove her point, as their depictions are highly controversial amongst all fan fiction communities and often condemned even more than ‘weaker’ female characters.

Camille Bacon-Smith (1992), on the other hand, focused on how women actively seek empowerment through fan communities and through fan fiction in particular in the fandoms of *Star Trek* and *Blake’s 7*. According to her, “increasingly, women in the fan community were turning away in their fiction from the ideal of marriage and family for complete fulfilment” (1992: 141) but at the same time were lacking role models of strong women in the media. Consequently, she argues “fans use[d] their fiction to communicate messages about their own lives” (1992: 150) and through fan fiction, “[developed] relationships with fictional characters that [were] no less real than, while being intrinsically different from, relationships with living people”

(1992: 152). This highly personal relationship with one's object of fandom can also be detected in the Haldir fandom, and as will be demonstrated in Chapter 3, has significant effects on the portrayal of both the OFC and of Haldir.

Deborah Kaplan (2006) took a similar approach to Bacon-Smith but looked particularly at the way in which fans create fan fiction characters as "interpretations" or representatives of their own readings of media texts. Analysing a sample of fan fictions from science fiction fandoms like *X-Files*, *Star Trek* and *Buffy*, she found that all fan fiction texts "rely on the interplay between knowledge of the source text and knowledge of the fanon" and a successful negotiation of the two (2006: 136, 139-42). This "moral economy of fandom", i.e. the regulation of fan fiction content, was also the subject of one of Jenkins' later studies on *Star Trek* (2006) in which he examined how it influenced fan fiction writing, particularly that of women. According to his findings, stories written by women focus more on relationships and character backgrounds rather than adventure and technical or scientific aspects of the series, a phenomenon which he blames on gendered social programming socializing men and women to read for and write different things in different ways.

A main focus of Jenkins' study is the issue of "intellectual transvestism" (Jenkins, 2006: 44) which draws on Laura Mulvey's (1975) theory of the male gaze in cinema. In this theory, Mulvey argues that women on screen are depicted as objects of the gaze of the male viewer and thus as an object of pleasure for a male audience, while the men on screen are the characters which drive the plot action

and with which the viewers are supposed to identify. Consequently, Mulvey argues, the men on screen direct the gaze of the audience to the female character to be looked at. Women in the audience are in turn forced to take up a male subject position when watching films in order to read them in the way they are intended. As Jenkins (2006) has argued, this “intellectual transvestism” takes place in all forms of mass media, including literature, but there has been growing female resistance to it in the form of romance novels as well as romantic fan fiction written by women. In these, he argues, it is the woman who is the bearer of the look and who drives the plot, while the male remains the passive party. This development poses another important aspect of the portrayal of the OFC in Haldir fan fiction by subverting the male gaze, which will again be discussed in Chapter 3.

The similarities between romantic fan fiction usually written by women and romance novels have also been picked up upon by Catherine Driscoll (2006). Driscoll claims that the general structure, narrative and narration of most romantic fan fiction are very much congruent with the generic conventions of romance novels and proceeds to analyse the differences in the portrayal of sex in romantic fan fiction, distinguishing between “plot sex” and “porn sex”. The former, she argues, is part of most romance novels and romantic fan fiction and “marks out story developments, usually in a sequence of escalating intimacy” between the central pairing (2006: 85). Consequently, “plot sex” can act as a way in which characters can be characterised and depicted, whereas the latter, “porn sex”, is just about the sex and hardly about the characters involved as the sexual encounter is the only thing the story is about, just like other pornography.

The romance novel conventions mentioned in Jenkins' and Driscoll's studies have been set out by two main works. One of them is Janice Radway's *Reading the Romance* (1984) in which she investigates how romance novels can be seen as empowering women through the subversion of patriarchy by studying a sample of female romance novel readers in an American suburban town. She found that this subversion of patriarchy came about by the way in which the women *read* the novels as part of escapism and me-time, drawing up an ideal world in which men and women are as they should be – honest, respectful towards and appreciative of each other, but at the same time strong and independent from one another. The second prominent work in this field is the compilation *Dangerous Men and Adventurous Women* edited Jayne Ann Krentz (1992), in which she and her colleagues present how the *writing* of romance novels can also be seen as a form of female empowerment. According to them, this is brought about by the structure and content of romance novels where all problems are mostly of a psychological or interpersonal nature, and can consequently only be solved by female wisdom, empathy and communication. As a result, women are empowered by being the drivers of the plot action and the primary problem-solvers, another issue that will be picked up upon in my analysis of Haldir fan fiction later.

Thus, looking at the various themes that have determined fan fiction research until today – mainly those of situating fan productivity in a social and cultural framework – it stands out that little to nothing has been done regarding the actual content of fan fiction. My research will aim to change this by looking at the way in which

authors and readers engage with *Lord of the Rings* romantic Haldir fan fictions through their content and characters, and how this can empower them as both fans and female *LOTR* fans. I am going to analyse these two areas by specifically looking at the way in which fans make use of identification with original female characters and how this can reflect the female and fan subject positions of both readers and writers of fan fiction on him.

## **Chapter 2:**

### **Methodology**

The *Lord of the Rings* fandom based both on the books by Tolkien and their film version by Peter Jackson from 2001-2003 is considered to be one of the biggest fandoms online (Allington, 2007). Popular fan fiction sites for the Lord of the Rings can be found at websites such as [www.hall-of-fire.com](http://www.hall-of-fire.com), [www.henneth-annun.net](http://www.henneth-annun.net), [www.ofelvesandmen.com](http://www.ofelvesandmen.com), [www.libraryofmoria.com](http://www.libraryofmoria.com) and [www.fanfiction.net](http://www.fanfiction.net). The reason why I chose to investigate fan fiction on the *LOTR* character Haldir is the condition that he gained a considerably large fan following online despite the fact that only very little is known about him and his background. Contrary to fan fiction featuring main characters from the *Lord of the Rings*, authors of Haldir fan fictions have thus got to be more creative when designing his character and those around him such as his family, friends and romantic partner. Particularly the latter was of great interest to me, as the majority of Haldir fan fiction can be classified as 'het' (heterosexual) romance (FanFiction.Net, 'Books: Lord of the Rings': 2009), meaning that authors are using original characters as his lovers which they invented themselves due to the fact that there is no original partner for him in the *LOTR* canon. Consequently, I decided to look at the way in which fan fiction authors create these original female characters as well as his character in order to identify possible patterns and coherences. Moreover, I sought to examine whether such portrayals correspond with different types of narratives, and to investigate possible connections between the portrayal of the OFCs and Haldir as the object of the fandom.

## Research Design

In order to meet these aims I decided to conduct a combination of text and narrative analysis of a sample of ten English language Haldir fan fictions and to complement these findings with a minimum number of four qualitative interviews with authors of the same. Due to the fact that these authors were likely to be situated in entirely different parts of the worlds, I chose to conduct the interviews with them via e-mail, while offering the interviewees the possibility to also question them via telephone, instant messenger (such as MSN or Yahoo!) or Skype if they preferred one of these methods. Both the fan fictions and the authors were chosen from the website [www.fanfiction.net](http://www.fanfiction.net) due to the fact that it is the largest fan fiction website for most fandoms including that of the *Lord of the Rings* and that most fan fiction authors publish their stories primarily at FanFiction.Net and secondarily at other *LOTR* fan fiction websites. In addition, many *LOTR* fandom specific websites feature largely slash fan fiction, whereas FanFiction.net is contains both heterosexual and homosexual romances.

## Text Analysis

I chose to analyse a sample of Haldir fan fiction by means of a combination of narrative and text analysis because the two together would allow me to examine the portrayal of the original female characters on different levels most effectively, particularly in conjunction with the interviews I conducted. In addition, as Fairclough has argued, textual analysis can only help to achieve best results if it is used together with other forms of analysis as it is “inevitably selective” and limited (2003: 14-15) . Researchers, he claims, are influenced by their own unavoidable

bias and way of reading a text, making “objectivity” or neutral reading impossible as in any type of social research. Moreover, by simply analysing a text is possible to make inferences and assessments of its contents, but it cannot provide the researcher with causalities or intentions. Combining textual analysis with other kinds of analyses, Fairclough argues, lessens the effect of the researcher’s selective readings and provides them with new perspectives and even causalities. Thus, in the case of my research, combining textual analysis with narrative analysis and interviews helped to reduce the effects of my own selective reading of the fan fiction sample by complementing it with the points of view and causalities offered by my interviewees and the findings of my narrative analysis of the fiction sample. Moreover, analysing the fan fictions’ texts and narratives made it possible for me to investigate them as wholes rather than fragmented pieces, allowing for a “qualitative analysis” of their content (Sarantakos, 2005: 309; Chase, 2005).

### Sampling

As mentioned above, I chose to examine ten fan fictions from the website FanFiction.Net in a purposive sample put together according to six specific criteria. The first criterion was that the stories had to be heterosexual romances listed in the romance genre on FanFiction.Net, including genre crossovers like ‘romance/drama’, or ‘romance/adventure’. This was to ensure that the stories did feature a prominent original female character relevant to my research topic. The second most important criterion was that the stories had to be completed so it would be possible for me to investigate the portrayal of the OFC and of Haldir from the beginning to the end and to determine any coherences or patterns leading to

certain plot resolutions. Thirdly, it was important that all stories in my sample received more positive reviews than the majority of other romantic Haldir fan fictions in the website so that I could trace coherences and contradictions in the types of stories that seemed to be most popular among the fan fiction community. Criteria four and five regarded the word limits, which I set at a minimum of 1,000 words and at a maximum of 100,000 words to ensure that complex stories with beginning, middle and end would be developed but that I would be able to handle the amount of data gained from all stories. The last criterion was that of actuality; I aimed to include both recent and older stories to not limit my sample to any specific time frames but to ascertain an overview of the portrayal of OFCs in Haldir fan fiction in general. In the end, there were fifteen fan fictions that complied with all of these criteria out of which I chose the ten that matched the sample criteria closest.

### Data Collection

Given the fact that there are “no [particular] formulae or recipes for the ‘best’ way to analyse” texts as each text analysis depends on the aims of its research (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996: 80), I decided to follow Peräkylä’s (2005) model of common practice in text analysis. This included reading and re-reading the texts to be analysed, identifying key themes corresponding with one’s research topic or question, and finally summing up meanings brought about by the texts as well as patterns and (in)congruencies observed. Although many researchers recommend to pay particular attention to grammar and form (Paltridge, 2006), I chose to look only at textual aspects like narration, ideology, genre and language choices, an analysis which was in part informed by aspects of narrative analysis.

This type of analysis particularly helped me to assess the effects of and compliance or resistance to romantic generic conventions regarding character portrayal in Haldir fan fiction. As Coffey and Atkinson have argued (1996), narrative genre is of particular importance when researching texts as it shapes all narratives and subjects, a condition that turned out to be true in the case of my research, too, as will be seen in my analysis and discussion. Just like in textual analysis there is no exact formula or guide by which narrative analysis is supposed to be conducted. Instead, Coffey and Atkinson (1996) recommend framing one's analysis according to the aspects of texts and stories one would like to investigate. Correspondingly I chose to analyse genre, as mentioned above, but also plot, character descriptions and events relating to the characters of Haldir and the OFC. Examining these enabled me to draw conclusions regarding the fan fictions' ideology and character portrayal as well as the meaning resulting from it for both readers and authors.

### Analysis of Fan Fictions

In order to analyse the portrayal of the OFC in romantic Haldir fan fiction most effectively, I looked particularly at the type of descriptions she and Haldir were given through the aforementioned narrative features and tried to fathom, with the help of my interview data, why these descriptions were chosen over others (Peräkylä, 2005; Paltridge, 2006). Moreover, I aimed to evaluate what kind of readings and meanings could come from these descriptions, and how this affected the way in which romantic Haldir fan fiction could be seen in relation to its readers. However, as mentioned above, my analysis of these textual and narrative features

is just one reading of them and should be regarded as such, although I aimed to widen its comprehensiveness through the interviews I conducted.

### **Interviews**

For my interviews, I aimed to question a sample of four to six interviewees. After I had familiarised myself with the stories and authors on FanFiction.Net, I chose to formally e-mail six Haldir fan fiction authors first in order to establish an initial contact with them and to ask them to participate in my research. In case there were no positive replies I could e-mail more, but I did not want to approach too many authors from the beginning to avoid having to turn any of them down if the maximum number of six interviewees was exceeded.

### Sampling

Overall I had five criteria according to which I selected a purposive sample of respondents. Given the fact that I was investigating portrayals of Haldir and original female characters, I focused on authors of stories found in the 'romance' genre, including cross-overs like those mentioned above. The second most important criterion when choosing possible authors to interview was actuality; I wanted to interview authors who had written their last piece of Haldir fan fiction maximally a year ago, or, even better, were still writing some. This ensured that they could answer questions about their motivations and views more accurately, relying on contemporary feelings rather than what they believe they had once felt. The third most important criterion was that the authors must have had completed at least one Haldir story to demonstrate a minimum level of commitment to and

engagement with the *LOTR*/Haldir fandom. Further influences on the interview sample were how many stories a writer had authored, how many years they had been writing for (I wanted both old and new hands in Haldir fan fiction writing) and how many reviews (good and negative) their stories received from the Haldir fan fiction community. Demographic features were irrelevant as I was looking at *what* the authors produced rather than how and under what influences; attributes like age, gender and ethnicity were thus not included in the sampling criteria. Nevertheless, all authors willing to take part in my research turned out to be female.

Unfortunately, the total amount of authors fulfilling the criteria mentioned above was rather small as the publication of Haldir fan fiction decreased during the last three years together with the hype of the *LOTR* films. Moreover, two of the authors in my initial sample all of a sudden stopped replying after they had answered the first questions, a typical problem when conducting online interviews (Neumann, 2006). Unfortunately, these drop-outs did not respond to my queries whether and why they had dropped out either which could have helped me to identify and rectify possible problems in my research procedure. Thus, I could only recruit more authors and in the end had four interviewees staying with me all through my research. Although it was merely the minimum number of interviewees I had planned to interview their responses were very detailed and provided me with a large and useful enough amount of perspectives to inform my analysis of Haldir stories.

## Data Collection

Despite the fact that I had offered several ways to conduct the interviews all interviews were in the end done by e-mail as it was the most convenient way for both me and the researched. For them, doing the interview asynchronously via e-mail was highly advantageous as it allowed them to reply to my questions whenever it suited them without time pressures and restrictions, and they had more time to consider their answers and views to give detailed and thought-through answers (O'Connor *et al*, 2008) . In addition, their anonymity was better preserved as I did not need any more contact data than the e-mail address already available online, such as a telephone number or chat room alias.

For me as researcher, e-mail interviews were also advantageous as they allowed me to carefully read and consider the interviewees' replies and to follow-up or probe some of the contents of their responses (Jupp, 2006). While some researchers and academics feel that leaving too much time for the interviewees to answer questions might lead to "socially desirable answers" at the expense of spontaneity and "snappiness" (O'Connor *et al*, 2008), it was the better option in the case of my study as it aimed to investigate Haldir fan fiction in considerable depth. Consequently, my questions were asking for a lot of information which required the interviewees to think about their writing thoroughly, making shorter and snappy answers less desirable. While the interview was structured in that I had a catalogue of fifteen questions I intended to ask my participants, it also left the interviewees some room to expand on aspects which they deemed important due to the written nature of their answers. Often, they even answered a question that was supposed

to follow later earlier on, allowing me to avoid repetition and to simply probe and follow up on their responses.

Moreover, conducting the interviews via e-mail allowed me to overcome global geographical boundaries in a quick and cost-effective manner while still obtaining first hand information from the authors (Neumann, 2006). At the same time, there was no need for a large research team as I was able to conduct all interviews just by myself and there was also less room for bias because typical subconscious influences such as physical appearance, ethnicity, manner of speaking and age were largely absent in the written exchange with the interviewees (Neumann, 2006).

However, conducting my research through the internet and particularly via e-mail also had its downsides. As Neumann pointed out (2006), there is often a low response rate to research participation requests via e-mail and a high-drop-out rate in online social research, a fact that was most definitely a problem in my study, as I explained above. It can also be rather time-consuming, Neumann argues further, if reminders or probes must be sent to the interviewees. Except for the follow-ups of drop-outs, however, this was fortunately less an issue in my particular study, as my interviewees overall returned their replies to me within an appropriate time frame. As Neumann argues further, the lack of control about the conditions under which the questions are replied to can also pose a threat to the validity of online social research outcomes, just as the researcher can never know whether the interviewee is actually who they say they are (2006). Nevertheless, this was again less of a

problem in my research as its focus was not who the interviewees were demographically but what they write about and why. It would have been detectable had the answers to my questions not been given by the same person throughout as the style of writing and expressing oneself would probably have varied between two different respondents. Finally, the last problem to consider in online interviews is the fact that the researcher is unable to see the gestures and facial expressions, i.e. body language, of the respondents which in some cases can say more than a thousand words or the respondents' answers themselves (Jupp, 2006).

Interestingly, however, most of my respondents felt that this was a problem themselves and chose to use emoticons (e.g. smileys), chat language (e.g. \*grin\*) and fillers (e.g. "well", "um") to compensate for the lack of non-verbal interaction within our e-mails.

- Trust, Rapport and Reassurance

The lack of physical presence of the interviewer and the interviewed has also got other important implications for research conducted online. As Kivits (2005) pointed out, the ability of the interviewees to trust the interviewer is fundamental in all interviews as the interviewees must be comfortable to speak to the interviewer to give accurate and honest answers. While trust, rapport and reassurance can easily be established through a neat appearance and polite but friendly speech and body language, interviews mediated new media like the internet cannot make use of these things. As a result, special care must be taken when corresponding with the interviewees in order to establish the same or at least similar level of trust and reassurance. In my case, I followed Kivits' advice and made sure all my

correspondence with my participants contained a friendly, informal but polite tone throughout. Moreover, I always started my e-mails with a salutation or address and signed them accordingly. I also always thanked the participants for sending me their previous replies and offered some basic information about myself (age, gender, nationality, university, hobbies, etc.) so they could get a better picture of their interviewer. This seemed to work for most of my participants who replied to me in the same tone, often chatting about their lives and what they were doing at the moment. As a result, I rarely had to ask them to give me more detailed answers, and many of their answers addressed me directly, asking if I knew what they meant or not to laugh. Thus, it was possible to establish a personal relationship and a good rapport with all of my participants even though all of us were deprived of means like visual appearance and body language.

- Design and Nature of Interview Questions

Another way in which to build a good rapport with one's participants is to make sure the interview questions are not too complex and follow a logical order (Kivits, 2005). In the case of my research, I decided to ask my interviewees a total of fifteen questions structured in three parts (see Appendix 1). The first four questions were asking about the interviewees' general history and background of fan fiction writing, while the next five questions focused on how they see Haldir and the way they portray him in their stories. The last six questions then focused on original female characters and inquired about the interviewees' points of views on them and how they portrayed OFCs in their own stories. Nevertheless, this was only a general structure, as some interviewees answered some questions in earlier

replies, as mentioned above. In addition, in the case of one underage participant, I left out the last question which focuses on sex in Haldir fan fictions.

In general, I sent the interview questions in blocks of two to three questions in order to remain in control of the direction the interview was going, to break up the bulk of questions for the participants, to avoid repetition if the interviewees answered a question early and to retain the possibility of direct and prompt probing. Only in few cases the participants themselves wished to answer all questions in one go which was of course possible, too.

### Analysis of Interviews

Once all interviews were finished, I analysed them by singling out similarities and differences in the respondents' answers regarding the themes I had already outlined from my own text and narrative analyses. In addition, I looked for aspects that the authors brought up themselves and which had not caught my attention in my analyses until then. For example, it surprised me to see how all four authors seemed to have a certain set character in mind regarding Haldir, even though there was hardly any information about him from Tolkien's books and Jackson's films. This helped me to make inferences on how being a Haldir fan influences the authors' writings and how their fictions reflect their relationship with him as the object of their fandom (see Discussion and Analysis below for further details).

## **Ethics**

While analysing the texts and narratives of the fan fictions in my sample brought with it some minor ethical considerations, interviewing a sample of fan fictions authors was ethically a bit more complicated as it involved human subjects which could have been affected directly by this research. Nevertheless, I was able to resolve all ethical issues that arose by taking precautionary and preventive measures avoiding all forms of harm to the participants in this study and to the authors of the fan fictions in my sample.

### Text Analysis

In terms of my text analysis, the only ethical issue that came to pass was that I analysed fan fictions without having asked for the authors' consent. However, as I retrieved all of them from the public domain website FanFiction.Net there were no copyright or privacy infringements (Whiteman, 2007). Moreover, the aliases of the authors of the fan fictions in my sample will not be named in this dissertation.

### Interviews

While some academics consider entering an established online community in order to obtain prospective participants' e-mail addresses unethical, O'Connor *et al.* (2008) have argued that recruiting research participants this way is not unethical as the members of a public online community have to take into account that their information and e-mail addresses will be available to anyone if they choose to publish them online. In the case of my research, I decided that it was ethically acceptable to directly e-mail the authors of Haldir fan fiction to request their

participation in my research for the same reasons that O'Connor *et al.* outlined. This also allowed the authors to simply ignore my request and delete it, a fact that was generally problematic to me but an easy solution for the authors I e-mailed if they did not want to take part in my research and thus minimised my intrusion of their privacy and time (O'Connor *et al.*, 2008). Moreover, I did not enter an online community solely for the purpose of my research but had been part of the FanFiction.Net *LOTR* community for more than six years.

As Steve Jones (2004) has argued, an important aspect of all research involving human subjects is transparency for participants regarding all areas of the study in question. Consequently, I did not only offer and provide prospective participants with the Participant Consent Form and Consent Statement to have a non-committal look at, but also gave them all of my and my ethical supervisor's contact details including full names, postal addresses, telephone numbers and e-mail addresses. In addition to all of this, I encouraged the (prospective) participants of my study to ask any questions that they might have before, during and after the interview, and I answered all of their questions openly unless I felt that a frank answer might have influenced their interview responses or the anonymity of other participants. In such cases, I chose to say directly that I could not answer their question for these very reasons.

- Participant Consent

In accordance with the University of Leicester's Code of Practice on Ethical Standards for Research Involving Human Participants, all of my respondents were

provided with a Participant Consent Form (see Appendix 2) and Consent Statement (see Appendix 3) which guaranteed the participants of my study complete anonymity and confidentiality regarding all aspects of the interviews according to the Data Protection Act 1998. Correspondingly, their names and identifying affiliations will be anonymized in this dissertation; instead, each interviewee will be coded with an 'R' for 'respondent', and will randomly be allocated an additional number between one and four, such as R4, for example.

- Underage Ethics

In one case, however, I was required to slightly adjust my ethics procedure and documents, as one of the participants was less than eighteen years old. I did not know this at the time I e-mailed her requesting her participation, but only found out when she agreed to participate while mentioning herself that she was underage and thus could be restricted in her participation. Nevertheless, she fit all criteria of my interview sample perfectly, and although she was considered a legal minor in the UK, I decided to interview her still as the University of Leicester's Code of Practice on Ethical Standards for Research Involving Human Participants states that

“[A]rticle 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child [...] requires that children who are capable of forming their own views should be granted the right to express them freely in all matters affecting them, commensurate with their age and maturity.”

(University of Leicester, 2008)

Looking at this excerpt, I decided that it was ethically acceptable for me to interview this under-age participant for the following reasons: Firstly, the fact that she was less than eighteen but more than sixteen years old and thus could be considered to be in the transition from childhood to adulthood; secondly, the fact that she had explicitly expressed a willingness to take part in my research but at the same time had also mentioned that she was underage, thereby demonstrating a high level of maturity and awareness of legal and ethical requirements in research projects. Finally, it had to be taken into account that she does publish her fan fiction stories on-line and thereby participates in an online community where fan fiction serves as a way to express one's views and opinions publicly (see Bacon-Smith and Allington in the Literature Review).

At the same time, it was highly unlikely that my study would have any psychological, health-related, social, economic or political impacts on any of the participants due to the fact that it solely focused on the participants' work published online and not on aspects of their private life. In order to protect the one underage interviewee further, however, I additionally did not ask the last of my interview question as it inquired about the interviewees' views on sex in Haldir fan fiction (as mentioned above).

Moreover, I modified the Participant Consent Form and Consent Statement according to the minor participant's age (see Appendices 4 and 5), simplifying the forms' language legal terminology and lowering the confirmation of her age to at

least sixteen years. As a result, it was possible to further comply with the University of Leicester's Code of Practice on Ethical Standards for Research Involving Human Participants which demands that "efforts should be made to obtain informed consent from children involved in any research" (University of Leicester, 2008).

Finally, I left it up to her to decide if she would like to inform her parents of the project due to the fact that informed consent was given directly by her, but suggested to her that informing her parents might be a good idea.

### **Chapter 3:**

#### **Analysis and Discussion**

In this chapter I am going to discuss the similarities and differences I found in my text and narrative analyses of the Haldir fan fiction sample and will complement my findings with those from the interviews I conducted. First, I will explore how the generic conventions of romance novels can be seen as influencing the portrayal of Haldir and the OFC, how in particular sexual behaviour is used as a means of characterisation and how common themes in romantic Haldir fan fiction not based on romance novels bring about further characterisation patterns for both Haldir and the OFC. Subsequently, I am going to look at the characterisations of the OFC in more detail and will evaluate how the lack of information about Haldir and being a female fan author and reader influence the meaning and implications of the OFC, particularly with regards to her as easy to identify with, a reassuring ideal and as facilitator of a form of ‘double escapism’.

#### **Romance Novels as Basis for Character Portrayal in Romantic Haldir Fan Fiction**

When conducting the textual analysis of my Haldir fan fiction sample of ten, one of my first observations was that six had plots, basic content and character portrayals that paralleled those of romance novels and that this influenced the portrayal of both the character of Haldir and of the OFC as romantic hero and heroine strongly. This analysis was informed by Linda Barlow and Jayne Ann Krentz’s outline of typical romance novels including, most importantly, a “spirited young [woman]”

thrown together with a “mysterious” hero having a discernible past (1992: 17-19). Both clash repeatedly (verbally, not physically), thereby presenting themselves as a suitable challenge for one another. In the end, the happiness of both “depend[s] upon *her* ability to teach him how to love” (my emphasis) and on *her* ability to transform their relationship into one of deep love and fulfilment, although the hero is the one that is physically stronger and/or economically and socially better off (*ibid.*). In addition, the suspense of the story does not depend on *whether* the two will end up together but on *how* and *when* this happens (Driscoll, 2006).

Although places, events and original characters vary in the different fan stories in my sample, the basic concepts as named above remain: At the beginning, an original female character is more or less ‘forced’ due to her occupation (for example as maid), sustained injuries or other form of predicament to spend a certain amount of time with Haldir, a mysterious and inscrutable Elf of high rank from a renowned Elven kingdom. Although the OFC and Haldir might not be immediately attracted to one another but argue and clash directly, there is a type of bond between the two right from their first meeting which at least one of them can feel:

“He sighed. He did not understand why he felt drawn to this woman, or why he had such a strong desire to speak with her.” (“The Lost One”)

In the fictions it is thus made clear from when the OFC and Haldir first meet that they are destined to be together; the only question remaining is what will happen to

make them fall in love and to unite the two forever. This observation was directly and indirectly supported by all of my interviewees; for example, respondent R1 summed the structures and emphases of her fan fictions up as follows:

“I like the romance, I like stretching Haldir’s nerves taut with a female who both irritates and entices him. I think the fun is [...] in the tension of the growing attraction.”

Thus, as respondent R1 says, the actual storyline with its twists, turns and “growing attraction” is more important than the ending, which of course will be happy. It is all about *how* the story develops and how the two main characters, Haldir and the OFC, contribute to it.

Consequently, the romantic generic conventions influence the portrayal of the original female character and of Haldir to a very large extent as in all of the previously mentioned fan fictions the OFC is depicted as a young and strong-willed heroine while Haldir is portrayed as a mysterious hero who in one way or another has to learn how to love. While it is these exact portrayals that allow for a storyline as it is found in romance novels to develop, there is also another further important feature that has been added in all six fan fictions which makes them slightly different from generic romance literature.

This feature is the portrayal of the OFC as not only a young and strong-willed heroine but also as a woman or she-Elf who has suffered through an immense

tragedy such as losing her family or previous lover. Once she meets Haldir, who has usually got to overcome his own terrible past or excessive self-control in his devotion to his duty to his country/kingdom, the two are able to surmount their respective pasts through their mutual love and support, as in the fiction “Hidden Hero”. Here, the heroine has to overcome the loss of her brother and best friend who died in an Orc attack, while Haldir has to deal with the death of his parents a few millennia before which forced him to take on a parental role for his younger brothers and to sacrifice his youth in the process. Both characters were of course able to survive without the other before and to even live a considerably happy life, but when they join forces together in a romantic relationship, they are able to move on from their pasts, be far happier than before and, in a way, become invincible as a team.

While many academics and members of the general public see romance novels as being disempowering for women (Radway, 1984; Krentz, 1992), there are also voices like the romance writers Susan Elizabeth Phillips (1992), Robyn Donald (1992) and academic Janice Radway (1984) who claim that romance novels are really a form of female empowerment. Their argument is based on the fact that romance novels only reach their happy end through the way in which the heroine is able to use her intelligence, compassion, courage, loyalty and kindness to help both her and the hero to overcome the shadows of their past. This form of empowerment can also be seen in the six Haldir fan fictions modelled on them, as in all of them, Haldir’s physical strength, social status and other superior attributes (like his ability to heal) usually do come in handy at one point or another in the

story, but the decisive attributes for their happy ending is the way they can transform each other's nature and how particularly the OFC can change Haldir for his own good (e. g. "Take Your Pain Away", "The Lost One", "Hidden Hero"). My interviewees referred to this matter, too; for example, R2 of my respondents summarised the importance of the female character the following way:

"She may say a kind word to him just when he needs it, or she may slap his face when no one else dares. [...] Basically, she rocks his world in some way, often annoying him because of it. But when the dust settles, he's always intrigued... and a lot happier."

Thus, the characteristics possessed by an OFC modeled on romantic heroines play an important role in the course the Haldir fan fictions take, and only due to these she has the power to shake up Haldir's way of being and to change his and her own lives.

### **Sexual Behaviour as Means of Characterisation in Romantic Haldir Fan Fiction**

One aspect, however, where many of my sampled romantic Haldir stories vary from one another is the inclusion, exclusion and type of portrayal of love-making. As Jayne Ann Krentz has argued (1992), romance novels can but do not have to contain depictions of erotic scenes (such as naked bodies) and sexual intercourse; however, it is always a symbol of a character or a relationship (promiscuity= never known love, (attempted) rape= despicability of character, 'making love'= affirmation of romantic relationship, restraint= nobility of character). In my sample of ten fan

fictions, five of them were, according to FanFiction.Net's standards, classified as "M" - containing content "[n]ot suitable for children or teens below the age of 16 with possible strong but non-explicit adult themes, references to violence, and strong coarse language" (Fictionratings.com, 'Fiction Ratings': 2005). Looking at them more closely, however, it turned out that these five were in fact classified as such primarily due to their sexual content (graphic depictions of nudity and sexual intercourse), but that only two of them were part of the grouping of six fan fictions similar to romance novels mentioned in the section above. This could be seen as implying that sexual relations are not as important in Haldir fan stories bearing resemblance to romance novels due to the fact that the remaining four fan fictions from the romance novel genre were classified maximally as "T", "[s]uitable for teens, 13 years and older, with some violence, minor coarse language, and minor suggestive adult themes" (in the case of the sampled fan fictions: kissing and topless males) (Fictionratings.com, 'Fiction Ratings': 2005). Consequently, it can be argued that Haldir fan fiction based on romance novels features sex scenes mainly as 'plot sex', i.e. developing along with the plot as part of a growing intimacy between two characters, rather than as 'porn sex' where sexual encounters are the predominant feature of the storyline (Driscoll, 2006).

In my interviews my respondents' answers indicated too that sex in romantic Haldir fan fiction is plot sex rather than porn sex, explaining that it was usually something inevitable happening alongside the formation of a romantic couple in the fictions they authored. For example, respondent R1 stressed that sex was important but more like "icing on the cake", while another, R3, stated that she purposely included

a lot of sex in her stories as “[people] want to read about the affairs and the love and yes, the sex”. At the same time, however, she also stated that

“it’s very easy to portray the depth, or lack thereof, of a relationship between the characters through sex (or lack thereof).”

Thus, even though sexual content seems to have a subordinate role in romantic Haldir fan fiction in general and particularly in those paralleling romance novels, it can be argued that when it is used, it is an indication of a persona’s character as well as of a relationship as it is in romance novels, and consequently forms an important aspect in the portrayal of both the character of Haldir and the OFC.

### **The Nature of Character Portrayals in Romantic Haldir Fan Fiction Not Based on Romance Novels**

Next to the six fan fictions bearing resemblance to romance novels the remaining four fictions followed different patterns. While they again focused on a an independent and strong-willed OFC, only the stories “The Midsummer Hunt”, “The March Warden” and “Because of You, I Am Afraid” are once more concerned with *how* Haldir and the OFC will end up together, while the last one, called “The Hunt” centres on predestination and the moment when the OFC and Haldir get together, which I shall discuss later.

In terms of the first three, it can be said that all of them concentrate on how Haldir deals with a lover who is literally going her own way. For example, “Because of

"You, I Am Afraid" deals with an elven OFC who long ago decided to live as a healer in a human village outside the borders of Lothlorien. Haldir, who used to be her lover, broke up with her because of it as he could not accept and support her decision to do so. Now, the OFC's village is suffering from food shortage and a dire winter, and in the end, Haldir sees the errors of his ways, orders the elves to come to the humans' and the OFC's aid and manages to win her back, this time accepting her decision to live among humans.

Thus, the portrayal of Haldir and the OFC also plays an important part in this type of romantic stories. While the OFC is again a strong-willed and independent character, possibly in a more modern sense when making 'career' and 'live' decisions, Haldir is portrayed as already in love with the OFC but too stubborn or conservative to accept the decision she makes as an independent she-Elf. These characterisations are consequently what drives the plot, and they allow it to focus once more on the *interactions* (i.e. the *how*) between the two characters bringing about the obvious and natural happy ending.

Nevertheless, even the characters in this type of romantic Haldir fan fiction are subject to characterisation by means of their sexual behaviour. Most of all, it stands out that two of the fictions are rated "M" (for their graphic sexual content) and only one is rated "T" (for kisses and sexual references). Thus, in these stories, sex seems to be more important than in Haldir fan fiction based on romance novels, and it could be argued that this has a particular effect on the way in which the OFC and Haldir are supposed to be seen by the readers. Reflecting back on the entire

story-line – a man having to accept the career and life decisions of his girlfriend/wife – one can see parallels to the lives of many modern women struggling to unite the ideals of family, career and personal fulfilment. As modern day women are also more sexually active and as sex has come to be considered “normal” in most romantic relationships in Western countries nowadays, one could argue that the stronger emphasis on sex in at least two of the stories mentioned above polishes off the OFC as reflecting a modern-day woman rather than a she-Elf contemporary of Tolkien’s Middle Earth.

Lastly, there is the aforementioned story “The Hunt” which does not fit in any of the two romantic story categories above. Although it does, like all others, focus on how Haldir and the OFC come together, it is different in that the storyline does not contain the usual chain of events and communication leading to a blissfully united couple. Rather, it draws on predestination as a bond between lovers, and has Haldir chasing the OFC as part of a hunt taking place “only once every few hundred years” where both follow the call of their *fëar* (the ‘spirits’ or ‘souls’ of elves which can be joined to form a spiritual bond representing an elven marriage). Once he finds her, Haldir has to conquer her (physically) before they are united by a night of intense love-making. Thus, the portrayals of Haldir as hunter and the OFC as prey/hunted are very different from both the depictions of the two in fan fiction based on romance novels and in the three fan fictions I mentioned in the previous paragraphs. Although they seem to be implying that the OFC is the weaker of the two, one will see upon closer inspection that once again this is not the case, as even here the OFC is independent and has a will of her own. She

does not simply surrender to Haldir's attempts to conquer her but makes it as difficult as possible for him, even using her own weapons, a set of knives. Haldir must thus again prove himself to be worthy of her by being able to break through her physical defences while restraining himself to not hurt her in any way. Both of them are independent in that they were able to live without one another before they went on The Hunt, but they are just as dependent on one another as each needs the other for their own spiritual fulfilment. Consequently, neither of the two is better off than the other, and while Haldir does possess the muscular strength to defeat the OFC physically, it is of no use to him in the achievement of their actual goal of spiritual romantic bonding. Therefore, despite the fact that both Haldir and the OFC can be said to be depicted as equal independent beings, they are both also equally dependent as they are destined to be with one another and thus need each other for fulfilment and perfect happiness.

As in all other fan fictions rated "M" in my sample, the eventual sexual encounter between Haldir and the OFC in "The Hunt" helps to portray both their characters and the relationship the two have with one another. Both are equally lustful and aggressive but without any harmful consequences for either of them. They are on the same level, none of them inferior or superior to the other, and both are not afraid to actively take what they want (= the other). In their case, the sexual intercourse is the most explicit culmination of their relationship of all the fan fictions in my sample, as it represents an actual spiritual romantic bond between the two:

“And when at last they came together it was not with the half-crazed wildness of the night, but with an awareness and focus that spoke of rapidly awakening feelings. [...] And when it was over, each felt the amazing sense of rightness that came with finding one’s destined fëa-mate.” (“The Hunt”)

Thus, sexual behaviour is again used as a way to portray both Haldir’s and the OFC’s characters as their aggressiveness and lust in this passage seems to demonstrate once more that they are independent equals even ‘in the bedroom’ and that both possess strong minds. At the same time, however, their sexual encounter also implies that their “eternal bond” is spiritually and physically inevitable, and that it can only take place between these two as they are destined to be with each other, singling them out from the rest of the characters in the story.

### **The Portrayals of Original Female Characters in Romantic Haldir Fan Fiction and Their Implications**

When investigating the portrayal of the original female character in my sample of romantic Haldir fan fiction it soon became obvious to me that it was impossible to separate the portrayal of the OFC from the portrayal of Haldir. While I had expected a focus on Haldir as the object of the fandom and thus a close relationship between the depiction of him and of the OFC as his love interest, I did not anticipate finding that Haldir remains primarily the object of the fandom, with the OFC who determining *his* portrayal rather than vice versa. This is brought about by the fact that her characterisation as strong and independent sets up the story line and narrative conventions that define Haldir, while at the same she

reflects upon the fan relationship authors and readers have with Haldir as the object of their fandom.

#### The Lack of Information about Haldir

One of the main reasons why the OFC is so influential in the portrayal of Haldir is likely the fact that very little is known about the character of Haldir from both Tolkien's works and Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings (LOTR)* trilogy. As mentioned before, Haldir only makes two appearances in the first *LOTR* book *The Fellowship of the Ring*, whereas Peter Jackson has granted him a bigger role in his trilogy where Haldir is featured in the first and in the second film and where he is portrayed more like a leader and a warrior than he is in the books. Nevertheless, even his film portrayal was relatively depthless, and except for a few obvious characteristics, such as his elven stiffness, aloofness and his slight arrogance, his character is very 'producerly', i.e. full of gaps, and thus leaves it entirely up to the authors of Haldir fan fiction to create and fill out his character with personal attributes (Fiske, 1992).

The variety of types of Haldir fan fiction in my romantic fan fiction sample only shows the beginnings of the variety of portrayals of his character through fan fiction authors. In my interviews, for example, each of the four authors seemed to have their own specific picture of Haldir in mind, and so, given the lack of actual information about him, it could be argued that when they say to get the inspiration for their stories (amongst other things) from his character alone, it is more likely to

be inspiration from his character *as they see it* rather than his actual character on screen or in the book.

### The Influence of Being a Fan on Character Portrayals in Haldir Fan Fiction

Looking at my Haldir fan fiction sample from Pugh's (2005) point of view of fan fiction as a result of fans "wanting more" of and from their object of fandom, I found her theory to be supported, as the relationship between the authors of my sample and Haldir as their object of fandom seemed to influence the portrayal of the OFC and thus of Haldir significantly. Not only did these portrayals seem to depend on how the fan fiction authors see Haldir, but also on how they themselves identify with the OFC as his counterpart.

As the object of the fandom and as the hero of romantic fan fiction, Haldir always remains the sole focus of all ten of my sample stories, but in at least eight of them it is the OFC who is depicted as most active in establishing a relationship with him (e.g. "Falling in Doubt", "Because of You I Am Afraid"). Moreover, the major part of the story is told from the OFC's third-person subjective narrative position in all ten of them, although there are (less frequent) shifts to the third-person point of view of Haldir. As a result, the main access point for the readers to the story is the OFC as it is her thoughts that they learn about the most, with their perception of Haldir and other characters in the story taking place mainly through the eyes of the OFC. This distribution of narrative positions complies with Laura Kinsale's observation that in most romance literature the female character or heroine provides the narrative point of view and thus is the point of access for the reader into the story of the

romance and can be seen as “holding open a spot [...] into which the [...] reader can slip mentally” as it is primarily aimed at a female audience (Kinsale, 1992: 2). At the same time, she argues, the hero is merely there as an object to be engaged rather than identified with by the heroine and through her, the (female) reader.

Coming back to romantic Haldir fan fiction, it can be argued that their general parallels with Kinsale’s observations regarding romance literature has certain implications for the characterisation of the OFC and Haldir. First of all, making Haldir the passive admired object rather than the protagonist and prime narrator of fan fiction on him could be considered to be a representation of the relationship Haldir fans have with him as their object of fandom. Like all fan relationships, their relationship with Haldir is automatically an imbalanced one as it is upon them as fans to be active in order to establish a relationship with him; he himself cannot reach out and address each fan personally (Bacon-Smith, 1992). Portraying Haldir the way fans imagine him in fan fiction is therefore a way in which authors and readers can engage with Haldir and establish a more personal relationship with him through the OFC, bringing him closer to themselves. In my interviews, I found this observation supported as several authors mentioned that they had a hard time expressing exactly what it is that they feel about their stories and Haldir in particular. For them, writing and reading about Haldir is very personal, and they can get very angry at portrayals that are not ‘worthy’ of him – in their opinion. For example, respondent R1 stated that “[perhaps] Tolkien never delved so deeply into this minor character of his [Haldir], but I for one can’t leave him alone” and warned other writers “don’t make Haldir some foppish, blushing elf or I see red”, while

another respondent said that “[after] ‘meeting’ Haldir [watching *The Two Towers* film], I suddenly found that I could write again, after a [burnout] hiatus of 7 years” (R2).

Thus, it can be argued that the portrayal of Haldir as a rather passive object is a reflection of the imbalanced relationship fans have with him as object of their fandom. However, that is not all as it also allows reading and writing fans to (re-) interpret his character and to endow him with whatever characteristics they want him to have (Kaplan, 2006) in order to establish a more personal and direct relationship with him. The OFC is highly important in this process at the same time, as she serves as a point of access into this more personal relationship with Haldir.

#### The Influence of the Fan and Female Gaze on the Portrayal of the OFC and Haldir

In addition to bringing about characterisations of Haldir and the OFC that reflect fans’ imbalanced fan relationship with Haldir, Haldir fan fiction in which the OFC seems to hold open a spot to slip in for the female reader can also be considered to be a demonstration of how fans do not remain entirely powerless even if they are forced to admire their object of fandom from a distance. While Haldir fictions are of course an homage to his character in *LOTR*, fan fiction authors not only actively endow his ‘marginal’ persona in Tolkien’s world with the attributes they wish him to have but they can also be said to make him subject to a ‘female gaze’, thereby establishing him as an object of their fan fetish and subverting traditional roles of males and females in the mass media as laid out by Laura Mulvey (1975).

Whereas in Mulvey's theory of the "male gaze" women on screen are said to be depicted as objects of the gaze of the male viewer and thus as an object of pleasure for a male audience with the men on screen driving the plot action, Haldir fan fiction with its predominantly female readership seems to subvert this gendered depiction. As Jenkins has argued in accordance with Mulvey's theory, women in mass media audiences are frequently forced to take up a male subject position to read media content in the way it is intended, creating a form of "intellectual transvestism" (2006: 44). However, Jenkins also claimed that media content aimed specifically at women, such as romance novels as well as romantic fan fiction have been used to counter this mental gender adjustment by making the woman the bearer of the look.

A subversion of the male gaze by making the male the object of a female and fan-fetishist gaze can also be said to occur in my sample of Haldir fan fiction, where Haldir seems to be the object of a female gaze. This is brought about particularly by the way in which he and the OFC are characterised and depicted; for example, in my sample of Haldir fan fictions, descriptions of him are always detailed and graphic, and his physical attributes like his muscular form and fine features are frequently mentioned. The OFC, on the contrary, is in most cases only described briefly and mainly by her hair, eyes, figure and clothing. A good example of the female gaze in Haldir fan fiction can be found in "Amarië & Haldir: Paths of Destiny" where Haldir's first entrance is described as follows:

“The haughty voice came from behind the Elves directly in front of her. Immediately, they parted, revealing another male Elf—tall, with long silvery blond hair and dark, finely arched brows. Although garbed like the others, he was an imposing figure, greater than all the other Elves both in authority and sheer physical perfection. At the moment, he seemed to be looking down his nose at her, his expression quite insolent and his cool gray eyes taking in far more of her appearance than she liked.”

It can be argued that the detailed description of Haldir’s voice, figure, hair, face, eyes and demeanour in this passage puts him on display for the reader for detailed study and admiration and thus actively subjects him to the fan and female gaze. As respondent R2 mentioned in my interviews, she believes that Haldir should be portrayed to appeal not only to be admired by the OFC but also by the reader so they “fall in love with him alongside the OFC”. It therefore becomes evident that the portrayal of the OFC as the bearer of the gaze and Haldir as the object of it is an important aspect in Haldir fan fiction as it can be considered to reflect and to some extent even transform the imbalanced fan relationship fans have with Haldir by actively subjecting him to the powerful admiration and judging looks of the female character and thereby, his fans.

Most importantly, however, the characterisation of the OFC as the bearer of the look and of Haldir as object of the look leads to a form of role-reversal in Haldir fan fiction. Resisting the “intellectual transvestism” (Jenkins, 2006) common in mass media where women are forced to take up a male subject position to identify with the gaze that is then male, the female character in Haldir fan fiction is *not* to be

looked at but is the bearer of the look; she drives the action and is more active in establishing the romantic relationship central to the plot (as mentioned above) while Haldir seems to take the place that was previously reserved for the female, to be of the rather passive object of the gaze, the gaze that now becomes female itself. Thus, the parallels of romantic Haldir fan fiction to other romance literature – such as the OFC as the point of access for the reader and the male hero as the object to be admired (Kinsale, 1992) – not only reflects and helps to overcome the imbalanced relationship of Haldir fans with their object of fandom but also rids readers and authors of intellectual transvestism through the transformation of the male gaze into a female one, thereby empowering readers and authors once more as fans and as women consuming media.

#### The OFC as a Desirable and Accessible Character for Reader Identification

While the fan and the female gaze thus linger on the character of Haldir in my sample of fan fiction on him, the OFC as the bearer of the look, the prime narrator (as mentioned above) and thus the persona to identify with for the reader seems to require a certain set of attributes to make her credible for the readers and thus easy or desirable to identify with.

As mentioned repeatedly throughout this analysis, the most stringent attributes which are awarded to all OFCs in my sample are those of personal independence, strong will and honesty. At the same time, more traditional social notions of femininity (Krentz, 1992) such as being very emotional, exceptionally beautiful or naïve are included in only four out of the ten fictions in my sample, and are never

the OFCs primary defining characteristics, beauty in particular. Although all heroines in my sample of Haldir fan fiction do possess a basic attractiveness, their beauty often becomes secondary due to the fact that nine out of them are elves and one is half-Elf and half-human. As Tolkien's elves all are beautiful, beauty is automatically one less attribute that could single an OFC out from others and define her. In my interviews, three respondents supported this observation, stating that "beauty is not all [Haldir] wants" (R1) but that the OFC should have "enough pleasing physical attributes to capture male attention, but without having these attributes be the centre of the story" (R4). Their statements paralleled another of my observation regarding beauty: In at least nine out of the ten fan fictions in my sample, the most detailed descriptions of the OFCs were based on her personal characteristics rather than physical attributes, particularly when she is being assessed by Haldir:

"But, despite never being able to see her hair, (for she not once removed the scarf in his presence,) he found her incredibly arousing. No woman had ever dared to stand up to him the way she did (on every opportunity provided, he might add!), no woman possessed the same inner strength she seemed to exude. She frustrated him, teased him, brushed him off and drove him mad with longing." ("Take Your Pain Away")

Thus, aspects of the OFC's physical beauty, like her hair, are hardly described and become secondary in romantic Haldir fan fictions like "Take Your Pain Away"; instead, the focus is on the OFC's personality which is described in a lot greater

detail. It could therefore be argued focusing on the OFC's personality rather than her physical attributes makes her more accessible and desirable to identify with for the readers, as it complies with the storyline focusing on inner feelings, transformations and strength rather than mere action, events and appearances. In order to identify with her, the reader must be able relate to the OFC; too strong differences between the appearances of the reader and of the OFC could hinder this process, as visible attributes like physical features are harder to imagine in oneself during identification rather than personal attributes.

In addition to the focus on the OFC's personality for easier identification there also seems to be a row of personal attributes that an OFC must *not* have to enable willing identification. In my interviews, all respondents mentioned that both "whiny, nagging, pansy-ish can't-take-care-of-herself-ridiculousness" (R3) as well as super-human like qualities (like invincibility, being good at everything, etc.) are very undesirable for them in an OFC. Looking at my sample of Haldir fan fictions, I found that only two of them classified as either category while all other eight did not feature women with such qualities at all or only as antagonists or fools on the side. At the same time, the actual OFCs in these eight stories had both explicit strengths (such as intelligence, wit, compassion, honesty, uprightness or self-confidence) *and* weaknesses (such as a quick temper, lack of self-confidence or stubbornness), and from my interviews, it seemed that being 'human' in this way is the second most important aspect of her character next to the OFC's independence and strong will. As my respondents put it, she must have "positive and negative traits" (R2) so she can "blend in with the canon characters" (R4) and

readers can identify with her (R2). They also stated that the OFC can make mistakes, learn from them and apologise, “thereby demonstrating maturity and character growth” (R2). Thus, it seems that this important human-ness of the OFC’s character again facilitates the process of identification with her for the fan fiction readers who can relate to the fact that she, like everyone else, has good and negative traits to her personality, similar to McGrath-Kerr’s study on the degradation of “Super-Sam” in the *Stargate SG-1* fandom (2006).

At the same time, however, although she must appear human regarding her personality, it is interesting to note that there are no depictions of an OFC portraying her as an actual human being in my sample. As mentioned above, nine OFCs from the ten fan fictions I analysed are elven, and one is half-elven, half-human. This has once more important implications for the OFC as the character with which readers are supposed to identify as it makes the entire storyline in which she features more realistic.

This is due to the fact that in the Tolkien canon, romantic relationships between humans and elves were exceptionally rare as elves are immortal. They can only die of fatal injuries or of grief, including heartbreak from the loss of a lover, and so stories involving a human/Haldir pairing inevitably have a tragic undertone as it is known to the author and to the reader that Haldir will in the end die along with the human OFC before his time while terribly suffering from grief. Thus, there would not be a truly happy ending for the two, a fact that also my interviewees picked up on. Three of them agreed that they disliked a Haldir/human couple, with

respondent R2 explicitly stating that she purposely does not use such pairings so she does not “have to deal with the whole immortality issue” and respondent R4 referring to the fact that such pairings are “highly inaccurate in the world Tolkien has created”. Thus, it becomes evident that realism for the readers as Tolkien fans plays an important role and influences the portrayal of the OFC not only in that she must be ‘normal’ or ‘human’ regarding her personality, but also in that she must be a credible counterpart for Haldir regarding her race in order to make her a desirable and accessible character to identify with for the readers.

#### Making the OFC a Reassuring Ideal for Fan Readers

Moreover, despite being a desirable and accessible character for reader identification, the original female character in Haldir fan fiction can also be seen as a reassuring ideal. In my fan fiction sample, I found that each and every one of them is, in some way, about the achievement of male and female happiness and fulfilment through a romantic relationship, and the fact that this can only come about if both characters possess certain attributes like independence, strong will, honesty, and mutual respect. Although the individual storylines and OFCs vary in my story sample – featuring princesses, maids, healers, and warriors – all of the fictions revolve around the issues of self-fulfilment and happiness and how the OFCs can achieve it. Although it could be criticised that each happy ending means a heterosexual romantic relationship with Haldir, it is important to acknowledge that this is in fact just one (although important) aspect of the happy ending. As mentioned in my discussion above of the types of romances depicted in Haldir fan fictions, the aspect of coming together in romantic Haldir fan fictions is expected

but secondary; it is the way with all of its obstacles in which the OFC and Haldir find each other that is the most important aspect of the story. In the six stories similar to romance novels, for example, it is the way in which both Haldir and the OFC overcome their respective pasts and their mutual dislike; in the other three similar stories, it is how Haldir deals with the OFC's decisions and highly independent lifestyle, and even in "The Hunt" it is the way in which Haldir and the OFC accept *each other*. Thus, what makes all of my sample's endings happy is not just the fact that the OFC and Haldir are united, but the fact that all problems and obstacles have been overcome.

The reason why this is important regarding the portrayal of the OFC is the fact that next to the gratification derived from being a fan reading about their object of fandom, the readers of Haldir fan fiction also embark on a hard but happily ending quest for ideal personal fulfilment with the OFC. Identifying with her can give the readers the reassurance that everything, both relationships and more practical problems, will turn out well for them and the OFC if only they both stick to the proven personal values of independence, strong will and honesty. As Phillips has argued, this is a common appeal of romantic literature where the hero himself as well as the plot become a "potent symbol of all the obstacles life presents to women", and the happy ending brought about by the strong heroine in the story reassures the reader that being independent and courageous will eventually allow a woman to overcome whatever she may have to face, just by herself (Phillips, 1992). As also respondent R2 explained in my interviews, she feels that her audience does read her stories for "escapism, and so [she] give[s] them (and

[her]self) upbeat endings” for their reassurance. Thus, the portrayal of the OFC as independent, strong-willed and honest is very important in Haldir fan fiction as it allows the fan fiction readers to identify with her and to draw on the reassurance brought about by the OFC’s ideal happy ending which she produced herself.

### The OFC as Facilitator of Double Escapism

At the same time, five out of ten stories in my sample of Haldir fan fiction featured original female characters who come to Lothlorien (Haldir’s home) to seek protection from something that physically or psychologically haunts them (“The Lost One”, “Take Your Pain Away”, “Amarië & Haldir: Paths of Destiny”). When crossing the borders of Lothlorien, they (literally) run into Haldir, who indirectly protects the OFCs, keeping whatever follows them out with aid of his troops of which he is the leader. Lothlorien thus becomes a safe haven for the OFCs to which they can withdraw to sort out and overcome their problems, just like the readers and authors of Haldir fan fiction can ‘withdraw’ to a story to ‘meet’ Haldir and to escape their problems (R2; Gwenllian-Jones, 2003). For both the reader and the OFC, Haldir is an important contributor to the solution of their problems, and in both cases it is not about what he does in a practical sense (i.e. killing the orcs that chased the OFC is fine but it is not the solution to the problem that these orcs have just killed the OFC’s family and the grief is ripping her apart) but how he psychologically supports and transforms them both. Thus, the OFC in romantic Haldir fan fiction can be said to allow a double form of escapism for the readers: On the one hand, as a means to engage with Haldir’s character as object of their fandom, allowing authors and readers to take off their minds of the everyday world,

while on the other hand, as granting them access to the story and to Lothlorien as a safe haven for them where they can withdraw to to be reassured of themselves and of the fact that any problems they might have will eventually be resolved.

## Conclusion

This study aimed to examine the way in which fan engagement takes place through fan productivity in the *Lord of the Rings (LOTR)* fandom and more specifically, through romantic fan fiction on the minor character of Haldir. Focusing on the portrayal of original female characters (OFCs) in this type of fan fiction, I have argued that OFCs are being used by authors and readers to reflect on Haldir fans' own relationships with their object of fandom, to resist intellectual transvestism and to create a form of double escapism.

In terms of the portrayal of OFCs, my textual analysis paired with narrative analysis and interviews led me to conclude that all ten fan fictions in my sample shared a common basic portrayal of the OFC as an independent and strong-willed she-Elf (or half-Elf) who knows what she wants, regardless of the romantic sub-genres she was featured in. For example, while romantic Haldir fan fiction adopting the generic conventions of romance literature (Barlow and Krentz, 1992) accordingly create Haldir's character as a mystic romantic hero with the OFC being the romantic heroine, some authors seem to use their romantic Haldir stories and their two protagonists also to reflect on modern day issues women have to deal with, including managing a career and a family/love-life. Moreover, as in much other romance literature, sexual behaviour seems to be a commonly used way to characterise both the OFC and Haldir, generally featuring sex as 'plot sex' rather than 'porn sex', i.e. as a symbol of growing romantic intimacy between the two protagonists (Fiske, 1992).

In addition, an important feature of Haldir fan fiction appears to be that its source text, the character Haldir in the *Lord of the Rings* books (Tolkien, 1954) and films (Jackson, 2001, 2002), is of a rather 'producerly' nature (Fiske, 1992) as hardly anything is known about him. It can be argued that this creates an even stronger bond between fan fiction author/readers and Haldir as their object of fandom, as it requires them to invent most of his character themselves. Particularly in my interviews it seemed that all authors have their very own picture of Haldir in mind, while it furthermore appeared that they created Haldir according to the characteristics of the OFC rather than vice versa, thus purposely using the OFC as a means to engage directly with Haldir as the object of their fandom. At the same time, my analysis of the fan fiction sample also led me to consider the portrayal of the OFC as a resistance to the male gaze (Mulvey, 1975) and consequently to 'intellectual transvestism' (Jenkins, 1992) due to the fact that the OFC seems to be the driving force of the plot, while Haldir and his physical appearance are frequently made the centre of the OFC's and thus female readers' attention, creating a form of 'female gaze'. It was furthermore argued that this 'female gaze' is joined by another look, the 'fan gaze' which is again mediated by the OFC as the active character and helps to further engage fan readers with the character of Haldir directly.

Moreover, my narrative analysis of my fan fiction sample led me to conclude that rather than Haldir, it is the OFC who is the primary narrator and thus the character with which readers are supposed to identify. As a result, it seems that the OFC has

to be particularly accessible and desirable to identify with, meaning that she cannot be super-human-like but has to have strengths and weaknesses like all of us do and has to be at least half-Elven in race to make her a believable and acceptable counterpart for Haldir. However, the OFC is apparently not only a means to engage with Haldir and to slip into the storyline for the female readers, but also seems to serve as a reassuring ideal for them in that her own personal story is one of female success and fulfilment with regards to love *and* career, brought about solely by herself through her honesty, independence and strong will. The OFC could thus also be said to be a reassurance for readers and authors implying that if they stick to the same principles and attributes the OFC does, their happy ending will also be inevitable. Finally, it was argued that this leads to a form of double escapism as the OFC allows Haldir fan fiction readers to on the one hand escape their everyday life by identifying with her and joining an alternate world where happy endings most definitely happen, while on the other hand, she allows them to escape reality by serving as a means of engaging with Haldir, again through identification with her.

All in all, it can thus be said that the original female character in Haldir fan fiction is just as important as Haldir due the fact that she is the persona with which readers are supposed to identify in various ways and because she determines his character more than he determines hers. It is thus primarily through the identification with her that fans are able to directly engage with Haldir as the fan object in fan fiction. While this research aimed to expand on the existing research within the field of fan fiction studies by providing insights into the relationships fans establish with their objects of fandom, it could provide only a general overview as it

was based on and thus to a certain amount was limited by textual and narrative analysis. In order to find more concrete evidence for and expand on the findings of this paper, it would be necessary in future research to use interviews with authors and readers of fan fiction as the primary research tool in order to be able to focus on but go beyond fan fiction texts. Moreover, it would be very useful to have Sandvoss' psychoanalytical approaches regarding fandom and fan productivity as 'extension of the self' (2005b) as a starting point of future research, as the findings of this study strongly suggest that fan fictions invite an 'extension of the self' by the readers into the stories of their fandom.

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## Appendix 1

### Interview Questions

#### General

1. When did you start writing fan fiction? What prompted you to start writing?
2. What are your general inspirations when writing fan fiction?
3. What are your favourite fan fiction websites?
4. Do you beta-read fan fictions by other authors?

#### Haldir

5. Can you say a little bit about why you started writing about Haldir.
6. Is your admiration of Haldir based on the books, the films or other authors' fan fictions? Answered this one in answer to Q1
7. What qualities do you feel are important to the character of Haldir? How do these influence your writing?
8. Is there anything about Haldir's character that you change intentionally in your writing? If yes, why?
9. How important is Haldir's physical appearance for you when you create his character in your writing?

#### The (Other) Female Character(s)

10. What inspirations do you draw on when creating the main female character in Haldir fan fictions?
11. In your opinion, what are essential attributes of a credible and effective OFC?
12. What kind of portrayals do you not like in a characterisation of an OFC?
13. In your fan fictions, how (if at all) does the OFC single herself out from the other characters, i.e. is there anything that makes her special?
14. How important is the female characters' physical appearance in your Haldir fan fictions?
15. How important do you feel are sex and sexual experience in Haldir fan fictions? How important are the two in your own fan fictions in particular?

## **Appendix 2**

### **Participant Consent Form**

**Project: Haldir/OFC: The Creation of Original Female Characters in ‘Haldir Fics’**

**Contact Address:**

**Christine Weitbrecht  
301 Clarendon Park Road  
LE2 3AQ  
Leicester  
United Kingdom**

**Tel.: 0044 (0)7942 614330**

**E-mail: [cw151@le.ac.uk](mailto:cw151@le.ac.uk)**

**Natasha Whiteman  
Department of Media and Communication  
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LE1 7RH  
United Kingdom**

**Tel.: 0044 (0)116 2522797**

**E-mail: [new9@le.ac.uk](mailto:new9@le.ac.uk)**

**Date: 3rd February 2009**

### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

The title of this research is “Haldir/OFC: The Creation of Original Female Characters in ‘Haldir Fics’”. The principal investigator of this project is Christine Weitbrecht, a student at the University of Leicester Department Media and Communication. I am studying how authors of Lord of the Ring fanfictions featuring Haldir as their main character create an original female character (OFC) according to their own imagination, creativity and ideas. In cooperation with my supervisor **Natasha Whiteman**, a lecturer at the University of Leicester Department Media and Communication, I am collecting data from **adult** authors of Haldir fanfictions that contain an original female character. These data will inform my analysis of a sample of Haldir/OFC fanfictions and aid the detection of possible patterns and coherences in the portrayals of both characters depending on the type of the narrative. The data collected will also help to identify reasons of and influences on fanfiction authors leading to certain types of portrayals of both Haldir and the corresponding OFC.

### **PROCEDURES AND PROTECTION**

The research involves a small number of interviews with authors of Haldir/OFC fanfictions conducted via e-mail, Skype, instant messenger or telephone (depending on the individual respondents' preferences). The interview questions will explore the authors' inspirations, reasons and intentions regarding the portrayal of both the character of Haldir and the OFC. Questions about the authors' personal lives are restricted to their identification with the Lord of the Rings fandom and their motivations and history of reading and writing fanfictions.

All correspondence between the researcher and the interviewee will be recorded/transcribed for reference purposes and will be stored inaccessible for any third parties.

Each interview session will take approximately **20** minutes. The number of interview sessions will be agreed with the participants following discussion of the project.

Your participation in the project/survey is entirely voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the project at any point. You are also free to not answer any question asked by the researcher. If you are uncertain or uncomfortable about any aspect of your participation please contact me or my supervisor to discuss your concerns or request clarification on any aspect of the study.

Any information you supply to use will be treated confidentially in accordance with the 1998 Data Protection Act: your name and identifying affiliations will be anonymized in any resulting publications, unless you give me your explicit consent to identify you as a subject.

If you have any questions about the ethical conduct of this research please contact Natasha Whiteman (who is also the Departmental Ethics Officer), using the contact details at the top of this letter.

Thank you very much for participating,

**Christine Weitbrecht**

### **Appendix 3**

#### **CONSENT STATEMENT**

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. Before we carry out the research, we would like you to read the following statements and confirm your agreement to take part in this study.

**Please replace with the letter 'X'  
to confirm**

I confirm that I have read and understand the Participant Consent Form dated 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2009.

All the questions that I have about the research have been satisfactorily answered.

I give my consent to the storing of interview transcripts/recordings by the researcher.

I confirm that I am at least 18 years or older.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time, without giving reason.

I understand in the case of this study my printed signature replaces my handwritten one due to the digital nature of the research.

I agree to participate.

Participant's signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's name (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

Replace this box with the letter 'X' if you would like to receive a summary of the results of this study (no personal results) by e-mail Ω

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix 4**

### **Participant Consent Form**

**Project: Haldir/OFC: The Creation of Original Female Characters in ‘Haldir Fics’**

**Contact Address:**

**Christine Weitbrecht  
301 Clarendon Park Road  
LE2 3AQ  
Leicester  
United Kingdom**

**Tel.: 0044 (0)7942 614330**

**E-mail: [cw151@le.ac.uk](mailto:cw151@le.ac.uk)**

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**E-mail: [new9@le.ac.uk](mailto:new9@le.ac.uk)**

**Date: 20<sup>th</sup> March 2009**

### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

The title of my research is “Haldir/OFC: The Creation of Original Female Characters in ‘Haldir Fics’”. The study is being run by Christine Weitbrecht, a student at the University of Leicester Department Media and Communication, and I am studying how authors of Lord of the Ring fanfictions featuring Haldir as their main character create an original female character (OFC) according to their own imagination, creativity and ideas. In cooperation with my supervisor **Natasha Whiteman**, a lecturer at the University of Leicester Department Media and Communication, I am collecting data from authors of Haldir fanfictions that contain an original female character. I am interested in what the reasons and inspirations for authors are to portray Haldir and the OFC in the way they do, and whether these are similar or different from other Haldir fanfiction authors’. I will also be analysing a number of Haldir/OFC fanfictions for this purpose.

### **PROCEDURES AND PROTECTION**

The research involves a small number of interviews with authors of Haldir/OFC fanfictions conducted via e-mail, Skype, instant messenger or telephone (depending on the individual

respondents' preferences). The interview questions will explore your interest in fanfiction writing and your influences and inspirations when you write Haldir fanfictions. I will keep a record of all the e-mails, forms, interview questions and interview answers we exchange during this study, but they will be stored in a safe place inaccessible for any third parties.

Each interview session will take approximately **20** minutes. The number of interview sessions will be agreed with the participants following discussion of the project.

Your participation in the project/survey is entirely voluntary- this means that you are can withdraw from the project at any point. You also do not have to answer any question if you do not want to. Please ask me if you have any questions about this study.

Any information you supply to use will be treated confidentially in accordance with the 1998 Data Protection Act. Your name and screen name (i.e. fanfiction.net alias) will be anonymized in any resulting publications.

If you have any questions about the ethical conduct of this research please contact Natasha Whiteman (who is also the Departmental Ethics Officer), using the contact details at the top of this letter.

Thank you very much for participating,

**Christine Weitbrecht**

## **Appendix 5**

### **CONSENT STATEMENT**

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. Before we carry out the research, I would like you to read the following statements and confirm that you agree to take part in this study.

**Please replace with the letter 'X'  
to confirm**

I confirm that I have read and understand the Participant Consent Form dated 20<sup>th</sup> March 2009.

All the questions that I have about the research have been answered.

I give my consent to the researcher keeping a record of the electronic interview.

I confirm that I am at least 16 years or older.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time, without having to give a reason.

I understand in the case of this study my printed signature replaces my handwritten one due to the digital nature of the research.

I agree to participate.

Participant's signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's name (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

Replace this box with the letter 'X' if you would like to receive a summary of the results of this study (no personal results) by e-mail Ω

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_