Relating with the Other in naturecultures:
Ethics and well-being in *Elfquest* comics

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Literature
Fall 2015

JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO

Tiedekunta Humanistinen tiedekunta	Laitos Taiteiden ja kulttuurin tutkimuksen laitos
Tekijä Hilla Kaipainen	
Työn nimi Relating with the Other in naturecultures: Ethics and well-being in *Elfquest* comics	
Oppiaine Kirjallisuus	Työn laji Pro gradu -tutkielma
Aika Lokakuu 2015	Sivumäärä 143

Tiivistelmä

Tutkielma tarkastelee eettistä Toisen kohtaamista *Elfquest* -sarjakuvassa. *Elfquest* on yhdysvaltalaisten Wendy ja Richard Pinin vuodesta 1978 lähtien omakustanteena julkaisema populaari fantasiagenreen kuuluva sarjakuvasarja. Se sijoittuu Kahden kuun maailmaan, jota asuttavat mm. haltiat, peikot ja ihmiset. *Elfquest* rakentuu haltioiden alkuperän, autenttisuuden ja identiteetin etsinnän varaan ja siinä korostuvat erilaisten elämäntyylien ja maailmankuvien sovittelu ja yhteenkuuluvuus.

Mukailen etiikan määrittelyssäni Emmanuel Levinasin filosofiaa, jonka mukaan Minä tulee subjektiksi vastuussaan Toista kohtaan. Tämä eettinen, interpersoonallinen suhde edeltää ontologiaa eli olemista, tietämistä ja moraalia. Etiikkaa kuvaavat Minän ruumiillinen herkkyys ja haavoittuvuus sekä ääretön, epäsymmetrinen ja pakkomielteinen vastuu Toista kohtaan. Ankkuroin etiikan merkitystä aineelliseen todellisuuteen yhdistämällä ekokriittiseen luentaani posthumanismin ja hyvinvointitutkimuksen näkökulmia. Kriittinen posthumanismi suhtautuu epäillen ihmisen ja inhimillisyyden käsitteisiin sekä humanismin perintöön. Hyödynnän Donna Harawayn kumppanuuslajien figuuria, jossa materiaalinen ja historiallinen, ruumiillinen ja semioottinen, luonto ja kulttuuri lysähtävät yhteen luontokulttuureiksi. Hyvinvoinnin käsitteellistän erityisesti eudaimoniana eli itsen mahdollisuuksien toteuttamisena tai kukoistuksena.

Analyysissäni etiikkaa, hyvinvointia ja kumppanuuslajeja nivovat yhteen neljä teemaa: kuuluminen, tunnistaminen, parantuminen ja uudistuminen. Henkilöhahmot, joiden avulla suunnistan sarjakuvan aukkoisessa ja täydentämistä vaativassa kerronnassa ja omassa hermeneuttis-fenomenologisessa lähiluvussani, kuvastavat Paul Ricoeurin narratiivisen identiteetin käsitettä, jossa yhdistyvät samuus ja itseys. *Elfquest* osoittaa, miten koti turvapaikkana on uhattu, ja kuulumisen tunnetta luonnehtii yhteisön tietyyn ympäristöön sopeutunut elämäntyyli. Lajien sekoittuminen kumppanuudessa, yhteisöllinen hyväksyntä, anteeksianto sekä muistaminen, jonka toisen kohtaaminen synnyttää, vahvistavat yksilön persoonallista sitkeyttä tai joustavuutta. Parantumisen teemassa pahuus nähdään tahtona omistaa toinen, ja kärsimys ja kipu osana elämän tarkoituksen etsintää ja identiteetin eheytymistä. Lopuksi tarkastelen subjektia ajassa, jossa ero toiseen näyttäytyy rajoittuneisuutena, kasvatuksena ja hetkessä elämisen menetyksenä. Samalla havaitsen, että nämä sarjakuvan tulkintani ovat muuntuvia, sillä tulkitsija suhteessaan Toiseen kyseenalaistaa oman olemassaolonsa. Populaarikulttuurin kuluttaminen voi olla nautinnon ja haavoittumisen luonnehtimaa identiteettityötä, jonka suhde Toiseen tekee mahdolliseksi. Tätä luontokulttuurista mahdollisuutta syventää ihmislajin hyvinvointia, jota toiset lajit kannattelevat, tulisi hyödyntää kestävän kehityksen kasvatuksessa.

Asiasanat etiikka, ekokritiikki, posthumanismi, sarjakuvat, toiseus, hyvinvointi, eudaimonia, identiteetti, kumppanuuslaji, *Elfquest*, Emmanuel Levinas, Donna Haraway
Säilytyspaikka JYX-tietokanta, Jyväskylän yliopiston kirjasto
Muita tietoja

UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ

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Title Relating with the Other in naturecultures: Ethics and well-being in *Elfquest* comics	
Subject Literature	Level Master's thesis
Month and year October 2015	Number of pages 143

Abstract

This study examines the ethical encounter with the Other in *Elfquest* comics. *Elfquest* is a popular fantasy comics series authored and independently published by Wendy and Richard Pini since 1978. Its setting is a secondary world called World of Two Moons, inhabited by elves, trolls, and humans, among others. The plot structure of this comics series is a quest, in the course of which questions of origin, authenticity, and identity become accentuated and settled in relation to different worldviews and lifestyles.

Ethics is defined according to the philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, who has described how the I becomes a subjectivity in its pre-ontological interpersonal relationship with the Other. This encounter is characterized by corporeal sensibility, vulnerability, and an infinitely obliging, asymmetric responsibility of the I for the Other. I ground this meaning of ethics to the material reality by combining perspectives of posthumanism and well-being studies in my ecocritical reading. Critical posthumanism unsettles the concept of human and doubts the heritage of humanism. I employ Donna Haraway's figure of companion species, in which historical and material, bodily and semiotic, and nature and culture implode together as naturecultures. I discuss well-being principally as eudaimonia: self-realization, fulfilling of potentials or flourishing.

The analysis of my hermeneutic-phenomenological reading of *Elfquest* is organized into four themes: belonging, recognition, healing, and renewal. In the iconotextual, sequential realm of comics made up of pieces and gaps, characters function as narrative tools that enable orientation, empathy, and immersion in their fantasy world. They also embody Paul Ricoeur's concept of narrative identity which unites sameness and selfhood. *Elfquest* depicts home as an endangered place but grounds the sense of belonging of communities and species in their lifestyles, historically adapted to their environments. Personal resilience stems from the intermingling of species, communal support, and remembrance, incited in corporeal meeting of alterity. The theme of healing illustrates one's capacity for evil as a will to appropriate another being, but suffering and pain contribute to the quest for life's purpose and integrity of identity. The theme of renewal demonstrates the difference of subjectivity to the Other as time, and shows itself in personal limitation, the challenge and unsettling questioning produced in education, and the losing of one's immediate presence in relation to one's environment. This unsettling is re-established as balance in the context of community. My interpretations drawn out of reading *Elfquest* are perceived as fluctuating. The disturbance in knowing is due to the relationship with the Other, who contests me to question my right to be. Popular culture products may take part in an identity work characterized by enjoyment and wounding which is made possible by my responsibility for the Other. In education for sustainability, ethics should be used to enliven the understanding of human well-being, brought forth in inter-species relationships.

Keywords
ethics, ecocriticism, posthumanism, comics, well-being, eudaimonia, identity, companion species, *Elfquest*, Emmanuel Levinas, Donna Haraway

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Additional information

When a mind does not know itself, it is flawed. When a mind is flawed, the man is flawed. When a man is flawed, that which he touches is flawed. It is said that what a flawed man sees, his hands make broken.

What can change the nature of a man?

Dak'kon and Ravel in *Planescape: Torment*

They spoke no more of the small news of the Shire far away, nor of the dark shadows and perils that encompassed them, but of the fair things they had seen in the world together, of the Elves, of the stars, of trees, and the gentle fall of bright year in the woods.

J.R.R. Tolkien: *Lord of the Rings*

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1 Introduction

1.1 The need for inter-species flourishing

In the course of tens of thousands of years, human interactions with earthly surroundings have become complex and global. Our species has grown in numbers and adopted diverse lifestyles and technologies. No place on the planet remains untouched by human influence (Leigh 2005, 4–5). The age we are living now is impregnated with environmental concern, drawing from the so-called ecological crisis. “So-called”, because the environmental problems and degradation that emerged heavily in the 1960s and 1970s were publicly and politically framed as a crisis, although their scope and duration exceeded and continues to exceed the concept. As Lord Ashby explains:

> “A crisis is a situation that will pass; it can be resolved by temporary hardship, temporary adjustment, technological and political expedients. What we are experiencing now is not a crisis: it is a climacteric. For the rest of man's history on earth, so far as one can foretell, he will have to live with problems of population, of resources, of pollution.” (Quoted in Caldwell 1998.)

Lord Ashby continues his address by questioning whether humankind can adapt oneself to anticipate environmental constraints or merely respond to their effects. In other words, shall we choose proaction or reaction? Human species in general can claim to have more knowledge, or good guesses, about the consequences of technological, political and ecological choices of individuals, communities and societies, whereas other animal societies can hardly but react to global changes. Are we then individually and socially responsible for the present and future well-being of all these “others”? If so, how do we recognize the other in need, and to what exactly does our responsibility oblige us? Perhaps the hardest questions are ethical; ethics is what humans deal with in daily actions and interactions, with other living beings as well as with texts and concepts. These relationships constitute us.

This study examines how a fantasy comic series *Elfquest* mediates ethics. What I mean by ethics is highly influenced by the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas. I do not discuss here any particular set of prescriptive norms or their specific application with regard to preservation, pollution, or human and animal rights, for example, but instead follow a path of metaethics in order to explore where and how the experiences of right and wrong, or good and ill, originate. Like Levinas, I understand here ethics as the relationship with the

Other[1], a relationship that obliges the subject, the "I", to infinite responsibility, and comes prior to morality and politics, and even what I can know. In my ecocritical, posthumanist, hermeneutic-phenomenological reading of the comics series *Elfquest* I mainly focus on the ethical questions of responsibility and interrelatedness in order to understand the human condition as integral part of ecosystems and other species. This approach is meant to contribute to further development of an ecologically sound human existence on Earth. I firmly believe that by understanding humanity and the self in relation with others we can promote both human well-being and the well-being of other animals, plants, and landscapes towards flourishing, rather than mere survival. My worldview, and personal philosophy in general, posits humans as first and foremost *relational* creatures; this paradigm can also be called ecosocial (see Hirvilammi 2015, 13). Ethics is not within us, but between us, and therefore we need to be alert to the changes and developments that take place in relationships, be they human or otherwise. I assume that diverse artifacts and cultural products share in the processes of socialization, education and ethical meaning making, about which I am concerned as the basis for a better future for humanity and the interrelated flourishing of earthly life forms.

By reading popular fantasy comics, a genre and a medium which have been accused of escapism or withdrawal from the real world problems, I intend to demonstrate how they – texts as actors – can call us into responsible relationships with each other. I am interested in processes of identification and interpretation in which we – or I – engage when reading narratives of popular fiction. I assume that the reflections of ethical relationships incite and inspire moral and political action. As I see it in the lines drawn by Levinas, human morality, or politics, is built on ethics as facing the Other. This impersonal world of politics takes form as values, justice, government, social and moral norms, sanctions, and negotiations (for example over whether and how we should protect endangered species, habitats and human lifestyles, eat meat, strive for economical growth, or regulate immigration). Morality must always be inspired by ethics, though they are of radically different order. (See Levinas and Kearney 1896, 29–30; Perpich 2008, 175–176.) It is on the basis of ethics, this demanding and obligating, and even painful interpersonal relationship of extreme sensibility, that we – as individuals, groups and societies – develop our consciousness and conscience, an active commitment or love, a functional way of balancing our needs and deeds with the rest of the natural-cultural world. Therefore, rather than asking how we should live our lives I am asking: How does one experience how to live one's life? What makes the meaning of our selves?

In this study, I often use the pronoun *we* or its derivatives (us, our) to speak in general for the human species in which me and you, my reader, belong. Furthermore, I use it as a rhetoric device which emphasizes the shared responsibility with one another, and which often implies that identification with other life forms is possible – be this other life form your neighbor, your dog, your lawn, an owl passing you in the night, a coral reef, or the bacteria functioning in your digestive system or the soil on which you walk.[2] Though we speak about human ethics with human language, I believe that we can extend our ethical comprehension to include other animals, or even landscapes and ecosystems. Of course, I am driven to question this belief, because this study regards ethics as facing the "Other" as absolute alterity that cannot be assimilated in "the same", "I" or "us". In the hope of not appropriating the unrepresentable otherness of the world, human and non-human others, I speak of identity and identification as a mediating term between ethics and morality, or facing the Other in extreme passivity and acting in the moral-political realm. I follow Paul Ricoeur's view of identity not as a description of the self (a description that would correspond to reality truthfully or falsely) but as a productive means for understanding self. Because identity answers both to "what?" and to "who?" it is in a sense split into idem and ipse identities, or sameness and selfhood, which can be examined and integrated in their over-lapping difference via texts and stories, as narrative identity. (Kaunismaa 1998, 170). We are co-authors in each other's stories, but the unbridgeable otherness of another being remains in the storytelling. My hermeneutic attempt to situate the self in human and non-human communities is reflected in the pronouns "we" or "us". Myself and the reader should nevertheless doubt the motifs of this pronoun, seeking for conformity and trying to dissipate differences (see Korhonen 2011, 107, and Haila 1999, 339 for criticism if one can truly speak for "us"). I use "we" because I maintain that the simultaneous processes of identification with the other – that is, aiming to realize one's identity or self – and the "impossibility of reducing the other to myself, of coinciding into sameness" (Levinas and Kearney 1986, 22) produce a tension that enhances our ethical scrutiny and critical thinking.

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[1] Levinas speaks of any other (*autre*) and of personal other (*autrui*); it has become a standard to designate the latter with initial capital letter in anglophone research. However, Levinas himself is not wholly consistent with the use of *autre* and *autrui*.

Though I am discussing ethical relationship generally, of course I am also personally defined by it. My position as researcher is not value-neutral, unaffected by my political opinions or indifferent to moral obligations, but grounded on my personal philosophy and the theoretical positions I have adopted. As this study centers on a hermeneutic-phenomenological reading of *Elfquest*, an outline of the structure of my experience is thus needed. I am an avid reader of fantasy novels, or speculative fiction, and comics, including *Elfquest,* since childhood. I consider them as one of my "educators", and still these media products often call me to question the roots of my ethics and personal philosophy, and thus develop them further.

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[2] The conventional ideas of what counts as "human" or "other" to the human are especially contested not only by critical posthumanism, but also by recent research on gut flora and other bacteria inhabiting human bodies. It can actually be concluded that our bodies are ecosystems in which "we are one percent human", for the millions genes of our bacterial inhabitants easily outnumber human genes. In addition, the gut flora influence brain functioning and behavior. See Martone 2011.

This happens through enjoyment, immersion, and social sharing either in memory or in the course of actual reading. They can be seen as taking part in an educational process which adheres purpose to myself and my experiences of the world, a process in which a rigid distinction between fact and fiction is not very important. I also experience inter-human relationships and movement in diverse environments, be they forests, cities, waters, or anything else where we are together immersed, much in the same way. The environments affect me emotionally, physically, cognitively, and socially. These ”moving” experiences can also be described in more psychological terms as acts of mindfulness, or flow. In these focused states of mind the ego and its stability, a kind of loneliness, do not matter much, and a perception of time as past, present, and future events is rooted in the very moment of experiencing. Personally, the most important quality of these experiences is a blend of pain and beauty: pain for the suffering of others and of self, and beauty as the value of others and self – or sensibility for them. Having read Levinas, I now see the blend of pain and beauty as going towards others, a relational experience of the fragility of things and my life among these things. In my philosophy, this emotional or affective orientation binds together environmental development (or degradation) and human well-being (or illness) as being fully responsible for other worldly actors and factors. I understand human personality as a complex, shifting construct constantly shaped in relationships with actors and actions, of which I am hardly even aware. My most individual characteristic is will – the ability to choose the direction where I am going. This direction basically grants meaning to life, and also the grounds for well-being as optimal, responsible functioning.

The most important concepts that guide this work are **naturecultures, companion species, and eudaimonic well-being**. I emphasize the importance of the sensual, bodily relationship with the material world and its actors for human well-being. Instead of discussing it in terms of nature or culture (because they still tend to be too opposed and harmonious concepts), I prefer to use Donna Haraway's term naturecultures, a complexity of even chaotic interactions in specific environments of the historical-material world, and her figure of companion species; what matters here is the relationship of companion species as significant otherness (Haraway 2003, 1–3).

It can be said that the phenomena we call nature or culture are two dialectic perspectives which "constantly mingle, like water and soil in a flowing stream" (Howarth 1995, 69). I wear glasses, but these concave plastic screens, a so-called cultural product, and the retina of my eyes inseparably form my mundane experience of seeing. This is a *gestalt*: it is a perception or an experience other than the sum of its parts, in which no clear lines between nature and culture can be drawn. Of course, I can take my glasses off, unlike all the human beliefs, customs and symbols that also constitute my everyday experience. Still, my glasses as well as my beliefs and values are adaptable means of explaining and situating the self-in-the-world, formed in interactions with the material reality by me and the communities I participate in. The material world that can be known to humanity always exists in the form of naturecultures. They are the web of material-semiotic relations and interactions of numerous organic and inorganic beings that supports the life that is meaningful to us. This perspective on nature, culture, and naturecultures is expanded in chapter 2.3.

I discuss well-being which, in the words of psychologists Ryan and Deci, “refers to optimal psychological functioning and experience” mostly as *eudaimonia*, originally an Aristotelian concept for human flourishing. From this perspective, “well-being consists of fulfilling or realizing one's daimon or true nature”. (Ryan and Deci, 2001, 142–143.) The treaties of eudaimonic well-being in the area of positive psychology stress concepts of meaning and purpose (Hefferon and Boniwell 2011, 77). In my view, well-being isn't limited to the affluence of material goods (welfare) and overall feeling of pleasure or happiness (subjective well-being and hedonism), but includes a relational view of human realization of values and virtues, and a time perspective on the good and ill that our actions may bring forth. The aspects of well-being such as health, pleasure, achievement, or relationships, are further discussed in chapter 2.4.

Levinas's thinking inspires the central questions of this study: **How does the Other present itself in the reading of *Elfquest*? Can the relationship with the Other be understood through the figure of companion species? Does this otherness constitute human well-being?** Though it is clear that the comics reader does not enter in an ethically obligating interhuman relationship just by looking at the comics page, I argue that this iconotextual medium can reflect the encounter with the Other through the interpretive process of reading. The pleasure of reading fantasy comics is social – we interpret fictional characters much like we would interpret other people's behavior (see chapter 2.1.5). It is also characterized by immersion – we travel to possible worlds in the disguise of a story, with the aid of empathy, momentarily responding to the fictional situations as if they were real, and the safety provided by the coherence of the secondary world (see chapter 2.2.1).

The reading of *Elfquest* I develop here can be characterized as ecocritical. Ecocriticism is a variegated branch of literary research that integrates interdisciplinary perspectives. It most simply and most broadly examines “all possible relations between literature and the physical world” (Glotfelty 1996, 20). Ecocritics are often avowedly committed to ecologically sound action in the cultural system, and study, for example, our underlying ecological values, place as a trope, the exact meaning of nature and its metaphors, and the relationship of human and non-human in texts. (Lahtinen and Lehtimäki 2008, 13–15; Garrard 2004, 3.) In this study, I am asking how we may enter into ethically binding relationship with the familiar and unfamiliar others that exist in the textual world and/or in the natural world. Ecophilosophy, posthumanism, positive psychology and ecopsychology provide background for my reading of the comic books. For example, the way I understand well-being and its treatment in *Elfquest* is influenced by ecopsychology which maintains that one is always in one's environment as a functional part of it. Thus, the study of the mind is relational – it should not be just "egopsychology" – and *being* is understood as a transitive verb, shaped and made understandable by different kinds of activities and orientations.

My study is directed by a concern for both human well-being as well as ecospheric well-being. I regard critically the story of progress and other grand narratives that humankind has constructed, though admittedly these narratives play a great role in our values, expectations, and identities. It is important to note that criticism does not imply a pessimistic view on human ability to develop in ethics and actions, even in global scale. For example, it seems that the rate of deadly human violence has decreased, perhaps for thousands of years, and we may be living our most peaceful period so far (Human Security Report Project 2014). However, peace – or well-being as both personal and societal flourishing – is nowhere fully achieved. People in developed countries as well as in developing or undeveloped countries are greatly affected by mental illnesses. With population growth and aging, the burden of mental and substance use disorders has increased worldwide, but according to WHO's estimation, four out of five people with serious mental disorders living in low and middle income countries lack the health services they need (Whiteford et al. 2013; WHO 2011). More than one third of European population suffers from mental disorders annually, and the number of people with disorders of the brain is even greater (Wittchen et al. 2011). Furthermore, depressive disorders are a leading direct cause of the global disease burden (Ferrari 2013). We must seek solutions to the problems in mental health, looking into their causes while treating them properly and inclusively. Mental illnesses develop in naturecultures, they are linked to lifestyles and philosophies of life, and therefore should be considered in a wider context than individual choices.

For the time being in Western societies, it is not a lack of knowledge that seems to thwart our proactive efforts in promoting ecological well-being. Scientists observe with impressive detail how fast the polar ice is melting, which species risk extinction or what amounts of coal are blown out to the atmosphere. Though it may seem difficult to think globally in one's daily life and even harder to commit oneself to global responsibility, the worldwide news feed has become part of our consciousness. We have many answers to *what* is happening in ecosystems and *how* we are provoking climate change. Still, the answers to questions such as *why* our societies are faltering in sustainable action are much more unclear. As historian Donald Worster writes, societies are "not merely products of climate, soil, disease, ecosystems and resources, but also of ideas, dreams and ethical systems." A satisfying resolving of the *why* questions requires understanding of ethical systems.[3] (Worster 1994, 27–28.)

I believe that in order to develop beneficial and sustainable ways of life it is important to reconsider the foundations of human ethics and even rethink the ontological concepts of "human" or "humanity" as figures; this is the position of posthumanism – more specifically critical posthumanism – which deconstructs the opposition between nature and culture and contextualizes humans as beings that have developed in relationship with numerous material and technical (life) forms, such as animals or machines. Donna Haraway's thinking can be characterized as posthumanist feminism.[4] (Rojola 2012, 264; see also Garrard 2012, 17.) Her concept of companion species – such as dogs and humans – that continue the project of her figure of cyborg has the aim to develop feminist "inquiry [that] is about understanding how things work, who is in the action, what might be possible, and how worldly actors might somehow be accountable to and love each other less violently" (Haraway 2003, 7). Cyborgs and companion species are analytical tools that reform the binaries and oppositions in Western thought, or, in a way, make them collapse together; Haraway calls this process *implosion*. She describes the work her figures are doing:

> "Cyborgs and companion species each bring together the human and non-human, the organic and technological, carbon and silicon, freedom and structure, history and myth, the rich and the poor, the state and the subject, diversity and depletion, modernity and postmodernity, and nature and culture in unexpected ways." (Ibid. 4.)

Still, it is essential to understand that companion species are not only figures, corporeal creatures "[s]ignicantly other to each other, in specific difference". They "are not surrogates for theory; they are not here just to think with. They are here to live with." (Haraway 2003, 3–5.) This feminist, posthumanist stance merges here with the purpose I see in ethics; thinking that is also acting in relation to something or someone else. Moreover, as Levinas is problematic in his accounts of femininity and multiculturalism (see

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[3] From the perspective of this study, Worster means moral systems rather than ethics. The traditional view of ethics often posits it as synonymous with morality; this also corresponds to the lay person's view. We can summarize the standard view of ethics as follows: Ethics firstly mean the reasonably durable ground of actions that are considered right or wrong for human beings. Humans are ethical subjects, that is, capable of understanding the right or wrong of their actions and hence making ethical decisions. Ethics consist of prescriptive norms of what humans ought to do or ought not to do; these standards are conveyed with concepts such as obligations, rights, virtues, benefits, or affects such as happiness, producing different branches of ethics, such as virtue ethics, utilitarism, or deontological ethics. Aside from this view, ethics also mean study and development of one's ethical standards which can take place on a personal, communal or institutional level. One should not equate ethics with feelings, religious or legislative norms or the common norms of society. (Andre & Velasquez 1987.) Ethics is often divided into normative ethics which describe the ethical standards of right and wrong conduct that we should follow, metaethics which examine the origin and meaning of ethical principles, and applied ethics, which involve specific issues, such as environmental ethics (Fieser, pars. 1–2).

[4] Haraway herself does not identify as posthumanist, due to the transhumanist movement of posthumanism. Transhumanism aspires to dramatically enhance human longevity and the psychic, physical and emotional abilities of humans with the aid of technological development. Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto*, however, especially criticizes the rationalist belief in progress that lies at the heart of transhumanism. (See Rojola 2012, 262–263.)

Perpich 2008, 177–193), a balancing view is needed.

Levinas's philosophy is founded on the phenomenological depiction of how the I encounters the face of the Other. The face is not an object (that could be possessed) but pure expression that is produced in the encounter. It both obliges and welcomes the ego. Vulnerable and defenseless, the face says: "You shall not kill." The rapport with the face is asymmetrical: "In ethics, the other's right to exist has primacy over my own [- -]." (Levinas and Kearney 1986, 24.) However, as Diane Perpich explains,

> "[- -] the figure of the face is not a thesis about ethics but is the performance of ethical life. The tension between what this figure *does* (when it represents the other) and what it *says* (that the other is unrepresentable) is the enactment of our original ethical situation. To paraphrase what Levinas says about freedom, to be ethical in Levinas's sense is to know that ethics is in danger. Ethics is a matter not of having a secure principle, but of realizing that the principle is never secure enough." (Perpich 2008, 77).

Reading *Elfquest* through Levinas's philosophy, contrasted with the eudaimonic well-being and companion species, may reveal that our ethics are indeed in danger – dangerously reformed by the worldly, material interactions in naturecultures. Perhaps this instability of diverse environments and their worldly actors lies at the heart of ethically committed life. In a passage which resebles Levinas's description of ethics as "a form of vigilant passivity to the call of the other" (Levinas and Kearney 1986, 29), Haraway calls for an ethics in which species and their differences matter:

> "I believe that all ethical relating, within or between species, is knit from the silk-strong thread of ongoing alertness to otherness-in-relation. We are not one, and being depends on getting on together. The obligation is to ask who are present and who are emergent." (Haraway 2003, 50)

In this study, fantasy comics mirror the "otherness-in-relation". Comics are blends of words, pictures, and sequences; they are a specific form of iconotexts, where words and pictures function inseparably. Modern fantasy is a genre of speculative fiction that employs magic or other supernatural elements in constructing a coherent, other reality. Though in reading fantasy comics we deal with iconotextual entities, disembodied in real life, I believe that there lies an ethically demanding and generative power in narrating imaginary, impossible, and yet paradoxically possible worlds. Speculative fiction may evoke transcendence (i.e. the pre-ontological ethical relationship to the other in the Levinasian sense) for example through the experience of wonder.

Both the comics medium and the fantasy genre are associated with pleasure-oriented reading and categorized as popular culture. However, defining popular culture is problematic. Calling something popular may mean that it is widespread or that many people like it. Being popular also implies having inferior or plain qualities. On the other hand, popular culture is sometimes understood as that which is deeply rooted in the lives of “the (common) people”, a view that may be denigrating or appraising. (Herkman 1998, 13.) The concept of popular resonates with the beliefs often ascribed to childhood, or to nature as opposed to culture, of being simple and original. Yet this reductive strategy of conceptualizing denies contradictions; childhood, nature(-cultures) and popular culture are also complex, novel, changing and emerging phenomena. I think that people like popular culture because it, as a form of storytelling, responds to the needs to feel for the other, and to relate with the world in which we live. Therefore, I will examine the *Elfquest* comics, its medium and genre from an ecosocial perspective, focusing on the experiences of pleasure, need, and relating, arising in my themes of belonging, recognition, healing, and renewal.

1.2 Analyzing Elfquest

Elfquest[5] is an adventure-oriented, long-running fantasy comic series created by Wendy and Richard Pini. *Elfquest* debuted in *Fantasy Quarterly* in 1978, but the creators were disappointed with the quality of the imprint and decided to self-publish it under their own WaRP Graphics (in the 1990s the name was changed to Warp Graphics, Inc.) – in fact for 25 years, until *Elfquest* was licensed for DC Comics in 2003 (*Elfquest* homepage: About Warp). *Elfquest* has also been published by Marvel and Apple Comics, and translated into ten languages, including two translations in Finnish, published by Kustannus oy Jalava in 1990–1993 and Egmont Kustannus from 2005. At the peak of its popularity, *Elfquest* monthly issues sold 100,000 copies worldwide. Also some volumes of prose fiction, role-playing games and a music CD have been released under the title. (Booker 2010; 173–174, 202; email correspondence with Richard Pini, July 2013.) Over the years, the original *Elfquest* has spawned numerous mini-series and publications in which the Pinis have had less influence, developing a cast of hundreds of characters. At the time I am writing this in autumn 2015, *Elfquest* is approaching its end with *The Final Quest,* published by Dark Horse Comics.

Despite its success, little research has been made on *Elfquest*; mostly it has been mentioned in a side note as a pioneer for self-printed comics, the first one that made its way to book stores (see for example Weiner, 2003, 26). In Finland, two master's theses (pro gradu) have been written on *Elfquest*, the first one by Inka Ukkola (1993) who sees it as an interpretation of North American culture and history and the second one (in English) by Maura Kontio (2007) on its translation to Finnish.

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[5] There is some variation in the orthography of the name: besides *Elfquest*, also *ElfQuest* or *Elf-Quest* are used.

Elfquest tells about several elven tribes, trolls and humans living in the World of Two Moons, which is clearly a secondary fantasy world (though it is distinct, it still has similarities with the Earth, such as climate, landscapes – and humans, very recognizable in their appearance and beliefs). The storyline centers on the tribe of Wolfriders, short forest-dwelling elves who ride wolves. The relationship of these companion species, a pack of elves and a wolf pack, is perhaps best characterized by terms of friendship and hybridity (see chapter 3.1.3). *Elfquest* is based on a *what if* -experiment typical to speculative fiction; it calls one to question what could have been the prehistory of our world if space traveling elves – or, an alien kind shaping themselves to these mythical creatures – would have entered it in early Paleolithic period?[6] Thus the narrative exemplifies "high" fantasy as opposed to "low" fantasy with ingredients of science fiction.[7] I briefly summarize major plot lines in chapter 2.2.2 which illustrates *Elfquest* as a quest fantasy, and more in detail in the actual analysis in chapter 3.

This study examines how naturecultures, well-being, and the ethical relationship with the Other are present in *Elfquest* (as representative of fantasy comics). My analysis roughly covers the comic book issues published in 1978–1990: issues 1–20 of *Elfquest*, which is here called *The Original Quest* as in the official *Elfquest* website; issues 1–8 of *Siege at Blue Mountain;* and issues 1–9 of *Kings of the Broken Wheel*. I also discuss briefly some episodes in the *Dreamtime* storyline (issues 1–12) which was published in an *Elfquest* anthology comic magazine in 1996–1999. From now on I will mostly use abbreviations of the first three series of *Elfquest* comic books: OQ (*The Original Quest*), SaBM (*Siege at Blue Mountain*), and KotBW (*Kings of the Broken Wheel*). Some scenes vary in different versions and re-printings of *Elfquest*, and the first issues were published in black and white. For the sake of simplicity I will refer to the coloured, digitized issues at the official ElfQuest homepage, which are best available to a regular reader.[8]

In my analysis I follow a hermeneutic-phenomenological approach to the interpretation of comics. It can be described as first-person, human, direct experience in reading *Elfquest.* Though the experience of the comics is directly affecting me, the reading is goal-oriented: I wish to realize, or to understand more fully (that is, in a more conscious and complex way) the self, the other, and human and inter-species relationships. Also, the reading is guided by preceding knowledge, some of which is applied during the interpretive process. Close-reading of several scenes in *Elfquest* forms an important part of the study. This close-reading progresses along the hermeneutic circle: constantly relating the parts of an iconotext to its whole, the whole to its individual parts, and both to the preceding knowledge, which also changes in the course of reading. Thus I seek to deepen my interpretation of ethics mediated in *Elfquest* by connecting it into specific natural-cultural contexts.

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[6] Though a reader of *Elfquest* knows from the beginning of the very first issue that the elves came from "elsewhere", this origin of the elves is revealed more specifically in issue 20 of *The Original Quest.* There is thus an overarching mystery, demanding for resolution, in the narrative of the original *Elfquest.*

[7] The distinction between high fantasy and low fantasy doesn't imply any appreciation of their literary quality, but merely refers to the higher or lower presence of the fantastic or marvelous elements in the narrated. See chapter 2.2.1.

[8] URL: http://elfquest.com/read/digitalEQ.html.

My approach to understanding comics is narratologically oriented. A purely semiotic analysis of comics pages as self-reliant system would not be sufficient for this study. Instead, in order to understand relating with the other through storytelling, I am interested in how comics engage their readers cognitively and bodily, for example through shifting focalization and tensions between story and discourse. (See Kukkonen 2013, 128–130.)

I understand reading as a complex phenomenon, an interaction of the text and the reader's self that are both situated in the world as parts of it, and shaped by diverse physical, mental and social factors in their particular environments. My reading as direct experience is reflected in the light of several selected contexts. I do not emphasize as much the historical and ideological situation in the time of the publication of *Elfquest* than the personally chosen theoretical background in well-being studies, ecophilosophy, posthumanism, and metaethical questioning. These areas are interwoven in the interpretive reading process, that has initially produced the themes of analysis (Belonging, Recognition, Healing, Renewal), and the more detailed iconotextual analysis situated within the themes. Of course, the contexts that can be consciously taken into account in an analytical approach must be demarcated. Furthermore, each reading is different due to the change that takes place in ourselves and our world, and the position of the researcher is always intentional and limited. Intentionality along the lines of Husserl is at play here; according to him, all consciousness is intentional. In other words, "consciousness is always consciousness *of something*" (Perpich 2008, 23). This study is driven by an environmental concern and an ecosocial consciousness I am trying to develop in myself and my relationships.

It could also be said that this study also aims to adopt a fuller "Self-realization" that the Norwegian ecophilosopher Arne Naess places as the most basic norm of his ecosophy (ecological wisdom, or personal ecological philosophy). The meaning of Self-realization is never made very explicit by Naess, but it is to be understood as the unfolding of the potentialities of an ecological, relational self; this self is opposed to a "narrow" ego, that is not understood in terms of relationship but isolated from the selves of others. The identification process with others widens the scope of self. (Naess 1989.) Thus this study explores if it is possible to identify with others through iconotextual interpretation while recognizing their absolute otherness. I doubt that even phenomenological description could fully reach the momentary, fleeting experience of the self-in-relation, but we may approach it with the tools of language and interpretation, hermeneutics that approaches the experience as a process of already translation, recreation, or arbitration: "There is no self-understanding that is not *mediated* by signs, symbols, and texts; in the final analysis self-understanding coincides with the interpretation given to these mediating terms." (Ricoeur 1991, quoted in Dauenhauer 2011, italics in the original.)

In my study I ask: How does the face-to-face relationship with the Other present itself in the reading of *Elfquest*? What does the figure of companion species bring into ethical relationship? How do protagonists and their significant others evolve in relation to each other? What is framed and perceived as good or evil – and why? What is beneficial or detrimental for individuals, communities, and their environments? How can eudaimonic well-being be realized in the relationship with the Other? Does otherness as absolute alterity even constitute well-being? Does *Elfquest* call for ethical alertness and responsibility for the other? If it does, does it enhance environmental action and eudaimonic well-being?

In close-reading *Elfquest* I will move on four levels: (1) semiotic (including linguistic and pictorial signs as well as effects, signs typical to comics medium, and the way these details form the individual style of *Elfquest*), (2) semantic (the denotations and connotations of words, pictures and effects), (3) structural (the relationships of different signs and elements), and [4] cultural (the relationship of iconotextual elements to the things outside of them – this level in my terms is rather natural-cultural) (see Johnson 2004). What does not lend itself to understanding directly can be gathered by examining the language and the pictures in detail and situating them in a new context.

In the following chapter 2, I discuss the theoretical background of this study. Its subchapters move from the more "concrete" towards the "abstract", philosophical level, though these aspects will merge in the actual analysis of scenes and themes in chapter 3.

In chapter 2.1, the main characteristics of comics are outlined in order to understand how the medium engages the reader. I examine the narration in comics, their history in relation with *Elfquest,* the roles of characters, and the process of identification in comics. The treatment of environmental issues and concerns in comics is also shortly observed. Chapter 2.2 focuses on the conventions of modern fantasy, specifically quest fantasy, and how the genre represents otherness and creates an affective bond with its readership. I will not try to discuss comprehensively the vast history of fantasy or the fantastic mode in literature, but rather what kind of thematic approaches are made possible by the genre, and how stories told in fantasy genre resonate with insights of environmental philosophy and ecopsychology.

In chapter 2.3 the concepts of nature, culture, and environment are discussed in order to demonstrate their complexity and value-ladenness. Haraway's concept “naturecultures” that renders rigid oppositions redundant, and her figure of companion species, are adopted. These concepts and lived realities focus on how things and creatures, both natural and cultural, act in relationships, and the ethical implications brought by them. Chapter 2.4 also performs conceptual work with the different formulations of health and well-being. In chapter 2.5 I focus more on hedonic and eudaimonic well-being, and in chapter 2.6 on how the theories and concepts collaborating in this study could be applied in the field of education.

In chapter 3, the analytical close-reading performed on scenes from *Elfquest* is gathered and consolidated with the theoretical perspectives provided in chapter 2. Chapter 4 summarizes the ethical (Self-)realization acquired in reading *Elfquest* through posthumanism, ecopsychology, an eudaimonic perspective on well-being and the philosophy of Levinas and Ricoeur.

2 Theoretical positions

2.1 Comics

2.1.1 Defining comics

McCloud specifies Will Eisner's definition of comics as “sequential art”: “Comics are juxtaposed pictorial and other images in a deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or produce an aesthetic response in the viewer.” This definition differentiates comics from movies which are sequential images in time, whereas comics are juxtaposed in space (though the effect of time in the course of reading is present, of course).[9] (McCloud 1993, 7–9, 95–97.) A reader of comics can move back and forth in this pictorial time-space, which the film viewer cannot do. Furthermore, the possibilities in which comics operate in space and organize their sequences of frames are rather unique and distinct from any other medium. For the purposes of this study, McCloud's definition is fairly sufficient, although it covers a wide range of pictorial-symbolic representations (such as hieroglyphs) which are not normally thought as comics in the modern sense as products of popular mass culture. This is the context of production and publication I will refer to when speaking about comics.

I treat comics as a fully developed, variegated medium and a specific form of iconotexts, that is, inter- and intratextual blends of written and pictorial content in which the parts function interdependently and inseparably. Comics could also be considered not as a medium but as a “visual language”: like sentences link words into sentences, comics link pictures into utterances. However, the forms in which comics have been published, read and institutionalized influence their understanding also in other media. (Kukkonen 2013, 5.) Web comics, for example, blur the lines between hypertexts and printed sequential narratives, but interpreting them as comics still reinforces traditional reading practices.

Kai Mikkonen argues that word and image have no essential difference based on perception. Rather, words and images have different, historically determined functions and uses which influence the reader's interpretation of their differences. However, the uses of word and picture are genuinely different, and neither can be wholly substituted by the other. (Mikkonen 2005, 16–17; 20.) While we easily assume that pictures can be understood “in a glance”, every perception is somehow interpreted on the basis of preexisting schemata, and not even the most photo-realistic picture can depict he reality “as it is”; moreover, pictorial instructions (such as how to attach your life belt or to assemble a piece of furniture) can be incomprehensible or difficult to “read” for some – the ways of employing pictures are also culture-specific and context-specific. In comics, it is quite common to depict a feeling or an atmosphere with words, and use pictures that function as symbols (or effects, see below) already conventionalized within the medium or devised anew. One can observe how the functioning of pictorial and verbal content varies between panels or whole comic series, for example with Herkman's categories: 1) the pictorial dominates, 2) the verbal dominates, 3) the pictorial and verbal collaborate, and 4) the pictorial and verbal are incommensurate as in 4a) metatext or 4b) paradox. (Herkman 1998, 58–61.) What is most important to note here, is that the verbal and the visual are in constant interplay.

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[9] See also the criticism on defining comics by comparing it with film by Romu (2015, 7–8).

Comics can be categorized according to the length of their sequences or their publication form: *comic strips* usually have something between one to nine frames and figure mostly in newspapers and periodicals, *comic magazines* (also called *comic book*, or simply *comic*, or in the case of underground comics, *comix*) are substantially longer, and *graphic novels* or *graphic short stories* are from the outset marketed as books. Some works that function only within one frame (such as *The Far Side* by Gary Larson) are often called comics, but from my perspective it would be more specific to refer to them as cartoons – despite the current view that a single picture can already be read as a narrative (Herkman 1998, 49).

The use of “comics” in broader naming of caricatures and cartoons might indicate that during its history, comics as popular mass medium has become more dominant, clearly distinguishable sign system in our culture. Various popular iconotexts – comics, cartoons, animations, illustrated books etc. – have a “family resemblance”: they share common characteristics but none of them are similar in every aspect and function.

Comics, like other art forms, constantly play with the limits and conventions of their expression: oral metaphors are translated into images; comic characters manipulate effects and frames as if they were concrete objects of their world, and so on. This kind of experimentation requires that the conventions of the medium form an intact system that can then be broken or tested. The medium also shapes itself from one culture to another. For example, Japanese manga has a fully developed, wide array of expressive techniques which are quite different from the Western comics tradition.

The goal of my study is not to explore the ontology of comics in detail. For my uses it is adequate to define comics as a distinct art form and medium following McCloud's definition, and to emphasize the cultural context of the modern comics as commercial popular culture. Like Juha Herkman, in this study I consider the sequential quality as the crucial factor for defining comics: they are narratives told with a sequence of frames containing pictures and words. The sequential narration in panels distinguishes comics from the tradition of other caricature images (or, iconic images, if we use McCloud's controversial term[10]). (Herkman 1998, 22.) In the following I examine the building blocks of the medium in detail.

2.1.2 Anatomy of an iconotect

The basic constituent or unit of comics is the frame. A frame, or a panel, can contain pictures, words and effects (i.e. signs which complement the meaning conveyed by written language and pictures). The discourse (how the story, the chain of events, is told) of comics is constituted by manipulating these elements and placing them in panels in a process of encapsulation. They present action, objects, or mood in the narrative. In most cases, a white space called the gutter surrounds the panels. In this case, the border of the page demarcates the picture – still, the lack of panel borders can, for example, create an effect of the narrated moment expanding in time and space, or of stillness and timelessness (see McCloud 1993, 103; for an example in *Elfquest*, see OQ 10, 31). Panel borders mostly set the mood and rhythm of narration – blurry borders as in OQ 6, 8–9 depict a flashback, and a panel shaped as a silhouette of a troll guard creates a menacing effect (image 1).

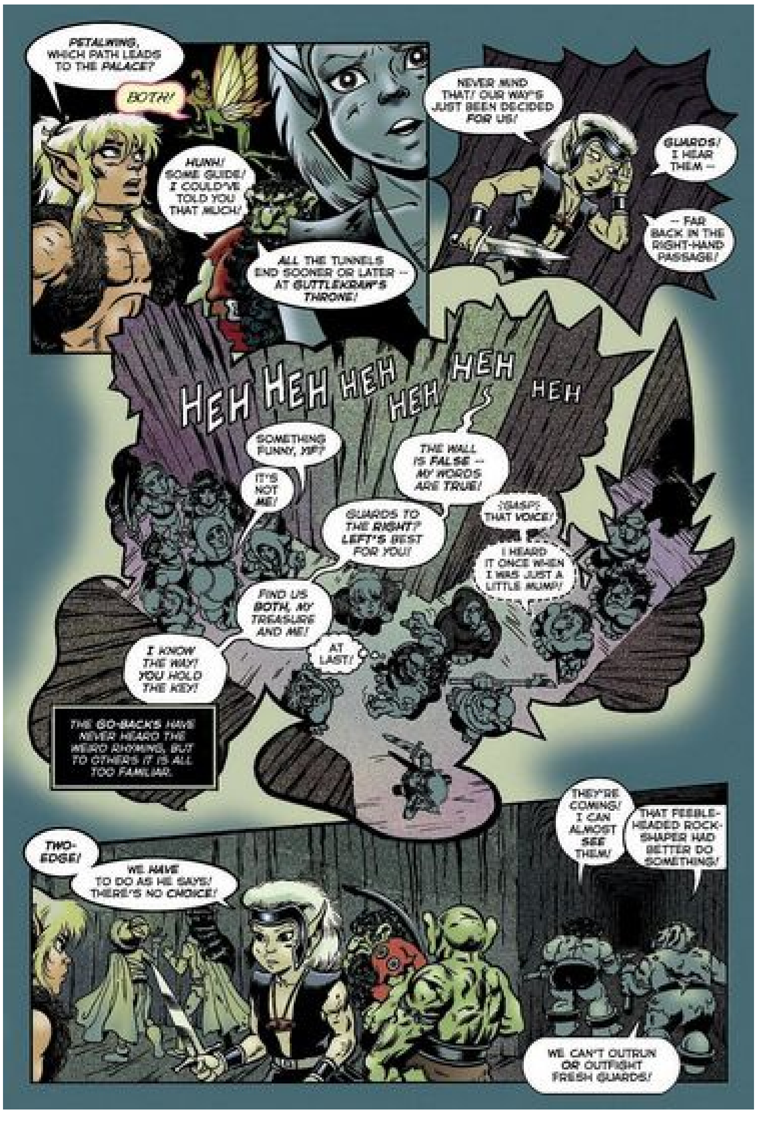
PETALWING, WHICH PATH LEADS TO THE PALACE?
BOTH!
HUNH! SOME GUIDE! I COULD'VE TOLD YOU THAT MUCH!
ALL THE TUNNELS END SOONER OR LATER -- AT GUTTLEKRAW'S THRONE!
NEVER MIND THAT! OUR WAY'S JUST BEEN DECIDED FOR US!
GUARDS! I HEAR THEM --
-- FAR BACK IN THE RIGHT-HAND PASSAGE!
HEH HEH HEH HEH HEH HEH
SOMETHING FUNNY, YIP?
IT'S NOT ME!
THE WALL IS FALSE -- MY WORDS ARE TRUE!
GUARDS TO THE RIGHT? LEFT'S BEST FOR YOU!
:GASP: THAT VOICE!
I HEARD IT ONCE WHEN I WAS JUST A LITTLE MUMP!
FIND US BOTH, MY TREASURE AND ME!
AT LAST!
I KNOW THE WAY! YOU HOLD THE KEY!
THE GO-BACKS HAVE NEVER HEARD THE WEIRD RHYMING, BUT TO OTHERS IT IS ALL TOO FAMILIAR.
THEY'RE COMING! I CAN ALMOST SEE THEM!
THAT FEEBLE-HEADED ROCK-SHAPER HAD BETTER DO SOMETHING!
TWO-EDGE!
WE HAVE TO DO AS HE SAYS! THERE'S NO CHOICE!
WE CAN'T OUTRUN OR OUTFIGHT FRESH GUARDS!

Image 1: OQ 18, 15.
In this context, the borders shaped as a troll guard seem to convey what the characters are hearing, and how they cognitively interpret what they are hearing.

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[10] McCloud uses "icon" in a broad sense to signify any image that expresses person, place, thing, or thought. For him "symbol" refers only to one category of icons: a symbol represents concepts, thoughts or philosophies. Some icons (or signifiers) are forged to resemble their signified, such as the images of faces, trees, or computers. The more the signifier is condensed or simplified to represent the signified, the more "iconic" it becomes. (McCloud 1993; 27, 30.)

Aside from the frame, another basic narrative unit in longer comics (comic books and graphic novels) is the page. The arrangement of different frames or “mise en page” creates a larger whole, or a “gestalt”, which not only guides or determines the way each frame and its elements are read, but is also experienced holistically as a designed object. Hence, in the case of longer comics it seems appropriate that the basic constituents of comics are pictures, words, and sequence, as Kukkonen maintains. (Kukkonen 2013, 5.) We may add effects (examined below) among the constituents of comics, although they can also be seen as specialized and often conventionalized instances of words and pictures.

Written text usually figures in comics as narrative text (mostly placed at the borders of the frame), as dialogue (mostly in oval balloons known as speech bubbles or cloud-shaped thought bubbles, representing inner dialogue) and in sound effects. The narrative written text usually supplements or explains the visual information whereas the typography and framing (form of a bubble) of the dialogue may represent the subtle, significant sound qualities that a voice can convey: tone, stress, volume, accent or possibly even intonation. The latter category of sound effects highlights still more the graphic qualities that written text arguably obtains when it is placed in comics. (Herkman 1998, 41–44.) If a certain onomatopoetic expression such as “Aaargh!” is taken out of its context, it easily appears comical, or at least slightly irrelevant; yet in the actual graphic context it partakes in the creation of agony or tension, for example. Thus the *expression* of the sound effect acts as inseparable element of the graphic narrative, much in the same way as an explosive sound in a movie serves as transparent and coherent element of the visual narrative (ibid. 43).

Let us consider two panels exemplifying Elfquest's sound effects: “WHWHOOOOO”, the howl of wind, drawn as coming out of a hole in a stone wall, adds a hue of tension to the information given by the narrator and characters' dialogue (someone unknown is shaping the rock magically and trying to get in) as well as visual expression (the dark hole opens like a gaping mouth and is placed in dominating position in regard of the characters Redlance and Suntop who draw away from it). A few pages later, “OOOOOOWWOOO”, howl of wolves (and Wolfriders) penetrates into a panel from the right, drawing the attention of two trolls towards the sound. Both sound effects are situated at the end of the page and given emphasis by the aid of deictic gaze (characters are looking towards the effects and engaging the reader in a process of joint attention, see Kukkonen 2013, 170); this foreshadows the threat the characters will face later in the narrative sequence (OQ 19; 9, 13).

The speech bubbles and thought bubbles are some of the most dominant units of the category of complementary signs, that Herkman calls effects. They are symbolic signs which are somewhat medium-specific – much of this kind of comics language that is now conventional, was experimented and created in the early 20th century. For example, a Z in a speech bubble means that the character is asleep or a shining light bulb in a thought bubble that he has come up with an idea. The outlines of speech bubbles can mark whispering or angry tone, or a wavy voice shivering from cold as in Suntop's “Brrr!” in the panel discussed above (OQ 19, 9), voice transmitted by electrical device (e.g. telephone conversations in Hergé's *Tintin*) or character's unique way of speaking (e.g. the dialogue of Dream or Delirium in Neil Gaiman's *The Sandman*). In *Elfquest* story world, the mental or telepathic communication of the elves known as “sending” is represented with differing outlines of speech bubbles (which are oval in the digitized versions I am referring to). Sending bubbles are virtually always accompanied by white star symbols (a type of effects specific to *Elfquest*) often placed near the sender's head. The modifications of these symbols stars can also mark a strong emotion (see enraged stars of Rayek in OQ 4, 1 or Cutter in SaBM 8, 15), or even personality of a character: the monster Madcoil horribly sends with a wavering, red-black star, (OQ 4, 21), and the core of Winnowill's sending star is also black (image 2).

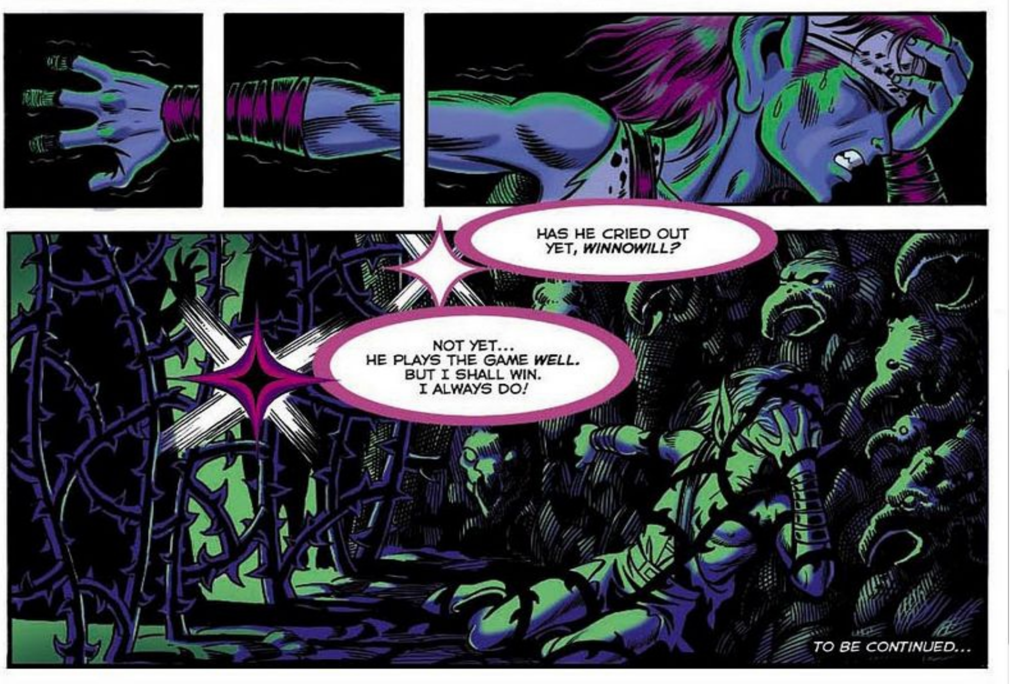
HAS HE CRIED OUT YET, WINNOWILL?
NOT YET... HE PLAYS THE GAME WELL. BUT I SHALL WIN. I ALWAYS DO!
TO BE CONTINUED...

Image 2: OQ 10, 32. Before Winnowill is seen in person, her sending star already evokes her malignant mindset. Note also the prolongation of time and intensification of torture by the use of gutters in the upper tier of panels: it is up to the reader to decide in which category McCloud's closure (1, 2, or 5) these panel to panel transitions fit best.

Reading comics involves combining the processes of abstract, symbolical thinking and direct visual responding. The level of abstraction does not comprise only of decoding the words' meaning. The whole structure of the sequential art as a series of frames requires that the reader interprets, fills in, and creates coherence in what he sees and reads. In each blank between the frames, and within frames, happens time – or, if not time, imagination. Duncan and Smith (2009, 164) explain that a comic panel is not experienced as “a frozen tableau of related images, but as an event, or most often a segment of an event, spanning a certain period of time”. Every detail and each line with their distinct “feel” contribute to the overall style and interpretation of the whole. Though in my analysis I stress the context of reading comics – in this case in an ethically oriented manner – the reader interpretation of images, words, effects, and sequences is tied to their immediate contexts on the page.

I maintain that the sequential narration is the prime qualifier of comics as medium. To put it otherwise, “[c]omics are reductive in creation and additive in reading”. That is, the artist engages in a process of *encapsulation*, “selecting images [and words] that capture the flow of experience and putting them in a panel”, and the reader in a combining process of *closure*, a term adapted from Gestalt psychology to comics research by McCloud. (Duncan & Smith 2009, 10, 166, 316.) McCloud identifies closure as the “phenomenon of observing the parts but perceiving the whole”, and specifies six different types of closure. His categories for the transitions between panels are: (1) moment to moment, (2) action to action, (3) subject to subject, (4) scene to scene, (5) aspect to aspect, and (6) non sequitor, in which there is no logical relationship between the panels. (McCloud 1993, 63; 69–73.)

The most common types of closure in *Elfquest* are clearly (2) action to action and also (3) subject to subject, and the comic books contain virtually none non sequitor transitions. This is generally the case in most Western mainstream comics, for the types 2 – 4 are effective in narrating an adventure (see McCloud 1993, 75–77). *Elfquest* also uses easily distinguishable scene to scene closures (4) in which character, place and time usually change. The narration sometimes takes advantage of this clarity and places panels from differing scenes in a tight sequence, where time, space and the fates of characters become interwoven, contrasted and connected (see, for example, OQ 8, 27–29 or OQ 20, 28–29). The moment to moment (1) and aspect to aspect (5) transitions in *Elfquest* are rare. Thus when they appear they emphasize, among other things, the mood, beauty or impact of the scene or the brevity of events (see for example OQ 9, 27 or KotBW 5, 8–10; 28–30).

The anatomy of comics is complex and varied. Though medium-specific conventions guide processes of interpretation, same iconotextual sequences can be experienced quite differently by individual readers. According to Herkman who uses the terminology by Roland Barthes and John Fiske, many texts of popular culture are “producerly” texts that evoke pleasure in the reader by calling him to actively and personally produce meanings from the text. Thus producerly texts integrate characteristics of Barthes' two categories of texts: “readerly” (easy to understand similarly by different readers) and “writerly” (complex, contradictory and open to various meanings). (Herkman 1998, 175–176.) Herkman also explains that the hybrid form of the comics medium has enabled it to break the margins of “normal” expression and perceived reality; comics has been a restless and uneasy medium hard to fit into neat categories (Herkman 2007, 59–60). This enables an agile, powerful approach to sensitive or controversial content – a possibility that many comics creators have explored in their own ways. For example, horror comics (e.g. those published by EC), underground comix (Robert Crumb), comics journalism (Joe Sacco), autobiographical comics (Marjane Satrapi, Alison Bechdel), alternative or experimental comics (Art Spiegelman, Chris Ware, the group Oubapo) and comics used for developmental purposes have depicted deeply personal, political and even potentially offensive themes.

The pleasure of reading media texts – be they readerly, writerly or producerly – is linked to the quality of identification that the reader experiences with the text. In his guide for using comics for informing about developmental issues, Leif Packalén says that comics is a non-aggressive medium, and can be used to deal with sensitive issues such as sex, love or death (Packalén 1999). Unlike photograph and film, comics elude too crude and brutal aggression; because comics are drawn and usually far from photo-realism, the onlooker recognizes "humanity", or the touch of a human hand. A great deal of the medium's power probably stems from this human touch, which, while being always interpretive and read as such, also affects the reader directly. Thus the things comics depict can be experienced as very "real" and also disturbing. Wendy and Richard Pini write about their personal involvement in the changes underwent by their characters, and how readers expressed strong opinions in response to scenes of death, love (and sex), and bloodshed:

> "[War was] not the sterile, bloodless posturing of traditional superhero comics – but an ignoble horror in which violent acts had violent consequences. [- -] There were those who wrote that some event or transition in Elfquest had helped them with similar happenings in their own lives, and there were those who expressed deep upset that we dared to show such 'real' things in a comic book meant for children (which Elfquest never was)." (1998, 4–5.)

The commentaries of Pinis and Packalén interestingly highlight how differently comics readers can situate themselves with regard to this type of iconotexts. The following overview of comics history also demonstrates how comics have gained many roles in relation to their readers and cultural movements: entertainers, moral educators, revisers of myths, challengers, sales magnets, and experimenters, for example.

2.1.3 Development of popular modern comics

Comics has long been one of the most underrated mediums, but has received more critical appreciation during the last decades. The history of comics can be traced back to cave paintings, hieroglyphics, Mayan art, medieval church art and book illustrations, and other predecessors in literature and visual arts such as the tapestry of Bayeux; for a very long time, humans have had the tendency to tell stories and depict their reality in multimodal forms. However, the first modern comics, a mass media phenomenon obtaining the name "comics", were published in the late 19th century (McCloud 1993, Herkman 1996, Barker 1989).

Already in the 1820s, Swiss Rudolphe Töppher developed the form of the medium with his *littérature en estampes*, satirical caricature stories that combined words and pictures set in narrative sequences. These sketchy, absurd “stories in etchings” in extensive album format succeeded in rendering movement unlike the traditional visual arts, and showed potential (for Johan Wolfgang von Goethe, for example) to tell stories of greater significance. (Duncan & Smith 2009, 24–25.)

Comics became popular notably in Europe, North America and Japan (the term “manga” was popularized by Hokusai in early 19 century), and developed somewhat distinctively in these different cultural contexts. Still, the early modern comics were first and foremost commercial products of mass media. American comics industry originated from humor supplements in newspapers that developed into comic strips, and from pulp magazines which provided the new medium with their investment capital, artists, genres, and heroes.

Newspaper comics had a simple goal: to increase the sales of products and ideas. (Duncan & Smith 2009, 26–29, 105.) However, from the very beginning comics were also meant for moral education; for example, in United Kingdom, Alfred Harmsworth launched *Comic Cuts* which he meant to counteract the Penny Dreadfuls, popular, entertaining, and sensational street literature of the Victorian era, and *Boy's Own Paper* by Religious Tract Society adopted adventure and sport as themes that the boy comic readers, their parents and the Christian publishers would accept. Barker argues that this original labeling of comics as “harmless” children's literature, opposing to “everything dangerous”, prevailed for more than half a century. (Barker 1989, 8–9.) Comics were further industrialized and grew in popularity during the early 20th century, with the rise of syndicates and international distribution. A comics magazine was such a cheap product that even children could afford them. This popularity among younger readers along with the name “comics” referring to something lighthearted and humorous probably reinforced the conception of comics as a childish medium. Still, many comics were and are appreciated by both adult and children readers, even if for differing reasons, and the marketing for adult readers has increased in the course of 20th century.

Superheroes dominated the American comics in the “Golden Age” of comics in the 1930s. When their popularity declined in the 1940s, comic book industry continued to thrive with a variety of genres: funny animals, romance, western, and especially crime and horror. According to Weiner (2003, 6–7), especially the skilful, subversive horror comics published by EC revealed the pretense in American lifestyle – for those who would see it.

A cultural movement aiming to control the emerging youth culture in the 1950s produced a public outcry against comics. Fredric Wertham's *Seduction of the Innocent* (1954) became its symbol. In his book

Wertham analyzed the effects of comics through a disease metaphor, claiming that comics deteriorate the morals of children and cause juvenile delinquency. Though the government did establish no censorship of comics, the comic book industry began self-censoring and regulating the content of their work with the inspection of the Comics Code Authority. The Comics Code banned, for example, sexual representations, violence, blood and gore, and the escape of criminals from justice. (Duncan & Smith 2009, 36–40; Kukkonen 2013, 110–111.) However, the counterculture ideology of the 1960s with its anarchic politics and sexual liberation, among other themes, began to flourish in the underground comics – these "comix" prospered until the mid-1970s (Arffman 2004, 19). Horror comic magazines re-entered the markets in the 1970s, but this time their generic as well as thematic scope was broader: they included more experimental science fiction and fantasy stories and approached societal problems such as racism, inequality, pollution, war, structural violence, or the malaise of youth (Hiltunen 2005, 212–214).

A new format of comics with its longer, carefully construed and generally “darker” story lines emerged in the 1980s, as a result of a lengthy development. Three critically acclaimed works are usually mentioned as prime examples of this format, the graphic novel: *Maus* (1980–1991) by Art Spiegelman, *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* (1986) by Frank Miller, and *The Watchmen* (1986–1987) by Alan Moore, Dave Gibbons, and John Higgins. The term “graphic novel” implies how the editors and artists wanted to force higher cultural status for their medium by characterizing it with the terms of literature. Artists as well as academics made more effort to redefine comics as an art form; Will Eisner, whose *Contract with God* in 1978 is regarded as one of the first graphic novels, coined the term “sequential art”. (Weiner 2003, 20.)

Elfquest was one of the pioneering creator-owned comics – falling in the “ground level” variety of non-mainstream, but not quite underground comic books of the late 1970s (Duncan & Smith 2009, 64–65). The comic book stores were prospering, comics were even regarded as an art form, and in general the comics industry experienced “a period of redefinition and transition”; this environment favored small companies and publishers (Weiner 2003, 25–26). The underground movement had stretched the conventions of comics genres, allowing the artists to express themselves more individually, and coincided with the women's liberation movement. As underground comics artists, women emphasized feminine sexuality but also independence, solidarity among women and even mystical, primal feminine power (Arffman 2004, 250). Traces of these themes can be clearly seen in *Elfquest*; notably the relatively open sexuality of elves, more explicit later in the series, is rooted to the values of the 1960s counterculture. Still, there is hardly any hint of the (self-)satirical tone that characterizes most underground comics – except perhaps in a meta-fictive extra issue ”Dreamtime Pt ?”, published in the late 1990s, where the co-creator Wendy Pini discusses the future of the series with two of her central characters. On the official *Elfquest* website, Wendy Pini names turn-of-the-century illustrators, Shakespeare, Japanese history, myths, fairy tales, and modern fantasy among her influences. By the late 1970s she was a rarity in the comic industry as being the first female author of a continuing fantasy/adventure comic series. (*Elfquest* homepage: About Warp.) When the first issues of *Elfquest* came out in newsstands, presumably the rigid gender oppositions within both "the System" and the counterculture movement had softened. *Elfquest* became popular especially among female readers in the US, one of the most successful independent comics, and gained a cult status. (Booker 2010; 173–174, 202; Kinder 1990, 381.)

The publication practices obviously influence the narration of comics. Although *Elfquest* is initially governed by a quest structure, with numerous other authors and parallel plots the series has also expanded to a type of narrative that Marie-Laure Ryan calls braided narrative. A braided narrative ties together different stories and of a large cast of characters that are still internally consistent and live in the same fictional environment – unlike in many superhero comics, for example. This kind of narrative seems endless, at least as long as it responds to the needs of readers. (Duncan and Smith 2009, 129–130.) However, the original *Elfquest* (*The Original Quest*) comes to a planned end, and the issues that this study examines narrate a global plot that touches all characters. Moreover, though the *Elfquest* continuum has meandered and grown manifold in the hands of various writers and artists since the earliest issues, Pinis have retained creative control over the series and planning to end the quest with the issues of *Final Quest*.

2.1.4 Ecosocial consciousness in comics

Lawrence Buell identifies four ways in which "acts of environmental imagination" possibly engage us with the world:

> "They may connect readers vicariously with others' experience, suffering, pain: that of nonhumans as well as humans. They may reconnect readers with places they have been and send them where they would otherwise never physically go. They may direct thought toward alternative futures. And they may affect one's caring for the physical world: make it feel more or less precious or endangered or disposable. All this may befall a moderately attentive reader reading about a cherished, abused, or endangered place." (Buell 2001, 2.)

As reflectors and commentators of diverse naturecultures, comics have touched social issues and, increasingly, environmental concerns during the last decades. Toxic discourse (see Buell) has entered even the most popular comic genres, such as superhero or funny animal comics. For example, the Earth Day strip in 1971 of *Pogo*, a long-running, socially satirical strip comic with anthropomorphic animals in swamp environment by Walter Kelly, features one of the most oft-cited comics quote: "We have met the enemy and he is us" (the protagonists are walking over piles of rubbish). Longer comic series are often situated in post-apocalyptic realms and focus on ecological themes of modifying the environment and co-existing peacefully, such as Hayao Miayzaki's popular and critically acclaimed manga series *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* (published in 1982–1994). Superheroes also have to deal with social and ecological problems. *Watchmen* starkly comments on the human war folly that can sometimes be appeased only by introducing an unknown enemy that unifies opposing sides. As current popular culture eagerly creates adaptations across different media, also comic creators tailor stories originally told in literature, cinema, or games for their chosen medium. For example, *The Sands of Sarasvati* (*Sarasvatin hiekkaa*), an environmentally alarming science fiction novel by Risto Isomäki, has been adapted to comic book form by Petri Tolppanen and Jussi Kaakinen. It depicts a sudden natural disaster that, in truth, our world may face in the near future. However, the storyworld, imaginary or realist, need not be demolished in order to feature environmental issues, as in Paul Chadwick's *Concrete* (published from 1986). The protagonist is a normal man whose brain has been transplanted into a large stone body by aliens (and whose thoughts are depicted extensively), but otherwise the story is set in realistic world.

These brief examples are explicit in their environmental commentary, but I assert that any text can be interpreted from an ecological perspective. Furthermore, any text has significance in regard to well-being because it is read by a human agent who cannot withdraw from the crucial aspects of his existence. Therefore, one can always examine how comics relate to their reader and how they relate their reader to something else – which, of course, is fundamentally ethical.

All comics mentioned above contain some amount of supernatural elements and can be characterized as speculative fiction. Looking back to the history of comics we can see that at all times the medium has been used to tell myths and legends – ancient storytelling practices have gained new forms, for example, in fairy tales, horror stories, the uncanny, sword-and-sorcery fantasy, science fiction inventions and “what if” -realities. Many of the most well-renowned comics fit well to the fantasy genre (e.g. *Little Nemo in Slumberland* by Winsor McCay or *The Sandman* by Neil Gaiman and numerous collaborative artists). In chapter 2.2 I will examine how we can differentiate diverse narratives that use fantastical elements from modern fantasy, much in the same way as we differentiate protocomics from modern comics.

2.1.5 Characters: tools for identification and otherness

The medium of comics traditionally relies heavily on characters. In contrast with literature, the distinguishable visual features and “bodily” presence of these entities on the comic page is usually perceived as the crux of the matter. The combinations of visual characteristics become trademarks that companies can own; for example Marvel defines itself as “one of the world’s most prominent character-based entertainment companies, built on a proven library of over 8,000 characters featured in a variety of media over seventy years". (Marvel, 2015.)

The overall visual style of a comic book strongly affects the way its characters and worldview are comprehended. Wendy Pini draws *Elfquest* in a relatively detailed and contrasted, graceful style that resembles manga and superhero comics. It also has some similarities with "clear line" style, which conventionally indicates "a lighthearted adventure" in which the triumph of heroes and of good over evil seems likely, in contrast with the "ugly" art style which often conveys a pessimistic and brute worldview (Duncan & Smith 2009, 162).

Elves and other characters in *Elfquest* can be conceived both as growing, aging beings and as compilations of signs and symbols – the former is born from an empathetic interaction of the reader with the latter. They have fixed features including facial characteristics as well as clothing and character-related symbols or markers, such as Skywise's blue metal headpiece, that make them recognizable from panel to panel. Some of their visual markers gain special meaning in the course of the series: the magnetic lodestone pendant of Skywise that he obtains early in the quest acts as compass, and brings luck and hope to himself and his companions (e.g. OQ 1, 24–25, 28; OQ 2, 3–4; OQ 9, 12–13). Thus hope and luck also come to characterize Skywise. The physical characteristics of elves are somewhat exaggerated and childlike, and pleasant to the Western eye. Most elves have large heads, eyes and ears, and soft hair, which tend to evoke in humans the will to protect. In many ways they reflect the stereotypical imagery of superheroes and fantastic adventurers, where muscular men and sexually attractive women dominate. However, considering the style of *Elfquest* characters in the context of independent comics, their appearance is quite striking – it has more to do with influence from manga than underground comix. In contrast, the humans in *Elfquest* are drawn quite realistically.

McCloud sees visual simplification, or caricature, as virtue that grants power to the comics. A cartoon is an empty shell within which we can travel to another realms; it is a concept (McCloud 1993, 36). According to McCloud, the appeal of cartoonish drawings stems from our bodily perception; we are aware of our own bodily sensations, positions and movements only roughly, whereas we see our environment, other objects and people in detail. For that reason simplified pictorial representations of characters in realistically drawn settings especially enhance the reader's identification with the characters; their caricature appearance allows us to extend our identities, place ourselves in these shells and explore the realms of comics in their disguise. McCloud calls this mask effect.[11] (McCloud 1993, 30–43.) In contrast with the rather realistically drawn human characters, the *Elfquest* elves occasionally do seem to offer themselves as vessels that transport our identities in their fantasy world. However, they situate roughly on the same moderate level of simplification and low level of abstraction with their environments and fellow creatures. When elves and humans meet in the story world, their visual and verbal opposition explicates that elves are not portrayed as caricatures of human bodies, but that they look genuinely different.[12]

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[11] McCloud's thinking follows the lines drawn by Marshall McLuhan, who observed how we humans tend to extend our identities and consciousness to material objects which we touch or connect with (see McCloud 1993, 38). Thus

Many characters in comics are virtually stable and unchanging, more like storytelling machines and symbols for ideas and ideals than real people – or "spheres of action", as Vladimir Propp describes fairy tale characters (Attebery 2012, 83). Superhero is the character type most emblematic of comics. In his commentary on Superman, Umberto Eco argues that despite his superhuman powers, the comics hero cannot fundamentally affect his environment, "because change would ground the superhero in the temporal and move him one step closer to death" (Duncan & Smith 2009, 233). The publication practices of comics easily grant well-established characters a serial existence which ultimately does not allow them to die – though in reality, they might change a lot in reflecting the current era and the wishes of their creators (consider, for example, the camp-style Batman of the 1960s and the "Dark Knight" of Frank Miller). In a way, characters are atemporal, if we do think of time as change – or, they inhabit an "adventure time", one of Bakhtin's chronotopes which describe the inseparability of time-space in works of art. In adventure time, events are sudden and not necessarily logically or psychologically consistent, taking place in large amounts of space and causing plot-lines characterized by "abduction, parting, pursuit, escape" (Vice 1997, 208). In *Elfquest*, the plot often progresses with these kinds of impulses. Nevertheless, that the narrative also emphasizes returning, dwelling, and adapting. Characters age and mature, but none of the central characters die in the issues examined; even the dying elves continue their existence in spirit form. When death happens, its tragedy weaves around the loss of material, sensual situation and relation with the other, and the problems of communication (see especially chapter 3.3.3). The stable, recognizable characters create a sense of continuity which allows the reader to feel safe.

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the individual self becomes extended in our concrete environments while remaining functional. Medium-specificity is prominent in McLuhan's thinking. On the basis of the effect and experience of using various media, he classified them in "hot" and "cool" media. McLuhan saw comics as cool medium: it requires a high degree of mental involvement from their user and engenders holistic patterns, for example, like oral discussion or idiographic writing. Also, how a medium functions in human experience depends on its environment: other media and the society in which it is used. According to McLuhan (1994, quoted in Bobbitt 2011), the narcotic or numbing effects of media can be counteracted by awareness, by using counteracting media and myth, "the instant vision of a complex process that ordinarily extends over a long period", and thus contributes to a gratifying understanding of reality. (Bobbitt 2011.)

[12] For example, a human woman called Nonna admires the fairness of elves and feels herself dimmed by the comparison. However, Cutter recognizes their differences both in outward and inward appearance by telling her: "We are different, but I see no ugliness in you." (OQ 9, 29.)

It is probable that the publication of comics in serial form enhances the reader's participation; serial narratives intertwine in the memories and perspectives of regular readers (see Varis 2013, 77–78). Repeated returning to empathize with the lives of fictional characters creates ties in which we invest, or nest, our own time, personality, and relationships. This affective bonding resembles the one we share with real persons and with environments of work and play which we inhabit (see also Ahmed's description of happiness as affect in chapter 2.4.2). Fantasy series form a similar pact of continuity, as will be examined below (chapter 2.2.2).

Characters may relate to other narrative agents (narrator, focalizer, and observer) in complex ways. In relatively straightforward adventure comics, including *Elfquest*, the levels of different agents are not so marked as in many autobiographical comics. Kukkonen demonstrates how the roles of three narrative (autobiographical) agents "[- -] can be read from the clues in the image and its perspective: the narrator, who creates the image; the focalizer, on whose knowledge it is based; and the observer, whose embodied spatial position is represented and which the reader is invited to share." (Kukkonen 2013, 59.) As the ethical questions of facing the unrepresentable other will be raised in the analysis, it will be necessary to examine the roles of various narrative agents also in *Elfquest*.

Though characters function as tools for storytelling, the readers are undeniably capable to identify and empathize with most of them. How can we perceive personality in things where there is none? The sole answer is not in that we interpret characters as mere extensions and reflectors of our egos. Lisa Zunshine argues that much of fiction's attraction stems from our tendency to apply to fictional characters the "theory of mind" we use to interpret other people's behavior. We do not know for certain that other people think, feel, memorize and plan, but on a theoretical level we (supposedly) assume they do. We assume each other a social existence, and, in part, connect similarly with fictional characters – "greedy mind-readers" as we are. Thus the pleasure involved in reading fiction and comics is also inherently *social*. Zunshine defines sosiocognitive complexity as "the depiction of a mental state embedded within another mental state" and maintains that fictional narratives – including graphic narratives – need at least three embedded mental state levels in order to function. (Zunshine 2011, 116–121.) The narrative agents all play their roles in constructing these sociocognitive levels. As we shall see in chapter 3, the most intriguing, pleasurable and engaging experiences in reading *Elfquest* result from the moments when the characters' behavior or understanding of the events is enigmatic, conflicting, or vulnerable to changes in facing otherness, or when we as readers sense that the characters are trying to interpret each other. The narrator, focalizer, and observer also take part in this interplay.

Aside from individual characters, particularly Cutter, the young chief of Wolfriders, the whole elven tribe can be seen as the main protagonist of *Elfquest*; many ethical conflicts and articulations arise from their encounters with other elven tribes (Sunfolk, Gliders and Go-Backs) or with trolls, preservers, humans and other animals of the World of Two Moons. These differing folk act as companion species for each other, or "make each other up, in the flesh", are "significantly other to each other", to quote Haraway's words (2003, 2–3).

2.2 Fantasy

2.2.1 Forming the Fantasyland

What Coleridge called "willing suspension of disbelief for the moment which constitutes poetic faith" (1817, quoted in Holland 2004, 395) can be seen central for immersive, influential experiencing of arts, including comics. In the fantasy genre, common in all media, this ability to believe in the non-existent gains even more prominence. Numerous scholars have attempted to define fantasy; however, their premises and cultural background differ from each other, which has led to conflicting definitions. Modern fantasy has developed from fairy tales, folklore, myths, legends and other religious stories, but it has evolved in the extent that it cannot substitute for them. Modern fantasy is also often grouped with science fiction and horror within the broader genre of speculative fiction.

One definition of the fantasy genre is that the story includes supernatural or magical elements that are impossible in real life, and that these elements have a clear function in the narration (Ihonen 2004, 78). The non-existent or magical is therefore real and active within the narrated realm. Already Tolkien discusses this in his 1947 essay "On Fairy-Stories"; he says that magic as such is not relevant, but how it is used: to explore the depths of time and space or to connect with other living beings. Tolkien maintains that the author should construct a consistent, internally believable secondary world, where the mind of the reader may enter. (Tolkien 2010, 208; 227.) The secondary world means the fantasy realm which may or may not exist separately from our world, the primary world.

In *Elfquest*, the very existence of elves, trolls, tiny winged preservers, and even primitive humans is wondrous, though at the same time familiar and comprehensible. Magical abilities are explained as capacities of elves, or a gift of their bodies (see OQ 20, 24). It would seem that due to historical reasons some elven tribes appreciate magic less, or have less use for it, and have thus forgotten even their most “basic” magical ability: “sending”, telepathic communication which cannot contain lies. Sending thus heightens the importance of the spiritual dimension, the authenticity and truthfulness in contact. What is more, Wolfriders can communicate with their wolf-friends with a special form of sending; this emphasizes their hybrid essence and shared history with the wolves. In this secondary world, also time travel is possible – and thus, for example, the exploration of the psychological hazards one faces when realizing fully one's own mortality and entanglement with time (see chapter 3.4.3).

Tzvetan Todorov's structuralist definition of the fantastic focuses on the interpretation of the story realm. According to Todorov, in order for the text to be fantastic, it has to fulfill at least two, if not three requirements: “First, the text must oblige the reader to consider the world of the characters as a world of living persons and to hesitate between a natural and a supernatural explanation of the events described.” The second requirement – that the hesitation is experienced by a character, with which the reader may identify – is not necessary for the construction of the genre, but the third is: “[T]he reader must adopt a certain attitude with regard to the text: he will reject allegorical as well as 'poetic' interpretations.” (Todorov 1975, 33.) Thus, the reader's hesitation whether the actions and entities of the text are possible or impossible, an uncertainty which may be shared with the textual character, is definitive for the fantastic. If, in the end, the supernatural events find a logical explanation, the genre shifts to uncanny[13]; if these supernatural events appear true, the fantastic moves on to marvelous. (Todorov 1975, 25, 41.) However, Todorov defines the *fantastique* according to its usage in French. The *fantastique* is a semi-genre or an effect situated between magic realism and (modern) fantasy as it is understood in English. Modern fantasy is often more alike to Todorov's marvelous, which presents a world or events that are unquestionably supernatural, that is, something that is not “real” as it is commonly and rationally understood. The characters in *Elfquest* may hesitate if magic is involved in some event or object, but they do not hesitate over the existence of magic itself, which they usually sense in some inherent way. The explanation of magic as an alien race's psychic capacities that remain hidden unless explored may be acceptable to the rational mind. In any case, most *Elfquest*'s characters themselves – elves, trolls, and fairy-like preservers – are supernatural to the eyes of the reader.

Brian Attebery (1980, 2) distinguishes fantasy from narrative poetry and surreal fiction on the basis that fantasy needs consistency. Fantasy also requires some imaginative effort from the reader, who accepts the unbelievable elements as integral parts of the story world, and enters a game which has rules that differ from the conventional reality. The idea is similar to Coleridge's “willing suspension of disbelief”, and

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[13] Todorov's categories “uncanny” and “disturbing” are not really dimensions of fairy tale but of legend, which is told as truth, has a localized setting and mainly a historical figure as its protagonist. Legends also tend to be more fragmentary narratives. (Attebery 1980, 6.)

Tolkien's “secondary belief”; however, Tolkien rejects suspending or rejecting one's disbelief as sheer falsehood, whereas one can be genuinely *enchanted* or charmed for example by a game, a play, or a story (Tolkien 2010, 227–228). Also, from a neuropsychological perspective, due to the different structures or strata of our brain, in the moment of experiencing fiction we *neither* believe or disbelieve the fictional world and its events. This aesthetic experience can be characterized by the Kantian term “disinterestedness”; that is, though we respond to a fictive situation emotionally as we would to a real one, momentarily we know that it requires no action, no “survival” or planning of movement from ourselves as individuals, and thus we do not engage in testing its realness. (Holland 2004.) Accepting the conventions of fantasy results, for the reader, as a coherent, rapt experience, which Attebery (1980, 2) describes as an “occasional sense of unexpected beauty and strangeness, in other words, wonder”. I argue that in this moment of “disinterestedness”, in feeling safe and not testing the reality, one is in direct contact with the influence of the Other in oneself.

According to Rosemary Jackson, fantasy neither escapes the real nor exists discretely from it. The relationship of fantasy and reality is “parasitical or symbiotic”; fantasy explores the limits and qualities of the real (Jackson 1981, 19–20). With this in mind, fantasy does have the ability to integrate familiar and strange, to sustain otherness which communicates with the categories of the Same. Fantasy may alert the human mind to regard the realm of “what if” for real, and help to appreciate the ordinary world while seeing alternatives to the obvious or mundane – thus it may resist the tendency of human mind to totalize the meaning of otherness within the categories of the same (see Levinas's thought in chapter 2.6). This metaphorical, cognitive and, at its best, empathetic process of reading may widen the scope of real, the domains of reality.

Ihonen notes that every fantasy tale involves its reader in a creation of a novel world. The supernatural events of fantasy are related to their environment and to reality – unlike supernatural events in fairy tales, which take place independently in an indefinable place and are based mostly on the conventions of the genre. (Ihonen 2004, 76.) In my point of view, it is appropriate to consider fantasy worlds as integrated, self-contained realities. By granting them a certain credibility one can recognize what these worlds say about our reality and our relationships within it. From the perspective of this study, fantasy is understood as a genre, or mode of narration, that helps one to momentarily reveal one’s relationship with “the other”, or absolute alterity. We may come out of the reading experience enriched by a capacity to engage with and to appreciate the “real in its wonder” (see Abram 2011, 259); texts are situated in the world and may lead us to experiences we would not otherwise have.

Modern fantasy has its roots in the folktale, which probably has the same origins as epic and myth.

According to Attebery, both fantasy and folktale aim for the same important goal, "to give comprehensible form to life, death, good, and evil" (Attebery 1980, 4), though it can be argued that the arts in general share the goal of generating meaningfulness. The oral tradition of one kind of folktale – called fairy tale or *Märchen,* 'wonder tale' – took literary form first in the hands of German Romantics (such as Novalis or E.T.A. Hoffmann). In the Anglo-Saxon Europe, fairy tale was further developing towards "high fantasy", influenced by the Gothic and Romantic movements. When morality and educational purposes eased their grip on children's literature, the field was free for the fantastical mode to develop further in literary fairy tales. A metadiegetic nonsense story included in Helene Sinclair's *Holiday House* (1839) can be considered as the first English literary fairy tale, and *The Hope of the Katzekopfs* (1844) as the first English children's fantasy novel. Later the works Charles Kingsley, and Lewis Carroll, and George MacDonald, among others, opened the way especially for such authors as C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien, who had a considerable impact on the conventions of modern fantasy. The prose of Tolkien is marked with the merging of comic and sublime, ordinary and supernatural; "[h]igh and low, myth and Märchen blend in to produce a uniquely moving story". (Attebery 1980, 6–12.) Edward James sees that the greatest accomplishment of Tolkien, "in retrospect, was in normalizing the idea of the secondary world" (James 2012, 65).

In the late 1970s, the time was ripe for the success of *Elfquest* not only on the comics market (see chapter 2.1.4) but also as a fantasy work. Publishers who had begun to see fantasy as a distinct genre. Not only several *The Lord of the Rings* imitations sold well, but also *The Silmarillion* appeared, heightening the interest of fantasy readership. The influence of fantasy was seen in the works of science fiction writers (e.g. Marion Zimmer Bradley), including a number of crossovers (e.g. Anne McCaffrey's series of the dragonriders of a colony planet Pern). Film reworkings of medieval fairy tales appeared (*Star Wars* and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* both in 1977). Fantasy also began to flourish in role-playing games: the first version of the *Dungeons and Dragons* was published in 1974. Fantasy readership had become increasingly female and utopian feminist possibilities were worked over within fantasy genre – a genre which had already been established well enough so that it could be parodied (by Terry Prachett, for example). (James 2012, 74–76.)

Attebery gives five criteria for describing the "high fantasy" tradition among the descendants of the folktale: (1) setting, (2) structural framework, (3) role and character of the protagonist, (4) types of secondary characters and (5) ways of tying events to values and ideas. *Elfquest* corresponds well to these particulars. Firstly, the World of Two Moons is an Other World, a definite location, which is neither heaven nor hell, but our own world made "fresher, grander, more alive, and more dangerous". Its melange of familiar and marvelous is fit for evoking "a nostalgia for the never-was". (Attebery 1980, 12.)

With structural framework Attebery means similar functions as presented by Vladimir Propp; the narratives of both fairy tales and fantasy are built by combining functional blocks (such as testing of the hero, rescue from pursuit, acquisition of a desired magical object, or chance meeting of the donor) which produce, for example, a quest. Actually most narratives, even realistic fiction, employ these story structures in disguised form, but fantasy tends to do it more openly and straightforwardly; in realistic fiction, the time perspective often varies on the level of discourse (the narrator reorganizes events with, for example, flashbacks, anticipations, or repetitions) whereas in fantasy the rearrangement of time may take place on the level of story (the protagonists travel in time, or time freezes). (Attebery 2012, 87–88.)

The chief Cutter could be called the hero of *Elfquest*, although his family and his tribe Wolfriders often seem as important; a community protagonist of sorts. Though gifted, Cutter is an ordinary, “limited character in the unlimited realm of fantasy” (Attebery 1980, 13), that gives guidance to the reader. Secondary characters, on the other hand, can be as “extraordinary as imagination permits” (ibid.): the main foe Winnowill, her half-elf, half-troll son Two-Edge, and Timmain, a High One and “Mother” of the Wolfriders, are all powerful and enigmatic characters. They all go through some kind of metamorphosis, whereas the main protagonists experience more subtle changes.

The themes – and wonder – of *Elfquest* mainly revolve around the question of the “true nature” of elves, and the conflicts between mortals and immortals. As Attebery explains,

> “[- -] high fantasy establishes a sphere of significance, in which the actions of hero and inhuman, helper and villain, reflect a coherent and extractable order. Characters are not merely individuals but the upholders of moral and intellectual standards. [- -] Acts in fantasy are always meaningful, because everything connects with, or signifies, everything else. The least detail may be an omen of the future, and the smallest action may bring that future to pass. Such a system of relationships is magical, whether the magic is openly displayed in spells and talismans or submerged in landscape or atmosphere or the very fabric of the created world.” (Attebery 1980, 13–14.)

Attebury's phrasing on the ethical meaningfulness of fantasy resonates well with ecological interconnectedness. The tendency of fantasy to adhere all events with special moral and ethical significance is crucial in the scope of this study.

2.2.2 *Elfquest*: a serial quest fantasy

Though tales of Fantasyland have taken many shapes over the years, the series form established its popularity in the 1970s. In series fiction, the commitment between the writer and reader has a special significance. With a sense of familiarity and continuity, the series author adds value to adventure, experience and pleasure promised by any fiction author, whereas the reader of series pledges to stay with characters, a place or a problem for a prolonged period of time. (Maund 2012, 147.) Of course, the commitment between these two parties is not automatically created and sustained, for not all series fiction is easily accessible in any of its parts and the reader may choose to break the pact anytime. Still, the potential for reassuring commitment comes across especially from comics series, for they tend to be less time consuming than novels.

Elfquest is a series of scripted form: it has continuing characters and a plot – that is mostly closed rather than very open ended – as its main driving force. *Elfquest* presents a conflict, characters whose task is to solve it, their short term successes and obstacles and finally, resolution and reward. These kinds of scripted series are possibly most common in fantasy genre.[14] While the scripted series is self-containing, it permits expansions. (Maund 2012, 148–149.) Also in *Elfquest*, the characters' undertakings, problems and even daily chores seem to be an endless mine of sequels. The issues I am examining, however, are more self-limiting with regard to their individual plots.

The narrative structure in myths since *Gilgamesh* and also in modern fantasy is often a quest; so it obviously is also in *Elfquest.* The wonders of the world are exxperienced through abundant traveling towards a specific goal. The early series revolve basically around the mission "have to find other elves", as the main protagonist Cutter sighs, making explicit the determination that prevents both him and the quest from dying[15] (OQ 8, 13). Fantasy meant for children and adolescents in particular uses quest structure, for the challenges of growing into adulthood can be clearly expressed in this narrative form. Thus fantasy acts as an important follower of the bildungsroman (e.g. *Jane Eyre, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn,* or *The Catcher in the Rye*). *Elfquest* makes use of the tropes of a coming-of-age story as a way to create a sense of familiarity with its readers (see Maund 2012, 150–151). Its storyline closely resembles the typical quest fantasy structure as described by W.A. Senior:

> "The narrative begins as a single thread but often becomes polysemous, as individuals or small groups pursue minor quests within the overall framework. Quest fantasies conventionally start in a place of security and stability, and then a disruption from the outside world occurs. The protagonist, generally an average person with hidden abilities, receives a call to action and reluctantly embarks on the first adventure. Choice is crucial in quest fantasy, so protagonists face several cruxes where their choices determine the fate of many. After the hero and company pass the first test and receive rewards such as magic items, a respite, often characterized by feasting and music in a haven under the protection of a wisdom figure, occurs during which the members of the company receive aid and knowledge." (Senior 2012, 190.)

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[14] Kari Maund also distinguishes two other types of series fiction: the classic series (classic, because it is recurrent in early modern fantasy), which is character-dependent and open-ended, and the thematic series, or series of place, which is bound rather by a common theme or setting than by common characters or plot. (Maund 2012, 148–149.)

[15] Later in the series, this determination as the driving force of the plot is repeated, when Rayek has separated Cutter from his family. Cutter is in a similar situation, close to death: "No... can't die now! Have to find... my family..!" (KotBW 7, 28.)

The pleasure in reading *Elfquest* partly stems from recognizing the conventions of the genre, and how they take their unique form, intertwining and unraveling as the complex of interactions between the characters and their world. It is also important to consider here how the “landscape functions as a character”, somewhat like in the American Western (ibid.) Most of the conventions Senior mentions are modulated in the course of *Elfquest*:

> “[- -] the average person as unwilling hero, the mage or wisdom figure, the importance of companions, the acquisition of knowledge and discovery of self, the crux of choice and action, the rejection of passivity, the wonder of the secondary world and its organic, sentient nature, the deep mythic past of history and legends, the mixture of peoples, the rules and limits of magic, the machinations of the Dark Lord and his minions, the reality of evil and the crescendo of battle and triumph, if only for a time.” (Senior 2012, 192.)

Cutter is young, orphaned chief of his tribe, curious about the world, and determined to reach a goal once he identifies it – thus a perfect fantasy hero to embark on a quest and fulfill his hidden, true potential. Cutter's companions also come into their own and develop distinct identities and gifts that contribute to the whole of their community (see for example Redlance and Scouter in OQ 5, or Zhantee and Venka in KotBW 9); the idea of “serving the tribe” is invoked repeatedly (e.g. KotBW 9, 17). The close kinship among Wolfriders is emphasized from the very beginning of the series – it also acts as a driving force for Cutter, an unwilling hero in the sense that he does not seek for heroic acts, but must do them for the sake of greater good; as he explains to his son: “That's all that matters, Suntop -- / -- the tribe!” (OQ 10, 31). The characters need to develop personally and in relation to each other in order to meet their challenges and overcome their difficulties.

Once an evil occurs – a revengeful tribe of humans burn down the forest and force Wolfriders to flee to the troll caverns – Cutter's obligation to lead his tribe towards a better future is tested. The feud between humans and elves also its roots deep in history, in the legendary time of the arrival of the High Ones, the elves' ancestors (OQ 1, 1–5). In their search for a safe haven the Wolfriders cross diverse, highly contrasted landscapes of their enigmatic, wondrous world; for example glimmering underground troll caverns or a burning desert in the midst of which their kindred the Sunfolk dwell peacefully in a green valley oasis, called “Sorrow's End”. After some conflicts and misunderstandings, Wolfriders meet two wisdom figures, the blind, cleric-like Suntoucher and the elderly Savah. They and their people welcome their forest cousins with kindness, celebration, music and dance. (OQ 1 and 2.)

Cutter's testing and personal development is in the focus of several issues (OQ 2–OQ 5); revealing his vulnerability, the plot allows the reader to identify more strongly with this average person who, nevertheless, is revealed virtuous (also by the wisdom figure Savah, see OQ 5, 19). Cutter has “recognized” with a Sunfolk maiden, powerful healer called Leetah. If two elves recognize, their come to know each other's souls, and will have children. Recognition is a call that cannot be ignored. However, Leetah rejects recognition and Cutter whom she considers barbarian. She is also courted by her long-time friend, the hot-tempered Rayek, who likewise possesses strong magical powers. Rayek challenges Cutter to a “trial of head, hand and heart”, a duel which contrasts the but due to his own weakness (a sort of hubris), loses the final test (OQ 3, 1–2). Defeated, he leaves on a journey of his own; when is met again much later, Rayek has been taught an important lesson of empathy by an old elf called Ekuar, whom Rayek saves from the enslavement of trolls and who becomes his friend and mentor (OQ 16, 17–24); despite this personal quest Rayek remains an abstruse character whose actions do both good and ill, determining the fate of many. Gradually Leetah accepts recognition and Cutter as her “lifemate”; in their union, the differences of the elven tribes are symbolically resolved. Recognition acts as a narrative, thematic device which negotiates and builds interdependence between different ethical systems and lifestyles (see chapter 3.2).

The quest mainly focuses on Cutter's voluntary attempt to connect with other elven kin. The fulfilling of the quest involves a long journey and the discovery of other bonds with the peoples of the world; not only other elves (the ancient Gliders, who are magically powerful and able to float in air, and Go-Backs, characterized by nomadic, harsh lifestyle and constant battling), but also trolls, humans, and fairy-like preservers. Communications with members of these different folk ultimately cause the quest to take unexpected twists and turns, leading the Wolfriders to reclaim their legendary, original home, the Palace of the High Ones, in a bloody war with fierce trolls (OQ 15–OQ 20). The elves fight the war in order to understand who they truly are; also Winnowill's traumatized half-elf, half-troll son Two-Edge, who has brought the elves and trolls to battle, seeks to determine through the war his true identity (see chapter 3.3.2).

Strategies of foreshadowing are employed in building familiarity with readers of series fiction (see Maund 2012, 149–150), making them anticipate the unfolding of the series, and bringing the characters together to face hardships and to discover where they truly belong. Cutter's family receives Savah's warning of “something evil” that Cutter “must not find” while he is on a quest to find other elves with his trusted friend Skywise; all Wolfriders then travel to the same location and discover another elven people called Gliders (OQ 9, 1–2; 34–35). Circumstances that can only lead to conflict force the two tribes to negotiate questions of responsibility and justice, right and wrong, different ways of living, authenticity, and being true to oneself. Wolfriders meet the most prominent figure of evil in whole *Elfquest*, the manipulative Winnowill of the Gliders, who is later called “the Black Snake”. Though she is defeated – she literally falls, though by her own choice (OQ 14) – this “Dark Lord” figure returns, with greater and more twisted plans, in a following series (*Siege at Blue Mountain*), in which the destinies of elves are more closely intertwined with their neighbors and original inhabitants of the world, the humans. A human tribe called Hoang G'Tay Sho who have been faithfully serving and worshiping the Gliders sees the basis of their world collapse, and a new worldview rebuilt on its ruins (this, too, happens concretely; see chapter 3.1.2). The prophecy of their shaman foreshadows the tragedy that lies for the intertwined destinies of humans and elves in the resolution of this smaller series: “The lie which is the truth shall bring more pain than the truth which is a lie.” (SaBM 3, 27; SaBM 6, 18.)

In the following sub-series *Kings of the Broken Wheel*, Cutter's son Suntop receives a call to act, as he suddenly begins to mentally hear “a cry for help” (KotBW 1, 30). This mysterious, collective cry of elves does not halt nor give Suntop a chance to rest, so his family and tribe must determine its source and come to aid. The elves realize that Suntop hears the echo of the High Ones crying out their agony, when long ago they fell in the wrong time of the World of Two Moons. Because time is conceived as cyclic in *Elfquest*, Rayek declares that this accident could be prevented. That would happen by time-traveling within the Palace, guided by their cry of the High Ones, to the distant future where they originally planned to land, and merging the Palace and the elven spirits inside it with themselves. This way the world will remain unaffected by the High Ones as well as the generations that followed them. Cutter does not accept this plan, for it would wipe out the very existence of all that are not inside Palace, and thus the meaning of the lives that became as a consequence of the High Ones' accident: “I cannot allow your choice to wipe out so many others' choices.” (KotBW 6, 14.)

As in a spontaneous moment of revelation, under Winnowill's influence, Rayek takes the Palace to this far-ahead time with Cutter's family in it. Cutter and other mortal elves left behind face an unbearable loss, when they know that they could face absolute negation – not only death, but also the reality of never having existed, if Rayek manages to merge the Palace with itself. Also Cutter's family realizes this when they arrive to the same place 10 000 years later. Still, the Wolfriders have persisted, after a long wait and “living death” – letting themselves be wrapped in preserver cocoons that stop the effects of time and living in the present, or in “the now of wolf-thought”, so greatly valued by Wolfriders. When the elves face the crucial moment of changing their very existence, all leave Rayek's side, save his daughter Venka, who places emphasis on the importance of choice – perhaps the strongest in all the *Elfquest* issues examined here: “I have the power to stop you. It is what I was raised to do. / But I won't. It must be your choice.” (KotBW 9, 25; see further discussion in chapter 3.4) The moment passes, the course of the world remains as it is, affected by the elven aliens – and “much needs putting right” (KotBW 9, 28).

2.3 Nature, culture, and naturecultures

This chapter attempts to elaborate the concept of naturecultures in relation the beneficial state of our earthly existence: well-being. The meanings of nature, culture, environment, and naturecultures will be discussed as well as the shifts in scientific paradigm and the influence they have on the understanding of human well-being and flourishing. The practical and ideological relationship between health and well-being is discussed. At the end of this section I will contrast two perspectives on well-being, and how it can be understood as either hedonic or eudaimonic concept, or integrating both of these lines of research. I will end up employing a relational paradigm of humanity and well-being as eudaimonia or ecosocial "self-realization". In the final part of this chapter I will discuss how ecocritical education for sustainability may enhance ecosocial connecting within naturecultures.

'Nature' is a complex concept; its definition is highly dependent on the contexts in which it is used and tells a great deal about our own discrepant human existence. In his *Keywords* (1983) Raymond Williams traces the historical and ideological changes of a variety of words involving values and ideas. He describes nature as one of the most complicated words in English and distinguishes three separate meanings for it. Firstly, nature is "the essential quantity and character of something"; secondly, "the inherent force which directs either the world or human beings or both"; thirdly, "the material world itself, taken as including or not including human beings". The first meaning of the English word nature (derived from the past participle of Latin *nacsi*, to be born) is historically the oldest one. The precise meanings of nature, especially in the second and third sense are clearly "variable and at times even opposed". This conflicting nature of nature is not a modern phenomenon. The emergence of nature as a singular term, or in the abstraction of Nature, reflects the assumption of a prime reality or source which explains the diversity of things (monism). Nature thus acts as a counterpart for God (in contrast to plurality of gods). However, the diversity of material things, processes, and their meanings remained in the concept. Williams illustrates how the tension of 'nature' becomes explicit in dramatic form (Shakespeare's *King Lear*)*:* "[- -] nature was at once innocent, unprovided, sure, unsure, fruitful, destructive, a pure force and tainted and cursed. The real complexity of natural processes has been rendered by the complexity within the singular term." (Williams 1983, 219–222.)

In contrast with nature, 'culture' also has manifold meanings. In Williams's summary, culture describes "a general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development", and its results, "the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity”. Culture also means “a particular way of life, whether of a people, a period or a group”. Culture is ordinary and specific, common and individual. (Williams 1983, 91–92.) Like nature, it denotes both processes and their results.

Both culture and nature can be understood as terms of value. Buell recognizes that nature (as a concept and as a way of referring to the relatively unfabricated parts of our environments) has a distinct function in ethical consciousness and human health; environments conceived more “natural” than others do significantly enhance convalescence (Buell 2001, 5–6.) On the other hand, Bennett observes that while the use of culture as a normative standard or canonical construct of arts is currently rare, the meaning of culture as social or societal improvement or the perfection of civilization as moral force has had its impact on the way our cities are constructed, for example. (Bennett 2005, 64–66.) The complexity and relativity of human and non-human cultures have perhaps become more accepted, and in current usage there has been a shift from speaking about “different cultures” to “cultures in difference”. New terms have been coined to describe the “fluidity and impermanence of cultural distinctions and relationships”, such as cultural hybridity, cultural flows, cross-cultural dialogue, and cultural in-betweenness. (Bennett 2005, 63–69.)

In many languages influenced by Western thought, the etymological and semantic changes of the concepts of nature and culture reflect shifts in societies, politics, and ethics, the relational aspects of humanity, and the need to discern and specify aspects of the material reality. For example in Finnish, *luoda* 'to create', the older meaning of which is probably is 'to cast', has derivatives such as *luonne* 'character' and *luonto* 'nature' (corresponding roughly with Williams's first and third meaning of nature, respectively). (Häkkinen 2004, 638, 642) It seems that many indigenous peoples who are still living in a reciprocal relationship with the world reflected in their folklore and stories have no need to distinguish nature and culture, as both simply form the whole of their lifestyle. Also, according to Fisher (2013, 5), many indigenous peoples have no need for ecopsychology, as its task is to reconnect the psyche with the natural world.

'Environment' is often used to substitute 'nature' which may be considered too manifold, and, at the same time, reductive term. While environment as a concept may help to integrate the cultural aspects with the natural world as the sum of various factors which determine one's living conditions, it can be contested, for example, on the basis of anthropocentrism. 'Environment' implicates that something is in its center, generally a human being or the human species, and may conceal the chaotic, conflicting, and dispersed web of interactions taking place in a particular environment. More importantly, “the environment” has become part of a totalizing discourse of global problems; we do not only speak of local, varied environments, but the of the whole Earth as our global environment.[16] According to Haila and Lähde, this is due to the environmental movement in the last third of the 20 century, which adopted environment as an umbrella term for various problems (e.g. pollution or loss of biodiversity as well as cultural diversity) and suspicions for technical development and growth: environment became a conceptual basis for moral protest. Haila and Lähde also state that while environment *surrounds* and nature is present *everywhere*, the nature that is meaningful to humans is the whole of the processes that constitute our specific existence. Nature gains its "face" as a result of experiences had in certain places. Thus nature, in human experience, is culturally determined and differentiated, whereas it extends outside of the experience we can have. (Haila and Lähde 2003, 11–14.) We can never comprehend nature (or culture) as it really is, as the totality of *all* processes, *all* experiences.

I understand nature as the whole of interconnected, material processes taking place in the universe and the world in which we live. Nature as a realist concept, as the true complexity and multiplicity of natural processes, exceeds human consciousness, and so it is frustratingly hard to say anything even vaguely "truthful" about it. (This realist concept can be opposed to "lay" or "surface" concept of nature as features of landscape that look "natural"; see Buell 2001, note 9, 268). Still, as we have observed, both nature and culture are thoroughly anthropogenic constructs, and carry the weight of historical and societal uses and purposes. Construing these ideas in powerful metaphors (such a "mother nature", "silent spring", or "becoming animal", see Abram 2010) also construct the beliefs of what is possible or impossible (Haila and Lähde 2003, 21–22). That is why I prefer to use Donna Haraway's term naturecultures and more precisely, companion species, which may help us to understand human ethics and human well-being as a function of relating with significant otherness – as "co-constitutive relationships in which none of the partners pre-exist the relating, and the relating is never done once and for all" (Haraway 2003, 12). These naturecultures that are meaningful to us, the so-called human nature included, are mediated and reformed in flesh, as interactions between species as well as in language and storytelling.

Talking about naturecultures in which the binary opposition *nature/culture* undergoes an implosion resembles the deconstructive bricolage approach. Deconstruction, a set of strategies for reading, aims to destabilize the structures of philosophical or conceptual systems by taking away their center (as systems of Western thought utilize centered systems) and allowing the movement of concepts – or “play” – to take place. The bricolage approach, then, acknowledges that the structure is unstable and its meanings provisional, yet useful, as with things and ideas conceived as natural, cultural, or natural-cultural. (Klages, 2006, 53–62.)

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[16] This conception can also be cherished: according to Gaia hypothesis, the organic and inorganic processes on Earth in whole create a self-regulating and life-sustaining homeostasis. Thus the whole planet can be conceived as a giant organism in which seemingly chaotic processes contribute to a long-term balance. The Gaia hypothesis has been criticized on the basis of its teleological and metaphoric qualities (though many opposing views of the "mechanisms" in organisms and their environments are also metaphoric), and the destabilizing effects of biota. It is also seen unfalsifiable, and thus not a hypothesis. (See Kircner 2002.)

I use 'environment' as a restricted term when referring to actual, material surroundings of a particular people or life form – or, in lieu of 'environment', I simply use 'place'. When speaking about these places and the complexity of lifestyles that have grown out of them in the processes of relating, I am using the term naturecultures.

2.4 What is being well?

2.4.1 Well-being and health

The concepts of well-being and health are closely related; they are often used as near synonyms or referring to the physical condition of the body with 'health' and to the mental condition with 'well-being'. Nevertheless, the widely accepted definition of health by the World Health Organization sets well-being on the ground level, on which health rests: “health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” (WHO 1948).

In the time of its formulation in 1946 the WHO's definition of health was groundbreaking. It is easy to understand and aspirational in that it demands efforts for a continuous and complete betterment especially in health care. However, critics highlight that in 60 years disease patterns have changed: because of improved sanitation, nutrition and health care interventions, people now have rather chronic than acute diseases. In today's societies, striving for “complete” well-being may treat people with chronic diseases as “definitely ill” and promote medicalization, leading to cases where healthcare screening efforts are directed to detecting abnormalities that might never cause illness. Also, drugs may be produced for conditions that before wouldn't have been considered as health problems.[17] (Huber 2011.) The WHO definition affects healthcare outcome measures, such as valuing longevity or complete recovery but not, in the same extent, societal participation or coping strategies.

Huber *et al.* (2011) suggest an alternative definition of health as “the ability to adapt and to self-manage”. The authors examine the implications of this resilience-based definition focusing on the physical, mental and social domains. On the physical domain, their definition of health manifests in the ability of an organism to maintain a physiological homeostasis in changing circumstances. On the mental domain, the definition draws on the sense of coherence, which groups together the subjective faculties of “comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness of a difficult situation”. Health in social domain can be identified in “people's capacity to fulfill their potential and their obligations, the ability to manage their life despite medical conditions and the ability to participate in social activities including work”. Huber et al. describe it as “dynamic balance between opportunities and limitations, shifting through life and affected by external conditions such as social and environmental challenges” (Huber 2011). In this respect, sustainable environmental developments clearly provide the basis for human health, though the authors content themselves with a brief analogy between human health and the ecologists' view of “healthy” Earth.

The impact of diverse environments on human health and well-being can be regarded from aesthetic, spiritual, social, political, and economic perspectives. Hirvilammi defines sustainable well-being in terms of a moderate standard of living, sensible and responsible action, meaningful relationships and authentic presence (Hirvilammi 2015). From a systems theoretical perspective sustainability is clearly seen in terms of resilience – not static, but adjusting (Hirvilammi 2015, 36–37)

The interplay of the psyche and the physical environment is emphasized by research in the areas of environmental psychology and ecopsychology. “Natural” environment, such as forests or lake shores, has been shown to have visual qualities that enhance the perceiver's well-being.[18] These health benefits were demonstrated already in a classic study by Ulrich (1984, 421) of patients who were recovering from surgery in hospital room either with a view on trees or a view on the opposite stone wall: “in comparison with the wall-view group, the patients with the tree view had shorter postoperative hospital stays, had fewer negative evaluative comments from the nurses, took fewer moderate and strong analgesic doses, and had slightly lower scores for minor postsurgical complications.” Corporality, the emotional body, is obviously essential in these interactions. Ecopsychologists tend to criticize our current therapeutic health care practices that mostly take place indoors, and ask if our environments could be conceived as communicators instead of objects to analyze. Heiskanen describes the project of traditional ecopsychology (which borrows from the health care practices of indigenous peoples) that needs to focus on the release of trauma, the shame, culpability, and hate that arise from our traumatic relationship with other nature. Traditional ecopsychology aims to build a companionship of responsibility and sharing in relation to one's environment and other people – one's significant others, one could say. (Heiskanen 2007, 178–186.)

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[17] The symptoms of this development can be seen in diagnosis practices. For example, when the American Psychiatric Assosiation adopted the *Fifth Edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-5), critics such as Mental Health Europe claimed that it diagnoses normal reactions (e.g. shyness or sadness following a loss in life) as mental illnesses. (Rantanen 2013.)

[18] Green vegetation, water and interaction with animals appear to have the strongest revival benefits, possibly because they are perceived most “natural” and because they enable both aesthetic experiences and recreational activities. Psychical revival in relation with the environment consists of enchantment (a keen, but not pressing observation of the surrounding elements), of change in one's everyday routines and laying aside of one's normal concerns, and of experiencing consistence of the environment with oneself. (See Salonen 2005, 64–68.) These kind of aspects would also well characterize reading for pleasure.

From my point of view, the construct of well-being grounds us to our environments, and to ethical life; a task in which health itself does not always suffice. The alternative definitions of health grant various dimensions also to the meaning of well-being: like health, well-being can be understood as a state or a process; as a goal or an inherent capacity; drawing on the major life forces such as hope, born intact in human beings, or in contact with others. These aspects are far from excluding each other. Rather, they are integrated in the ways human self relates with others and in the world. However, as Ryan and Deci note: “How we define well-being influences our practices of government, teaching, therapy, parenting, and preaching, as all such endeavors aim to change humans for the better, and thus require some vision of what ‘the better’ is.” (Ryan & Deci, 2001.) From my perspective, while health refers more to a state of physical, social and mental condition that can be measured, well-being is best seen as a process term which takes into account the awareness and alertness to relating with others, the basis of ethical life.

2.4.2 Hedonia and eudaimonia: happiness and flourishing

Interest in the empirical research on well-being seems to have mounted in Western societies during their period of material affluence. Well-being studies can be roughly categorized according to two differing, but overlapping paradigms: hedonism and eudaimonism. The hedonic paradigm on well-being focuses on the assessment of subjective well-being (SWB), often understood synonymous with happiness and constructed from three dimensions: life satisfaction, the presence of positive affect, and the absence of negative affect.

(Ryan and Deci 2001, 144.) The eudaimonic perspective, in contrast, stresses the role of intrinsic values, meaningfulness, and the realization of valued human potentials. While pleasure is hardly excluded from the eudaimonic view on well-being, it isn't usually seen as its core matter but rather as a by-product of eudaimonic lifestyle: “[- -] eudaimonic conceptions focus on the *content* of one's life, and the *processes* involved in living well, whereas hedonic conceptions on well-being focus on a specific *outcome*, namely the attainment of positive affect and an absence of pain.” (Ryan et al. 2008, 140, italics in the original.)

In their self-determination theory of motivation (SDT), psychologists Deci and Ryan stress the role of three innate psychological needs: autonomy, competence and relatedness. Realization of these needs is necessary for psychological growth, integrity, well-being (the satisfaction of life, for example), and experience of vitality and self-congruence (consistency with the ideal self and the actual self). In SDT, relatedness, competence, and autonomy are not posited as constituents of psychological health and well-being; instead, they foster both eudaimonic well-being and subjective well-being. (Ryan and Deci 2001, 146–147.) SDT hypothesizes that extrinsic aspirations, such as wealth, fame, or image of attractiveness, are not related to basic psychological needs, whereas intrinsic values are. Examples of these intrinsic values are personal growth, affiliation and intimacy, contributing to one's community, and personal health. The attainment of intrinsic goals enhances psychological well-being. (Ryan et al. 2008, 151–154.) Self-determination theory works well in integrating the individual and environmental (namely social) levels of motivation and well-being, and may help to resolve the enigma of resilience: what yields people mental “elasticity”, strength, and integrity when they face challenges and losses, and what makes some more resilient than others?

One simple distinction between the two conceptions of well-being is that when hedonism stresses happiness as subjective well-being, eudaimonism sees well-being in terms of flourishing, the concept of positive psychology that emphasises more the optimal human functioning than pleasure as subjective feeling. Of course, happiness can be integrated within eudaimonic view in many ways. For example, Brown and Kasser (2005) found that higher subjective well-being is linked with a higher degree of ecologically responsible behavior – and the compatibility of these two pursuits was explained by mindfulness and intrinsic value orientation. In questioniong the meaning of happiness, Sara Ahmed's exploration of the term on the grounds of affect theory might be helpful. In its modern sense, happiness has been associated with feeling, but Ahmed returns to the original meaning of happiness as contingency, something that happens to you:

> “Happiness can thus be described as *intentional* in the phenomenological sense (directed towards objects) as

> well as being *affective* (contact with objects). To bring these arguments together we might say that happiness is an orientation toward the objects we come into contact with.” (Ahmed 2010, 32.)

This perspective of happiness gains a fuller meaning in an ecopsychological context.

Eudaimonia can be connected with “self-realization” which many philosophies and religions around the world state as an important goal for human activity. Aristotle argued that the main goal in life lies in striving to realize one's true potential; though his ethics is based on virtues, he focuses more often on virtue defined as the golden mean than as the utmost realization of one's talents. (Ryff and Singer 2008, 18). Aristotle emphasizes measure and reason as the basis of eudaimonia, and also current psychological theories – rather empirical than deductive – construct eudaimonia as reflective and mindful process, or rooted in human autonomy (Ryan et al. 2008). Nordic ecophilosopher Arne Naess sets “Self-realization!”[19] as the basic norm of his systematic Ecosophy T, a philosophy that recognizes life as a vast historical process in which “the unfolding of potentialities is a right”; this self-unfolding concerns plants and animals as well as humans; indeed it appears to define authentic life. The higher the self-realization attained by others in favorable conditions, the more it supports the self-realization in myself, for “there is no completely isolatable I”. (Naess 1989, 164–165.) Though Andy Fieser identifies Self-realization as another name for ecological consciousness that transcends the narrow concept of self (Fieser 2002, 18), it can possibly also be coined as alternative name for eudaimonic well-being. In the light of Aristotle's and Naess's accounts, however, the attainment of self-realization requires measure, constant balancing, and respecting the self-unfolding of others – principally an ecosocial, gestalt view of oneself in the world. We could speak of an ecological eudaimonia, or ecological flourishing.

This conception of well-being as eudaimonia should yield significant changes towards a more sustainable lifestyle when applied in the fields of politics, health care, and education. When well-being is understood both in terms of eudaimonia and interrelatedness in naturecultures where species and their differences matter, the relational perspectives on coherence provided by ecopsychology gain importance. In ecocritical education that values these perspectives, we may stand a better chance to relate with significant otherness on a sociopolitical level.

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[19] The exclamation mark designates normativity in Naess's system.

2.5 Education for sustainability

As Garrard observes (2007, 360), ecocriticism “hopes to draw a certain moral authority from science”. The field of natural sciences can be seen as not objective, but a political realm, especially in the light of Levinas's account of the impersonal third (see chapter 2.6 below). Thus ecocritical practices in education are entangled with the world of politics. In ecocritical reading of texts, applying the ecological principles or concepts to human population easily becomes a moral mission. For example, the scientific construct of biodiversity is best realized on three levels: diversity between and within ecosystems and habitats, diversity of species, and genetic variation within species. (Yearley 1996, 121–122.). Biodiversity can be conceived as a goal, and not a description of state, and thus it would imply individual and communal promotion of diversity in all areas of life – though, in scientific usage, it is simply a mesure which varies according to different environments, or biomes and ecosystems. Also, the effects of biodiversity on human species are not only positive (e.g. diseases).

One of the mixed moral-scientific terms that guide our politics, economics and education, at least on the level of discourse, is sustainable development. However, the definitions of sustainability are diverse and numerous. A basic distinction can be made between “weak” and “strong” sustainability. According to the weak concept of sustainability, economic, social, and ecological capital can substitute for each other (meaning that human-made capital can replace natural capital, i.e. objects and processes among plants, animals and minerals, for example), whereas in strong sustainability the three areas complement each other. Thus according to the “strong” sustainability definition, the ecological capital provides the grounds for the social capital and the social capital for the economic capital. (Heikkurinen 2014, 11–12). Following this latter view, I argue that ecocritics and ecocritical educators should overtly discuss the origin of “human value”, and economics and social systems as built on, or stemming from, the non-human or non-profitable material world. In this systematic view, individual experiences are highly important.

The practical task of this study is to situate ethical relationship at the core of educational and pedagogical thinking on our environments and well-being. It is one of my firmest beliefs that literature has a significant role in educational practices, including the personal development of environmental consciousness and action. Learning outcomes tend to be most pronounced and long-lasting if people are emotionally involved in the process of learning as meaning-making – and this is what stories are for. Alida Gersie discusses how storytelling calls to our minds alternative life paths and knowledge of how to “approach the unfamiliar”.

Gersie observes that in complex situations we often seek aid from *within* the stories and do not realize that the answer lies in responding *to* a particular story.[20] (Gersie 1992, 14–15.) Since times unrecorded, stories and social storytelling practices with the aid of various media provide means of framing one's experience and learning about the reality. Ecocritical approaches are used in education with the aim to develop caring for the other-than-human, and active environmental betterment among students. To achieve this goal, they should engage with the students' lifelong experiences and their beliefs (Garrard 2007, 366). The importance is not within what is told and said, but how we respond to it.

Haila proposes health as a metaphor "for characterizing the growth of environmental consciousness". In the same way as illness makes us aware of health, environmental degradation has turned our attention to how we depend on other environmental actors. (Haila 1999, 344.) The same way as most of us strive for personal balance and lifestyle that would sustain us, the necessity of sustainable development is seen in various naturecultures. According to Heikkurinen (2014, 15), societies, organizations and individuals that live in abundance should re-evaluate their real needs by relating them with the needs of people living in poverty and the right of future generations to lead a meaningful life. Since storytelling is a social practice of our social species[21], collective wisdom can be gathered by telling, listening and evaluating stories in groups and communities. Can ecocritical readings, then, enhance sustainable and solidary action?

While ecocritical approaches utilize the scientific constructs of ecology to provide basis for their arguments, science itself is never immune to value-laden aspirations. Garrard examines how the pastoral imagery is also rooted in the science of ecology. He mentions, for example, the idea if succession by ecologist Frederick Clements, who propounded that plant species in a particular habitat would orderly evolve towards a diverse, complex and balanced "climax" stage. However, his view and similar harmonious, even pastoral ideas about nature's stability have been criticized by modern ecologists, who maintain that stasis is highly unusual in ecosystems, and that breakdowns, changes and fluctuations are constantly compensated by other kind of instability within the ecosystem, which still usually keeps within certain critical limits. This critical stance to popular notions about nature's balance Garrard calls postequilibrium ecology. (Garrard 2012, 63–65.) In the current political situation, this natural-cultural, ideological and ontological view of the world as fluctuating and unstable seems more useful and fit to inspire alertness to one's environments than pastoral, stabilizing ideas. Postequilibrium ecology also corresponds with the aspirations of radical ecopsychology.

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[20] This interestingly resonates with how Levinas differentiates the said and the saying; see chapter 2.6.

[21] As far as we know, other animals don't tell stories, or at least they do not tell them quite the same way as humans. Of course, signals used by animals, such as smell signs that dogs interpret, can be considered symbolic and even narrative.

Andy Fieser proposes that it is best to see ecopsychology as a large and multifaceted project that responds to a particular historical situation. He maintains that the whole ecopsychological work can be organized into four tasks and their interrelations: the psychological task, the philosophical task, the practical task, and the critical task. Ecopsychology posits the psyche “inside” the natural world and its relationships (or human minds and bodies inside the psyche and intelligence of the natural world; see Abram 2010), explores ways to talk about it, and employs both therapeutic and recollective practices that help people in creating life-sustaining societies. The task of social criticism is probably least worked on within the field of ecopsychology. (Fieser 2002, 6.) Fieser refers to predecessors of ecopsychology in literary history, such as Aldo Leopold who proposed in his *Sand Country Almanac* (1949) to regard land as a community in which we are “plain members”, rather than as “a commodity belonging to us”. “In the same vein, ecopsychologists argue that if we accept the ecological view that we are members of the biotic community, rather than its mere exploiters, then we may learn to recognize the natural world as a social and psychological field, just as we do the human community.” (Fisher 2002, 4–5.)

In education, however, it may be hard to inspire students to sustainable action that would promote the well-being of all our "biotic community". Garrard (2007) contrasts traditional environmental education and education for sustainability with regard to their outcomes and responses of students. Environmental education is often based on an excursion model: students read texts which appraise the beauty of the wild, and are physically taken to experience this wilderness, situated outside of urban environments. Though the excursions are often memorable, Garrard questions their lasting impact or integration with the students' daily life. He also sees the “lack of social and economic consideration in traditional [environmental education] as its most serious limitation” (Garrard 2007, 367). Invoking the human-caused destruction on our ”pristine” environments or so-called wilderness may be a worthy educational goal, but certainly not the only one. We also need to search for alternative futures, regard critically our values and practices, and connect environmental issues with the students' concern on how to act – otherwise education turns against itself. Garrard (2007, 367) quotes Webster (53): “Schools simply did not explore *realistic* alternative future and how to get there: in many ways the legacy of environmental education was not 'empowerment' at all, but guilt. And pessimism.” (Italics by Webster).

It may be harmful to separate wilderness from human-made environments as the grand “outside” of humanity. We should also turn our focus on the grassroots level, on that which is closest and most familiar, and perhaps discover oddities within it. For example, observing the variety of biological phenomena in urban surroundings helps to dismantle the dualism of nature and culture: “Examining succession patterns in college shrubberies and miniature wildernesses in car parks tends to break down the duality of culture and nature implicit in wilderness retreat, as well as inducing a shift in perspective of scale.” (Garrard 2007, 366.) We could also see that comics, and other popular narratives in which we immerse ourselves for pleasure, give the possibility to examine and question ourselves as members of naturecultures, as entangled species and not the heroic explorer. I propose that the metaphor of naturecultures may help us to realize our potentials as wellness within our relationships. Storytelling should also be storymaking. As if in my personal readings of *Elfquest* I sense the potential of trying to understand the other.

2.6 Levinas and facing the Other

In this study I reflect on the philosophy of Levinas through my reading of *Elfquest.* The thematic unities of analysis are experienced as formed in relationships and manifesting as eudaimonia, the well-being which consists of fulfilling one's potentials.

Emmanuel Levinas (1906–1995) was a French philosopher of Lithuanian and Jewish origin. He was a student of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, whose ideas he developed further and criticized. The philosophy of Levinas has been characterized as ethics, or, in Jacques Derrida's words, “an ethics of ethics”. It does not present normative rules but “is an interpretive, phenomenological description of the rise and repetition of the face-to-face encounter, or the intersubjective relation at its precognitive core; viz., being called by another and responding to that other” (Bergo, 2011). In contrast with the theories of immanence, which assert that the divine manifests in the material world, his philosophy can be described as a theory of transcendence, as the personal Other is seen as the origin of signification and subjectivity of the I, and is associated with “the Good [that] can not enter into a present nor be put into a representation” (Levinas 1981, 15). Though Levinas does not remain indifferent to material existence, or the sensibility of a subject, he sees that our enjoyment and suffering stems from the ethical relation, which is transcendental, and in which responsibility for the other creates the signification of the subject (see Levinas 1981, 90): “Transcendence is the spontaneity of responsibility for another person. [- -] We do not choose to be responsible. Responsibility arises as if elicited, before we begin to think about it, by the approach of the other person.” (Bergo, 2011.) Levinas develops his notions of the Other as absolute alterity, the face-to-face relationship between the I and the Other, and the ethical responsibility towards the Other notably in his major works *Totality and Infinity* (*Totalité et Infini*, 1961) and *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* (*Autrement qu'être ou au-dela de l'essence*, 1974).

Positing ethics as "the first philosophy" is quite an original attempt in Western philosophical thought. It contradicts the primacy of epistemology, or the long Western philosophical tradition which maintains that before ethics we should examine what can be known, and what are the limits of knowledge. Instead, the ethical relationship with the Other precedes the knowledge of the I and also its interest in being, "as a being-in-the-world attached to property and appropriating what is other than itself to itself", that belongs to the world of politics and morality, not ethics (Levinas and Kearney 1986, 29–30). The ethical relationship is not ontological, but rather disrupts the being-in-the-world, exists prior to one's "ontological relation to himself (egology) or to the totality of things we call the world (cosmology)" (ibid. 21). Therefore in facing the Other one opens up to a meaning that is not of the order of ontology (or of epistemology, as the ontological language governs Western philosophy); that is "other than being, that is otherwise than being" (ibid. 23).

Levinas's thinking differs from the main philosophical tradition also in the concept of responsibility. Normally, we think that one is held responsible for one's choices and intentional actions, but responsibility in Levinasian sense binds the I even before it is conscious of its responsibility, and makes the I responsible also for the actions it did not intent or know of. (Tuohimaa 2001, 35–6.) In explaining ethical responsibility Levinas describes it as insomnia or wakefulness – or love, as "the incessant watching over of the other", and not willful love or intentional altruism (Levinas and Kearney 1986, 30–31; Levinas 1981, 111–112). He seems particularly fond to cite Alyosha in Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*: "We are all responsible for everyone else – but I am more responsible than all the others." This does not mean that every "I" is as much responsible, but in fact that "I must always demand more of myself than of the other; [- -] not only am I more responsible than the other but I am even responsible for everyone else's responsibility!" (Levinas and Kearney 1986, 30–31.) Levinas writes that I become me due to the impossibility of escaping responsibility, this "taking charge of the other" that I cannot make into my own principle, because it commands me before it has been formulated or comprehended. The paradox of responsibility is that "I am obliged without this obligation having begun in me, as though an order slipped into my consciousness like a thief [- -]". The subject that is thus formed is not the ego, but is me, who cannot be generalized, "who am me and no one else" (Levinas 1981, 13–14). This responsibility towards the other is perhaps best described as the condition of a hostage, which goes beyond dependance: "All my inwardness is invested in the form of a despite-me, for-another” (ibid. 11). Because I am *for* the other, enjoyment or suffering *by* the other, or subjective experience, becomes possible. (Perpich 2008, 130; Levinas 1981, 90). Enjoyment and wounding, according to Levinas (1981, 62–63), are terms of proximity, which is the signification of the sensible, or an obsessive, extreme and immediate closeness with the other. “The relationship with alterity, which is what escapes apprehension, exceeds all comprehension, is infinitely remote, is, paradoxically enough, the most extreme immediacy, proximity closer than presence, obsessive contact.” (Lingis 1986, xix.) This paradoxical relationship forms the self (that is not universal or self-contained, that is not the ego: Levinas describes enjoyment as the coring out of ego, *dénucleation*; 1981, 64): "Proximity [- -] has to be conceived as a responsibility for the other; it might be called humanity, or subjectivity, or self." (Levinas 1981, 46.)

Substitution is the term Levinas (1981, 13) uses for the “very subjectivity of a subject”, or putting oneself in the place of the other, giving one's own substance to answer for the needs of the other. While it is an asymmetrical, passive relation to alterity, or “a radical or hyperbolic passivity, pure exposure to the other without even the initiative found in the capacity to receive” (Perpich 2008, 129), it gives signification to me, to a subjectivity. Levinas touches the very materiality of a subject when describing sensibility as this subjectivity:

> “Vulnerability, exposure to outrage, passivity more passive than all patience, passivity of the accusative form, trauma of accusation suffered by a hostage to the point of persecution, implicating the identity of the hostage who substitutes himself for the others: all this is the self, a defecting or defeat of the ego’s identity. And this, pushed to the limit, is sensibility, sensibility as the subjectivity of the subject. It is a substitution for another, one in the place of another, expiation.” (Levinas 1981, 15.)

Later in *Otherwise than Being* Levinas describes the subjectivity thus formed as ”the other in the same”, or an ”inspiration” in a rather literal sense of the term, as a breath of the other in me (ibid. 111). This also bridges the conceptual gap between mind and matter:

> ”I exist through the other and for the other, but without this being alienation: I am inspired. This inspiration is the psyche. The psyche can signify this alterity in the same without alienation in the form of incarnation, as being-in-one's-skin, having-the-other-in-one's-skin” (Ibid. 114–115.)

Because Levinas’s use of language is an attempt to speak about the pre-ontological encounter of the Other which defies the ontological language of philosophy, many of his insights and concepts, such as alterity, proximity, or substitution, are troublesome, paradoxical and thus difficult to take in. They signify otherwise than in the normal use of the language. This is linked to his question “What is saying without the said?” The said (content or message) belongs to the ontological order, but it is coupled with the moment of ethical sincerity or exposure towards the other: the saying. This saying is ”a foreword preceding languages, it is the proximity of one to the other, the commitment of an approach”. (Levinas 1981, 5.) The writing of Levinas's later work, especially *Otherwise than Being* which abandons the narrative structure of *Totality and Infinity*, is characterized by hesitation, and can be seen as an attempt to manifest the saying – though it, like all language, also falls into the ontological order.

Facing the Other peculiarly takes form as a material, bodily encounter, but exceeds its being present with its immediacy more pressing than being present. The face-to-face relationship with the other is infinitely compelling, yet the face seems terribly helpless and almost without any form: “The face is a trace of itself, given over to my responsibility, but to which I am wanting and faulty. It is as though I were responsible for his mortality, and guilty for surviving. [- -] To be reduced to having recourse to me is the homelessness or strangeness of the neighbor. It is incumbent on me.” (Levinas 1981, 91.)

By describing face as a trace in his later work, Levinas means to explain how the face can be non-present and yet significant in an ethical encounter. It ”does away with the need for a mediating figure between the face as an *imposition* and the face as *welcomed*” in his earlier work (Perpich 2008, 112). The trace is not to be understood in the normal sense of the word, as a trace of somebody or something having *been* present, but as the trace of the effacement of all traces which were already marks of absence (ibid.). In this sense, it can manifest in the face of the other, and oblige me in a way that not so much imposes but disturbs phenomena, or order ”without troubling it seriously” (Levinas 1987, quoted in Perpich 2008, 114). Levinas writes:

> “What is exceptional in this way of being signalled is that I am ordered toward the face of the other. [- -] All the negative attributes which state what is beyond essence become positive in responsibility, a response answering to a non-thematizable provocation and thus a non-vocation, a trauma. This response answers, before any understanding, for a debt contracted before any freedom and before any consciousness and any present, but it does answer, as though the invisible that bypasses the present left a trace by the very fact of bypassing the present. That trace lights up the face of a neighbor, ambiguously him *before whom* [- -] and him *for whom* I answer.” Levinas 1981, 11–12.)

In the following he explains that this trace is not of the order that could be "tracked down like game by a hunter" (ibid. 12). Through the trace of itself, the trace of wiping out of its traces, the infinite commands me in the present, but it does not appear in the present. The word "trauma" conveys well the force of this command, but we must note that due to "detour in the enigma of a trace" (ibid.) this is not necessarily to be understood as negative effect on my personality. In a way, we are all traumatized, all made subjects by our pre-cognitive contact with one another, obsessed by this other in responsibility that depends on a trace that is, however ”less than nothing” and which can thus be ignored (see Perpich 2008, 117).

How does the ethical relationship, encountering the trace of infinite in the face of the other, relate to morality? How does ethics inspire what we actually consider right or wrong, or the things and deeds we hold in value? To clarify the matter, Diane Perpich suggests in her own reading that ”the face does not *create* value nor is it the *recognition* of a value”. The face of the other engages me in the ethical mode, opening ”the possibility of value without itself existing *as* a value.” (Perpich 2008, 152.) The value, or justice, or morality, arises when there is a third in relation to I and the Other, and there always is. We are not alone in the world. The non-human and even textual others enter into play with my very subjectivity, which has been called into light in my interhuman responsibility for the other. The pre-cognitive and thus pre-ontological relation of the I towards the Other is asymmetrical, but in the presence of the third consciousness and comparison are elicited:

> “The act of consciousness is motivated by the presence of a third party alongside of the neighbor approached. A third party is also approached; and the relationship between the third party cannot be indifferent to me when I approach. There must a justice among incomparable ones. There must be a comparison between incomparables and a synopsis, a togetherness and contamporaneousness; there must be thematization, thought, history and inscription.” (Levinas 1981, 16.)

We don't necessarily face the Other in all the entities – say, animals, robots, fungi, or amusement parks – of the natural-cultural world, but that doesn't mean that they would not be valuable. It is the ethical relation itself that gives the possibility of things, and myself among these things, of having value in their existence. Levinas even says that ethics is “*against nature* because it forbids the murderousness of my natural will to put my own existence first” (Levinas & Kearney 1986, 24, italics original). In this sense, ethics is against culture, too.

Unlike many philosophers in the West, Levinas thinks that the most important question is not the fundamental ontological question (“Why is there being rather than nothing?”) but the ethical question: “Have I the right to be?” Reed explains: “The answer to the question is frightening in its exorbitance, for it calls for nothing less than a continuous self-questioning and an infinite responsibility. The very fact that a question is put awakens me to the realization that my entire self may be nothing but a response to another's question, and thus infinitely responsible.” (Reed 1986, 80–81.)

What meaning has Levinas's thinking of ethical responsibility when it comes in contact with naturecultures, human and non-human well-being in the context of companion species? The third, the realm of what is and what can be known, of history, politics, and justice, cannot be analyzed only in ethical terms (Korhonen 2011, 104). That is why I approach human and non-human relationships not only as a face-to-face encounter with the Other, but also as eudaimonic well-being, significant otherness as companion species, and education for sustainability. Nevertheless, the ethical interpersonal relationship must continue to inspire our morality, our politics, our trying to find a way to live with each other. This inspiration and approach is ultimately a most humbling project for peace (see Levinas 1981, 16). The primacy of the other, the ethical relationship that endangers one's very existence and manifests in the saying, can guide the aspirations in developing ecologically sound well-being, also characterized as eudaimonia. Ethics is the force that orders us to ask not merely *what* the other is, but *who* the other is. This question can ultimately be posed only to the Other (see Reed 1986, 80). The questioning, in which one can never be self-contained, is crucial in Levinas's philosophy, as summarized by Perpich:

> ”For Kantian moral theory, what matters about us is reason, that in virtue of which we are most godlike; for utilitarianism, what matters is that we are sentient and this puts us in ethical proximity to a whole range of non-human animals; for Levinas, what matters is not at all a *what* but a *who*: an absolutely incalculable other who cannot be reduced to some subset of properties and who is not worthy of ethical or moral consideration only in virtue of certain qualities or capacities – whether they be reason, language, a capacity to suffer, or anything else.” (Perpich 2008, 154.)

What is most compelling in both philosophy and fiction, is their capacity to say and to unsay themselves (see Levinas and Kearney 1986, 22). It is the ”how” of saying, and how it affects me and challenges me, that is important, not so much what is actually said. This is an ethical dimension, that can be realized and described to some extent in a hermeneutic-phenomenological reading. The philosophy of Levinas is used here to inspire my close-reading of *Elfquest* comics, to give it air, space, play, and gravity.

3 Reading *Elfquest*: faces and facets

This chapter explores the concrete ways in which good and ill are related to naturecultures and well-being in *Elfquest* comics. Selected scenes from the series address the following questions: How does the face-to-face relationship with the Other present itself in the reading of *Elfquest*? What does the figure of companion species bring into ethical relationship? How do the relationships between the protagonists and their significant others evolve? What is framed and perceived as good or evil – and why? What is beneficial or detrimental for individuals, communities, and their environments? How can eudaimonic well-being be realized in the relationship with the Other? Does otherness as absolute alterity even constitute well-being? Does *Elfquest* call for ethical alertness and responsibility for the other? If it does, does it enhance environmental action and eudaimonic well-being?

I focus on particular scenes from *The Original Quest*, *Siege at Blue Mountain*, *Kings of the Broken Wheel*, and some excerpts from the *Dreamtime* storyline. The scenes are selected for their internal coherence and strongest portrayal of one of the four themes: recognition, belonging, renewal, or healing. The themes have risen from my initial readings of *Elfquest* and are seen as diverse connections of ethics as the relationship with the Other, outlined in previous chapter 2.6. These themes can be visualized in a figure of a tree; the world tree, or the tree of life, prevalent in many myths and stories around the world. Actual trees are diverse in aspect, both familiar and yet alien to our animal minds and bodies, and unquestionably necessary to all those who breathe oxygen. Thus they quite concretely embody the real world otherness and responsibility in relation with human beings. The world tree is a symbol of gestalt character, but complex in its dynamics; the Wolfriders in *Elfquest* also identify trees with their home, origin, and spiritual existence ("Father Tree"). Also ethics, conceived as relational experience, is like a world tree – each part nourishing and sustaining the other.

The tree grows from the spheres of Belonging; these spheres are both different and connected. They may meet, intertwine and blend together in the act of Recognition, which entails identification, respect, and integration of alterity within oneself. Recognizing its Self gives support and strength to the tree. Within this Self, Healing takes place. Healing is the life vein that connects all the parts of the tree, all its different functions and orientations from the soil to the tips of its leaves. The tree has no special "place in the sun" of its own – it grows from the grounds of Belonging, but it does not possess these grounds. In the basis of Belonging, in the roots "where the soil is still moist and rich" one is "called to a healing" (*Dreamtime*, 7).

The growth of the tree itself is Renewal, the relationship in time that the tree has with its surroundings. The aspects of Renewal are diverse: fresh green leaves, ripening fruits, the gradual strengthening of tree bark, but also the falling of leaves. Renewal is what the tree gives back to the world, the force it has drawn from the grounds of Belonging through the veins of Healing. The seeds of Renewal travel far in the bellies of animate living creatures, to nourish other bases of Belonging. This cycle of ripening, maturation, death and decay depicts fully the theme of Renewal – eventually, the process of Renewal compounds to the spheres of Belonging.

3.1 Belonging

3.1.1 Destruction, degradation and loss of home

At the very beginning of *Elfquest,* the basic grounds of belonging – the concrete place one calls home – is devastated. A flashback on the initial pages of "Fire and Flight" retells the legend how a sophisticated elven folk, called "High Ones" or "firstcomers" by their descendants, arrived to the World of Two Moons. In the sequence, this world is depicted "nameless" and dark. Interestingly, the narrator posits the descent of a palace structure from a storm as a sublime sight, dramatically witnessed by primitive humans, and describes it from the humans' point of view as an event when "the natural order of things was suddenly **shattered** by forces supernatural and unknowable!" The Palace is also focalized as the "mountain thing" from the point of view of humans (and Wolfriders who ignore their origin). In the captions, the narrator recognizes the fear of both humans and elves, the fear of the unknown. The humans brutally slaughtered most of the strangers, while the survivors were forced to flee and scatter "far from their Palace home... never to return". (OQ 1, 1–5.) This loss and banishment is reflected and aggravated in the flight of Wolfriders, the much changed descendants of these strange elves, from the burning forest several pages and "countless generations" later (OQ 1, 5, 13–19). These situations characterized by shock, sorrow and uncertainty create dramatic tension and establish the major themes of *Elfquest:* The quest of finding other elves, or connecting with kin, guides the whole *Original Quest*, and the affined idea of regaining the "homeplace" or the "Holt of Holts" (OQ 15, 21) dominates its latter part.

Almost throughout the series, the Holt, forest home of the Wolfriders, is framed through a nostalgic or melancholic vision of loss and remembrance. The original Holt centers around and is all but personalized in the Father Tree, which was believed to guard the spirits of those elves who had passed away (OQ 20, 17). In the very first issue of *Elfquest*, the humans hungering for revenge burn down the Holt – and destroy the whole forest which is the basis of their own life, too. Wolfriders flee through the troll caverns and establish new home in the Sun Village, or Sorrow's End, living in caves beside the houses of Sunfolk, and a few years later new holts in Forbidden Grove (in *Siege at Blue Mountain*) and the unknown land on the other side of the Vastdeep Water (in *Kings of the Broken Wheel*) – though this time they are ”a pack made of many shapes and colours” (KotBW 7, 14), a blend of Wolfrider, Sun Folk, Go-Back and Glider members. The latter holt is set high atop tall conifers and called Thorny Mountain Holt, for the tree shaper Redlance forms a briar wall around it to protect it from humans – for that time, Cutter establishes “[- -] a new rule: To the humans in this strange land we'll be neither friends nor foes. / To them, we won't exist.” (KotBW 7, 3.) This principle of non-interference does not hold, after all – interactions with neighbors are inevitable.

Wolfriders clearly feel home in the forests where they set up their holts. “The souls of our kind have always yearned for the cool, dark beauty of the forest”, says Cutter (OQ 7, 34), though he has lived several years in the midst of a desert among Sunfolk and is about to discover that elves also dwell in stone halls and on snowy mountains. Some Wolfriders also choose a different personal path or lifestyle and hence a different home – like Dart, who mostly grew up in the Sun-Village and becomes protector of the Sunfolk. Leetah of the Sunfolk, Cutter's “lifemate”, is afraid of his “world of huge green growing things and monstrous beasts”, terrified of things she “cannot anticipate or control” (OQ 8, 5). However, when she has to face the forest she accepts its beauty and Cutter's encouragement to become a Wolfrider: “you have to move and breathe and ***think*** with the forest to live in it!” (OQ 10, 23.) Cutter’s words clearly imply that identification of a gestalt character with the environment is crucial for the ability to act meaningfully within it. Finally, Leetah identifies herself as belonging both to the desert and the forest – like her children, the twins Suntop and Ember (OQ 16, 26).

The customs of Leetah's people emphasize harmony and security, an ordered and tidy life. As her father Suntoucher says: “We are the **Sun folk** and ours is the way of **peace**” (OQ 2, 30). In the issue “Voice of the Sun”[22] (5 of OQ) the lifestyles of Wolfriders and Sunfolk are contrasted and negotiated. The Sunfolk accept destruction when it happens, even in their homes. When a horde of zwoots (big, strong, horse-like creatures) occasionally rush through their village, damaging their gardens and habitations, they simply move out of the way and repair the damages afterward. For Wolfriders, this kind of compliance seems intolerable, and they decide to pursue the zwoots and turn them to another direction. They succeed – also in giving new perspective for the Sunfolk.

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[22] The name of the issue is at least partly explained in the dialogue between Skywise and Suntoucher, a blind, cleric-like character and Leetah's father. Skywise, who fascinated by the workings of the sky like his tribe name implies “finds a mentor in the kindly Suntoucher”. The old elf tells Skywise that he doesn't need eyesight in order to interpret “the voice of the sun”, for the “mighty, life-giving **daystar**” tells him more through his other senses. (OQ 5, 2–3.) Suntoucher thus exemplifies the philosophy of gaining through relinquishing; the loss of sight sensitizes him to another signs of his environment that he can “hear” within his body.

The Sun Village is situated in a small green valley, an oasis surrounded by rock formations and burning desert. It is repeatedly depicted from bird's eye perspective; the round, decorated buildings, green gardens and tiled paths contribute to the image of orderly life style. In a short scene ending the issue 8 of *Kings of the Broken Wheel*, Sunfolk characters refer to "many changes" and "necessary changes" [that have happened in the course of thousands of years]; the final panel shows Sorrow's End once again from the bird's eye view, but this time the mountains around the familiar-looking village are shaped into rock spikes. This visual change, along with the characters' speculations of "a struggle **without** end" has a striking effect on the expectations of the reader. (KotBW 8, 29.)

The examples above demonstrate how the concept of home or dwelling as a place of security and permanence is repeatedly tested in the cases of all elven tribes. The longing for past unity and security is especially aggravated in the withdrawal of the Gliders from the outside world. Again, the Wolfrider lifestyle contrasts and conflicts with theirs.

Gliders are an old, immortal elven folk who possess strong magic powers and have long resided within Blue Mountain, which is sophisticated and labyrinthine in architecture. A cold blue hue of light dominates the scenes within it. Lord Voll, the leader of Gliders and firstborn of the "High Ones", meant Blue Mountain as a "haven" for those descendants of the "firstcomers" who wished to keep to the "glory" of their original ways and powers and "refused to be changed" by the world (OQ 13, 10). Blue Mountain became "a world unto itself" (OQ 15, 3).

However, the self-contained world of Gliders lacks warmth, renewal, and integrity. The scenes where Lord Voll explains the past are drawn as his mental images; but his expressions and words become distant as he recalls his dream that became petrified and locked in the past that is like "a cloud -- / -- easily seen from the distance, misty and intangible when I try to grasp it". (OQ 13, 10; OQ 11, 29.) Having limited himself within the boundaries of the dwelling of his dreams, his perception of time and change has dimmed and his "dream is **dying** – dying even as it lives on." Lord Voll experiences great sorrow and sense of loss since his people have long since ceased to reproduce. When Leetah opposes the plans of killing Strongbow's wolf-friend Briersting by saying that "you might as well command us to put our own **children** to death", Voll interprets her words as sheer impossibility: "**Children**, you say? / I thought only **Winnowill** was capable of such cruel mockery! / **There are no more children!** / There will **be** no more!". (OQ 11, 26–27.) Voll's bitterness and hopelessness is aggravated by the fact that he once loved Winnowill; their loss of love and trust reflects the loss of all Gliders. (OQ 15, 3.) Their grounds of belonging are dying and withering, since the aspects of renewal do not nourish them.

The Gliders within Blue Mountain are mostly seen as decorative figures drifting in the background, and few obtain distinct identities in the narration. This personal distance and the way the halls of Blue Mountain are drawn – dark, twisted pillars disappearing in the darkness that borders the frames, long, winding staircases, and bright ovals on floors which seem to float within the blackness – reflect the uncertainty Wolfriders and Leetah feel in this "huge, confusing place" of Gliders (OQ 11, 23). When Leetah wanders in her bright colors through the halls of Blue Mountain, she clenches herself, feeling the cold and dark of the space around her. She tries to speak with two Gliders, both sitting on their places as motionless figures. During her discussion with Winnowill she discovers that these Gliders are rock shapers who are mentally shut out of their surroundings so that they only perform one function, opening a way through the stone wall or strengthening a weakness in a hallway. Hence their names are nothing more than their function: Door and Brace. (OQ 12, 11–12.)

The Gliders are proud of the self-contained world they have created and even casually refer to themselves as "the High Ones", believing that they have not changed from their ancestors and their ways – even though they have. Their masterpiece, a set of decorative stone sculptures nested within each other like eggs and floating in air, is continuously shaped by Egg, another still figure who has devoted himself to this sole function. Aroree, one of the "chosen eight", Lord Voll's hunters and the few Gliders who still venture to the world outside, introduces Egg to a few Wolfriders. Her words naively reveal Gliders' firm belief in the all-encompassing wonder of their own creations, works that have the power of knowledge over reality:

> "[- -] you must be willing to lose yourself entirely in contemplation. All the secrets of existence are hidden in those symbols. And since life is endless for elves, **Egg's** work is also endless, ever growing... spinning... / each newly formed symbol changes the meaning of all the others. / Forever is not time

> enough to understand such a work – even for the **High Ones.**" (OQ 13, 15.)

Though Aroree appreciates the marvel of the ever-unfolding existence of things, or of nature that is always more and beyond of what can be comprehended, Egg's work is a representation of reality that values contemplation and examination. It does not value being called by, condemned by, and changed by this reality. Studying the representation of the world does not substitute participating in the actual world. One of the Wolfriders, Skywise, admits that Blue Mountain is wondrous, but he deeply feels that it is wrong to live in the way Door, Brace and Egg are living – only to perform one task, while being unresponsive to their surroundings. [23] Their choices contradict the beliefs of Wolfriders.

Whereas the Wolfrider lifestyle – fit for the forest environment – emphasizes experience through action and the "now of wolf thought", a genuine alertness to only what happens in the present, Gliders stress security, stability, and history as a uniform and coherent continuum. Winnowill, the prominent figure of evil that the Wolfriders meet in Blue Mountain, explains her own actions in ruling Blue Mountain as keeping her people safe: "I am afraid **for** [Lord Voll]. / For his sake I sent the **preservers** away long ago. I will **always** protect him." (OQ 14, 16.) As a method of subtle foreshadowing, Winnowill is here seen from a high vantage point behind a web of vines that later begin strangling "outsiders", the Wolfriders who try to rescue Cutter's son Suntop whom Winnowill has taken as a hostage to drive out these "intruders". Winnowill means protection from death, but also from the influence of the other, the neighboring world. It is a world in which her people had felt themselves as refugees and to which they have refused to adapt, clinging to their old ways of life. If one does not allow oneself to be influenced by the unknown, the alterity that one may label "savage", "inferior" or "tainted" in an act to regain one's integrity, this kind of protection is easily distorted.

Winnowill also justifies the pain she causes others through the ownership to her home, the Blue Mountain. When Suntop protests to his kidnapper that Blue Mountain not only belongs to her, but also to the other Gliders, Winnowill calmly repeats: "It belongs to **me!**" (OQ 14, 18.) The finality of her words implies that the other Gliders are also part of "it", objectified in Winnowill's scheme. Her subtle, assured smile is seen from a low angle – from Suntop's level of visual focalization – with a web of vines as her background. The environment of Blue Mountain and the personality of Winnowill are iconotextually depicted similarly: stark contrasts of white and black, imposing, puzzling, yet devoid of life-sustaining content.

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[23] While Aroree and Skywise discuss the Glider's lifestyle and Egg, the tipsy Wolfrider Pike has given him a sip of wine. Egg's work immediately begins to falter chaotically, showing that he is, after all, influenced by his environment and the impulses coming from it; "Got no **tolerance**, I guess!" Pike concludes in his down-to-earth humorous style. (OQ 13, 16.)

Eventually, Skywise finds a way to determinedly explain the wrongness in Gliders' lifestyle he tried to express to Aroree upon meeting Egg: “A starving animal trapped in a pit will rather gnaw at its **own body** rather than die of hunger! / You Gliders have been **feeding** on yourselves - - / - - for who knows **how** long! / This mountain can hold just so many. That's why you don't **breed** anymore!” (OQ 15, 4) Skywise's metaphor undermines the self-imposed distinction of Gliders from the outside world; the elves are not so different, after all, from other sentient creatures living in the World of Two Moons. One must note, however, that Skywise's fervent critique may have been born out of his renewed, awe-struck appreciation of the vast world that he experienced thanks to Aroree on their nightly flight: “under the stars, all lands are one -- / -- but no less wondrous.” (OQ 12, 18–21.) Skywise, in his own way, is horrified of the Gliders voluntary denial of the wonder of the world. Indirectly, he criticizes anyone who tries to remain unchanged by the Other and chained by stagnation.

Gliders regard their mountain as a possession, a place that can be molded to their liking. Contrasted with the Wolfrider lifestyle, this view is framed as joyless and unsustainable. Though appropriating one's dwelling in the categories of the I or the same can hardly be wholly judged (as we tend to form our homes as reflectors of our egos), the exclusion of outside elements makes it shallow. This kind of world loses its secrets and its inherent wonder (see Winnowill's words above and in OQ 13, 8). The material world can be understood merely in terms of “raw material” or object for exploitation (see Haila 1999, 343). This comes close to what Levinas says about the self (as the “primacy of what is mine”) as *hateful.* (Levinas and Kearney 1986, 26–27.)

The final volumes of *Siege at Blue Mountain* show that Blue Mountain's architecture clandestinely was or became more “artificial” than the Wolfriders knew. According to Winnowill's will, the Gliders were shaping eggs or shells within each other which were meant as a vessel that would transport the immortal elves out of the World of Two Moons – the world of which they never wanted to be part of. Blue Mountain begins to tremble and metamorphoses into a giant floating shell, which is, however, shattered after Cutter and his family confront Winnowill and break her control over the Gliders (see chapter 3.3.1).

When Lord Voll meets the preserver Petalwing, he recalls the original dwelling of their kind, the Palace of the High Ones, and fervently realizes that the lives of Gliders “have been but a poor **imitation** of their ways!” Standing on the top of spheres shaped by Egg, he declares: “**It is not the world outside but the world inside which is corrupt - - / - - and I am to blame!**” (OQ 15, 7–8.)

Lord Voll's sudden need for authenticity and truthfulness seems like an overreaction towards Glider's lifestyle. He dreams of regaining the “first and best home” of elves (OQ 15, 10), and forces the Wolfriders to come with him on the quest to find it in a cold, snowy land far away. The quest takes an unexpected and regrettable twist as the trolls residing in the Frozen Mountains attack the elves and kill Lord Voll. The shocked Gliders flee and abandon Wolfriders in the middle of a desperate fight. However, other elves that call themselves Go-Backs suddenly appear and rescue the outnumbered Wolfriders. (OQ 15, 21–32.)

Go-Backs were originally nomads, but they began to feel the “call of the Palace” for about one hundred years before Wolfriders meet them (OQ 16, 26). They dwell in a simple, crude lodge, and their lifestyle is characterized as a constant fighting against the trolls in order to reach the Palace. Though it can be said that the Go-Backs are not so “spiritually” oriented as their fellow tribes (they don't use or appreciate magic or even experience recognition), interestingly it is just they who have devoted their lives for “going back” to the Palace, because it began to call them.

Though the idea of the original, true, authentic home – a reformulation of pastoral – is reproduced in *Elfquest*, it is also put into question. The lifestyle of the Go-Backs is perhaps after all not determined by this home, an ultimate goal, but their long history and traditions as nomads, fighters and survivors. Take, for example, an excerpt of free indirect speech of the Go-Back leader Kahvi's immersion in the battle: “This is her meat and milk. This is her **life**. The castle be **cursed!**” (OQ 19, 17.)

What characterizes the way Go-Backs belong to the world seems not to be the idea of dwelling, but that of *going*. This is demonstrated in a short sequence in *Dreamtime*, after a Go-Back Skot, who has lived a long time with the Wolfriders, is painfully burned by the humans' camp fire. Pike, who is returning with him to the holt, asks him to tell a dream (his words, set in narrative caption and coupled with a silhouette of the pair riding on Pike's wolf, already create a distanced effect). (*Dreamtime* 89.) In a similar voice-over effect, Skot answers him by asking: “Does a **wolf** who runs in his **sleep** remember what it was he thought he was chasing?” He continues, with blurry-bordered, almost fully white images: "'Go-Backs **don't** remember sleep-pictures. Just **being alive** is like walking through a snow-dream anyway." This wakeful dream vision that alternates between a first person view, and a distant, impersonal view, depicts living as going, with no specific direction in the whiteness of the world, for the past is dissolved and the future is obscure, ”pretty much the same”: "'All that **ever** mattered was the going. When you can't do it any more --' / '-- the **next** one takes your place.'" The continuity of the going in which one contributes as having children is Skot's only dream, "'[- -] waking or sleeping-- ’ / ‘-- to make a **fawn** who'll take my place -- ’ / ‘ -- so I can stop.'" In the end, he evokes the Palace as a dwelling where his spirit will "go back" with the "others who've gone before". (Ibid. 90–91.) Nevertheless, the dwelling does not determine his way of life, his grounds of belonging, as much as simply his going in the present moment and its continuity. Later Pike protests against Cutter's anger – Skot has broken the rule of non-interference with the humans – on the basis of Skot's dream; unlike Wolfriders, the Go-Backs have not learned to care for “what's **been** and what's **to be**”, nor do they fear the past and future. According to Pike, their way of life is “a part of the way” the Wolfriders have lost sight of, and hence, they should not be judged by their occasional recklessness. (Ibid. 92–93.) Thus an individual's orientation to life, his personal decisions, are strongly molded by the lifestyle of his community and the specific physical environment where it has developed.

When the elves are finally through with fighting and reach the Palace, most of them don't choose to live in it. Upon entering the Palace, it seems strange, a place that does not whisper, but “screams” of magic (OQ 20, 19). When the elves reclaim their “homeplace” in discovering their history through the Scroll of Colors they learn that the Palace is a vessel, a means of transportation through time and space. It is also the dwelling of elven spirits after the death of their bodies. Though the Wolfriders will take with them the “feeling of belonging the Palace gives [- -] they cannot live hemmed in by walls” (OQ 20, 34). Still, the Palace is a place that transforms elves, or unfolds their potential. When the Palace is “awaken”, or the souls of the dead Gliders have settled in it and Rayek has made it fly again, both the spirits and the living elves are called to use their powers for a common purpose: to connect with kin. Once the elven characters travel within the Palace, their abilities and characteristics are enhanced: they are more able to see their target, communicate their wishes, and engage in active love. (KotBW 5, 26.)

3.1.2 Relationship between humans and elves

3.1.2.1 Conflicts of origin

Initially, humans act as prime motivators for the unfolding of the plot in *Elfquest*. Not only they force Wolfriders to escape their Holt and move on to another land, but later they also spark the quest to find other elves: after re-encountering humans Cutter cannot ignore their view that the elves "don't **belong** here" (OQ 6, 22).

The initial scene of the very first *Elfquest* issue produces the humans' idea of the elves as intruders who have corrupted the land humans own, "twisting the shapes of things with their foul magic". In a flashback to the time "long ago", the Palace of the High Ones descends from the skies in a great thunder storm, and the unfamiliarity of the sight terrifies the primitive humans. When the eyes of the two aliens meet each other in fear (for "fear has always had many faces"), and the confused elven stranger holds out his hand, both face a moment of communication – but it is lost in violence. The next panel shows the somber human crouched over his kill, in a realization of his desperate strength. Sadly, the elves never manage to communicate the purpose of their spectacular arrival; it becomes a secret that is forgotten even by the descendants of those who managed to flee the slaughter. (OQ 1, 3–5.)

When Wolfriders have lived in their new desert home for several years, a ragged human family wanders close to Sorrow's End. The elves and humans meet each other expressing strong emotions: fear and aversion. Cutter commands his tribe members Pike, Strongbow, and Woodlock (here Cutter hesitates, not liking Woodlock's uncharacteristic blood thirst) to kill the three adults and a child, but in the nick of time Redlance interrupts them. He tells about how he was tortured by humans (OQ 1) and kept asking them "why the need for such cruelty and hate"; he has the right to hear the answer now. Aro, the younger human male, who just moments ago has reproached the elves for the suffering they've caused for humans, senses his chance to speak out his truth. Depicted in a close-up (image 3), he says: "**Hear** me, wolf demons! We are enemies, but I will speak **true**! **This world is not yours!**" (OQ 6, 11–15.)

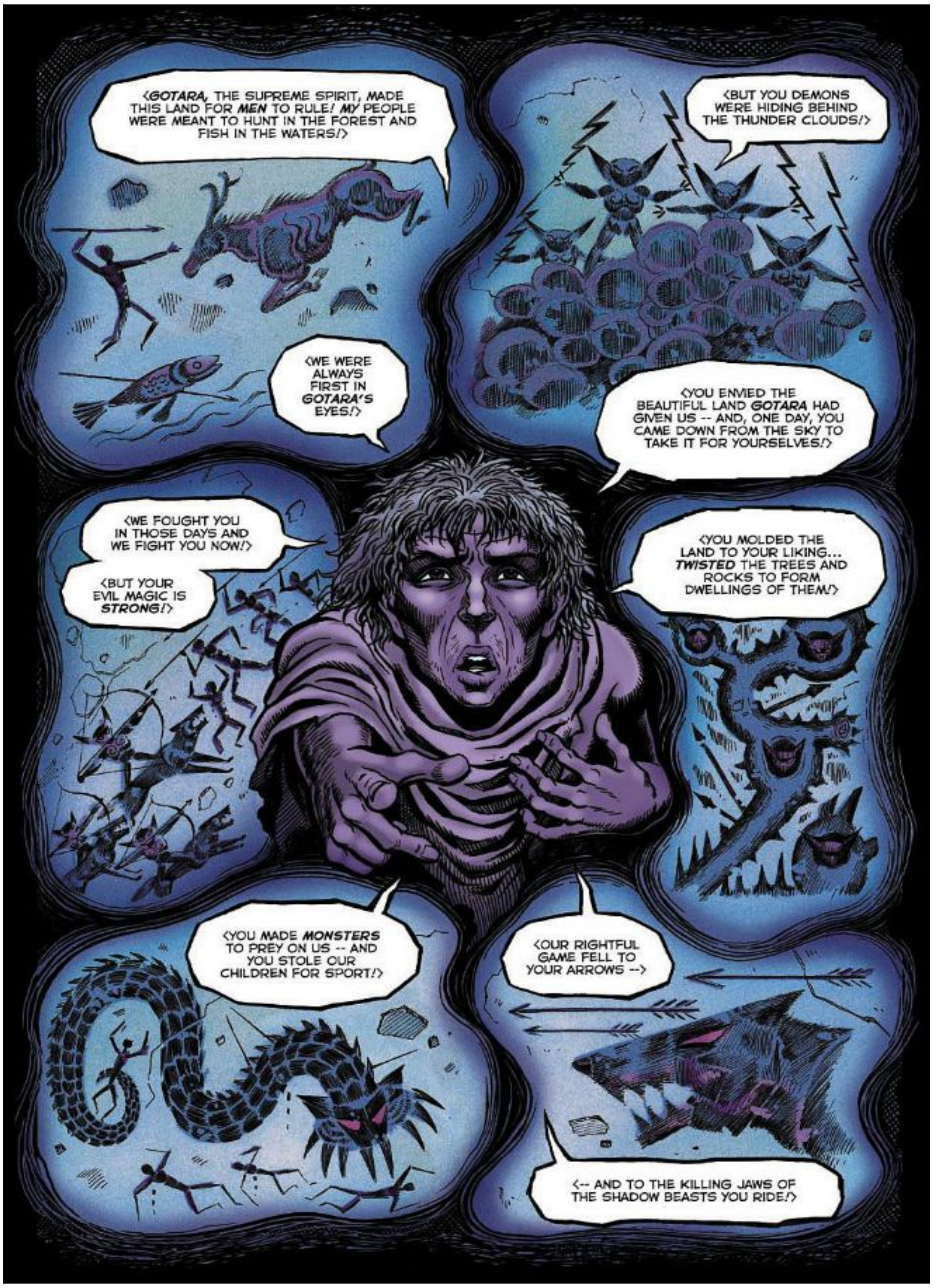
<GOTARA, THE SUPREME SPIRIT, MADE THIS LAND FOR MEN TO RULE! MY PEOPLE WERE MEANT TO HUNT IN THE FOREST AND FISH IN THE WATERS!>
<WE WERE ALWAYS FIRST IN GOTARA'S EYES!>
<BUT YOU DEMONS WERE HIDING BEHIND THE THUNDER CLOUDS!>
<YOU ENVIED THE BEAUTIFUL LAND GOTARA HAD GIVEN US -- AND, ONE DAY, YOU CAME DOWN FROM THE SKY TO TAKE IT FOR YOURSELVES!>
<WE FOUGHT YOU IN THOSE DAYS AND WE FIGHT YOU NOW!>
<BUT YOUR EVIL MAGIC IS STRONG!>
<YOU MOLDED THE LAND TO YOUR LIKING... TWISTED THE TREES AND ROCKS TO FORM DWELLINGS OF THEM!>
<YOU MADE MONSTERS TO PREY ON US -- AND YOU STOLE OUR CHILDREN FOR SPORT!>
<OUR RIGHTFUL GAME FELL TO YOUR ARROWS -->
<-- AND TO THE KILLING JAWS OF THE SHADOW BEASTS YOU RIDE!>

Image 3: OQ 6, 15.
Aro depicts the theistic world view of his people as primitive and sharp-edged imagery.

The world view of Aro's people considers elves as envious intruders who came from the skies to steal and foul the earthly resources that the god of humans, Gotara, had meant for the humans to enjoy. The position of humans is seen in terms of stewardship. However, as the task “to rule the land” was given for men who “were always first in **Gotara’s** eyes”, this rightful position left no place for outsiders. This theistic worldview and the ideology based on the ownership of material world and its objects, not the responsibility for the material needs of others, seems to justify the excluding, negating, and killing of those who are not given this divine right to supervise the land. It is not difficult to associate this conflict with the real-world political problems, such as hateful reactions to the arrival of refugees and opposition to immigration.

As the humans feel that they are commanded by their god Gotara, they quickly seek meaning for their misfortunes from the idea of penalty. When the Wolfriders kill a human, this comes as a punishment of spirits for the interruption of their ritual sacrifice of an elf – a ritual that would have maintained the order or hierarchy of things; also the re-encounter of their old enemies serves as a penalty for destroying the forest (OQ 1,9; OQ 6, 16). However, the delusional brother of Aro sees the irony of the situation: "- Heh heh heh… - Gotara willed that the land be cleansed… and we **cleansed** it - - down to its **bare, black bones**! The wolf demons are **destroyed**! - hah ha hah ha – Do you **hear**, great spirit…?" (OQ 1, 10; OQ 6, 17–18.) A paradox in the world view of humans creates agony and madness; they have to fulfill the wishes of their superior spirit with whom they cannot communicate directly, but they are themselves responsible for their actions and their own suffering. The evil that they do for themselves and others is clothed in the robe of unaccomplished duty.

This conflict between elves and humans, an ideological trench warfare, is somehow resolved with the expression of beliefs and values, and choices to act otherwise than before. It is crucial that Redlance alters the course of events by questioning the meaning in killing. He admits that it sickens him to look at humans and remember "what their kind once did to [him]", but he sincerely wants to understand the "why" motivating their actions (OQ 6, 15). Redlance also questions Woodlock's blood thirst ("coming from **you** words of death are **foul**!") and prompts him to reveal his deeper emotions and admit his desperation, the fear of never having a safe place to call one's own (OQ 6, 18). The shared history of humans and elves has promoted the will to understand even seemingly absurd, senseless actions; in this lies the thin hope of nonviolent communication.

What if the gods or spirits manifested themselves among us? That is how the Hoan G'Tay Sho believe – they live in certain harmony, they are "favored" by the spirits, but that steadiness of their lives proves dangerous for them, after all. The world views of the Hoan G'Tay Sho will be discussed below.

3.1.2.2 Difference and proximity: Nonna and Adar

Humans, like all species and communities dwelling in diverse environments, are have varied belief systems. On their journey to find other elves, Cutter and Skywise have their first clue about their kin from a human couple, Nonna and Adar, who are banished from Adar's tribe. In a fewer dream vision, caused by an infected wound, Cutter stumbles into their forest camp. Nonna carries the unconscious Wolfrider in their cave home and Adar drives away Cutter's wolf companion Nightrunner with fire. Too weak to flee or to resist, Cutter is mended by the couple and discovers the unimaginable: humans can act kindly, even lovingly, towards the elfin kind. (OQ 8; 15–21.) After Skywise has found Cutter and brought him some curative plants that heal his infection, Nonna, who is a "symbol-maker", shows them the pictures she has painted on the walls of the cave to honor the "bird spirits" who dwell inside Blue Mountain and ride giant birds. She recognizes Cutter and Skywise as these bird spirits, though they differ in size. (OQ, 27–29.)

The fact that Cutter is vulnerable and weak offers him a possibility for the kind of proximity with humans which he has never had in his lifetime. The truth in touch, the extreme sensibility of the caring caress cannot be ignored – no more than the truth in Cutter's sending, when he commands Skywise not to kill the humans; here the of his face, in a close-up, conveys its clarity (OQ 8, 24). The scene is, though, impregnated with tension: the narrator observes Cutter's fury after he has seen his wolf friend, whom Adar has burned, and how he "struggles to suppress thought of revenge" all conveyed, from an observer's point of view, in Cutter's matter-of-factly approach. The narrator demonstrates how hard it is for Cutter to speak words "that no Wolfrider has ever spoken to a human before": to admits that he understands them, and thank them for help. (OQ 8, 26.)

Cutter and Skywise stay with the humans for a while. Cutter learns more about the bird spirits from Nonna, but Skywise remains wary and disdainful of the humans. Nonna and Adar have been banished to the woods ten years earlier, because Adar brought his bride Nonna from another tribe, the Hoan G'Tay Sho, and "Bone Woman", the shaman figure of Adar's tribe did not accept her. Adar approaches Skywise, hidden among the branches, in a straightforward manner: "[- -] Tell me what good will come to me if I **worship** you!" (OQ 9, 7–8.) The situation is comical: the grudging, hidden elf is first unwilling to respond, then astonished by Adar's request; the human bluntly asks what benefits it would bring to praise this sour "deity" with songs and sacrifices.

The scene illustrates a direct relationship with the neighboring spirits. It bears a resemblance to the inter-relational stories of oral cultures which often take form as trickster stories. For the human mind, elves may resemble gods; as Cutter also curiously remarks, humans always call elves "spirits" or "demons" (OQ 9, 8). In reality, due to their long history on the World of Two Moons, elves can be approached as fellow creatures of the world with seemingly miraculous or "supernatural" characteristics; human knowledge of the world is limited, after all. When the gods are among us, we have to learn to live with them; conflicts and negotiation with them become part of the mundane communication.

Adar asks help for Nonna, for she is lonely, living apart from the community of other humans. Cutter and Skywise agree to help Adar and Nonna return to live among Adar's tribe. "Bone-Woman" has gained power by manipulating the fears of the tribe's chief, Olbar the Mountain-Tall, and using Nonna as a scapegoat. When the elves accompany Nonna and Adar, Olbar's rage is appeased. He regards Cutter and Skywise with humbled awe and wonder as well as puzzlement. The elves have to reconsider their ideas of humanity in watching them at their peaceful celebration:

> "For all their age-old and justifiable resentment of the humans - - the 'tall-ones' who are so strangely diverse in appearance and so violently unpredictable in temperament - - Cutter and Skywise observe that a smile is a smile and a touch is a touch among humans and elves alike." (OQ 9, 24.)

When parting with Nonna and Adar, who have been accepted into Adar's tribe, Cutter wonders why she looks sad. Nonna kneels beside Cutter, touching his chin, and explains her feelings that stem from the comparison of her human self with the beauty of the "spirits": "You are both so ***fair*** - - like the ***dawn***! Beside you, ***we*** are no better than coarse and clumsy ***toads***!" The narrator tells, in a caption, of Cutter's recent shift of perception, as he answers her truthfully: "No! You are the first humans to touch us with **love** instead of hate. We are different, but I see no **ugliness** in you." (OQ 9, 29.) The nonviolent, kind touch opened the eyes of the Wolfrider chief for wider range possibilities in relationships between the species. The bond is still tentative, but it is formed on mutual recognition of differences and on active taking care of the other's needs.

The scene above (and others in which Cutter and Skywise and Nonna and Adar interact) gains an extra twist with regard to the fact that Nonna and Adar are fictional alter egos of the creators Wendy and Richard Pini – in a way their "cameo-roles". Wendy Pini has said that Cutter reflects her personality with all the human sides removed, and Nonna with all the elfin sides removed. (Wilkerson 1994.) This inter-species encounter then also takes the form of identity meeting alterity, or of becoming oneself in relation to the other in the self.

A later scene with Olbar also illustrates how relationship between the divine spirits and their worshipers is normalized on the same level of communication. Olbar saves Cutter and Skywise from falling into their death.[24] Kneeling beside the exhausted elves, Olbar ponders: "What are you? You are not immortal - - you feel pain and fear death as **we** do! Yet you look so **strange**! [- -] I've always **feared** the spirits, but... You are **not** spirits, **men**, **children**, or **beasts**! Answer me **truly** - - what **are** you?" The elves, looking weakened and weary, look at him directly. Cutter tells him honestly: "No human has ever bothered to **ask**! We have no answer for you! What you call us doesn't matter - - It only matters that humans **never** needed to fear or hate us!" This meeting, however brief, where humans and elves touch both physically and mentally, helps members of both species shake away their old fears and fixed beliefs. (OQ 9, 40–44.) In their encounter, the ontological *what* is not important, but how the I approaches the Other. If the meeting takes form as proximity, and realizing of one's responsibility for the other's existence,

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[24] The landscape in this scene forms part of the suspense, and marks it as a crucial turning point: it is a steep, high cliff where the river falls down noisily (which we interpret from the fact that Skywise shouts). From the cliff, the

Non-violent communication on a shared level between members of different races is thus proved possible: it can become a dialogue based on genuine mutual interest and acceptance of differences and similarities. The interaction has to happen in proximity in order to be realized as interrelatedness. If individuals don't strive for it, no-one will manage it. That is something that Nonna's tribe, the Hoan G'Tay Sho, and the elven tribe of Gliders, never did learn – except perhaps in the end of the following sub-series *Siege at Blue Mountain.*

Nonna's people, the Hoan G'Tay Sho, communicate with the "bird spirits", i. e. the Gliders of the Blue Mountain, and worship them, unquestioning their benevolence. The tragedy of the *Siege at Blue Mountain* largely stems from the false beliefs on which the humans have built their world; that world is shattered with the destruction of Blue Mountain. First, Cutter travels to meet Nonna and Adar (who now live with Adar's tribe) and asks them to convince the Hoan G'Tay Sho that Winnowill tricks them and "keeps them as playthings". (SaBM 2, 18–25.) Sadly, Nonna's tribe refuses to believe them, but Cutter and his human companions venture into the Blue Mountain once again to find Dewshine's stolen cub and free Winnowill's human captives. (SaBM 4, 13–25, SaBM 6,

Nonna's firm belief on the good will of "bird spirits" seems to shatter and move to the other extreme when she sees how his people have been imprisoned. When Adar has broken the cage of Winnowill's human "pets", Nonna greets Kakuk, who was once so proud to be received by the "bird spirits". She shouts out in agony: "**Oh, sun and moons!** The bird spirits are **evil**! We have worshiped **evil spirits** all this while!!"

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elves can see Blue Mountain, where they are heading. The waterfall or "Death-water", the power of the river made explicit and sudden, parallels both the conflict with humans (the violence with the "thief" and incertitude with Olbar) and the parting with companions (Nightrunner, who leaves the elves to go to its death, and the possibility of Skywise's death). (OQ 9, 31–41.)

However, Cutter responds to Nonna's conflicting emotions calmly. Standing in a neutral position and looking Nonna straight to the eyes, like he did earlier in OQ 8, 26, Cutter responds:

> "**Nonna**... This is **Winnowill's** doing - - no one else's. She is **not** a 'bird spirit'. Neither am I, or **any** of my kind! Because of our looks and what we can do - - humans **hunt** us or make us gods. But there is no peace for us either way. We **cannot** go on tricking you! It is **wrong** and I am... sorry." (SaBM 6, 18)

Cutter first explains that the "bird spirits" as a whole are not to be held responsible for these particular evil actions, and continues by stripping away the "bird spirit" identity that the humans have accorded to elves. Good and evil do not lie in what somebody is; they are qualities enacted in relationships.

When Cutter asks the imprisoned human Kakuk to tell the truth about Blue Mountain to Hoan G'Tay Sho, he says: "I... **will**! But -- / -- I fear it will **destroy** them!" Cutter bows his head, sadly, remembering the human shaman's prophetic words, repeated for the third time in *Siege at Blue Mountain*: "And the lie which is the **truth** shall bring more pain -- / -- than the truth which is a **lie**!" (SaBM 6, 18.)

In the end of *Siege at Blue Mountain* Leetah heals Dart and Geoki, elf and human youngsters, who have seen a brother in each other's faces. Their hands, united in an attempt to save the other, won't come apart even when they are deadly hurt. This picture depicts how ”the world has changed -- / -- again”, as well as the aghast face of Dart's father Strongbow who, in an attempt to save his child, has killed another elf (which has never before happened). The image of the joined hands is repeated later, when Cutter and Nonna discuss how Leetah's healing has proved that the two peoples are more alike than not. They lay off the bond of worship, and seal a new bond of friendship with a shake of hands – of which Nonna makes a symbol for the Hoan G'Tay Sho "that will speak to them of the healing magic". (SaBM 8, 24.) The responsibility arises out of shared history and interpersonal sensibility.

3.1.3 Hybrid Wolfriders

The wolf companions of Wolfriders have affected the elves in fundamental ways. For example, they live according to "the way" which can be characterized as a coherent, integrated, and unquestioned life philosophy and lifestyle, "unchanged since the first bonding of wolf and elf" (OQ 9, 33; OQ 5, 17), and their consciousness takes place in "the now of wolf thought". "The way" is first mentioned explicitly as the reason for their hunt, the killing of only what they need (OQ 5, 17). The later treatments of “the way” focus on the close-knit relationship between elves and wolves. The questions of origin and authenticity of the body, its animality or bestiality, become increasingly problematic during the quest. Especially when Wolfriders come into contact with Gliders, who claim to have retained the original virtues and powers of the High Ones, raises a conflict over the wolf blood of Wolfriders. In other words, it is a conflict of being influenced by the world.

Usually in the course of series, the wolves exist as creatures who don't use language, other than that of howl, touch and scent, the bodily sensibility. Still, there are a few instances when the train of thought of a wolf is translated in a caption that seems to blend this perception of the moment with narrator's choice to depict it (OQ 8, 19). Also, Wolfriders communicate mentally with wolves by using “wolf-send”, which possibly convey mostly perceptions of a low level of abstraction (see OQ 1, 12 for example). The wolves have their own social order and habits, on the grounds of which they also interpret the behavior of elves (SaBM 5, 26) and in which the elves do not interfere too deeply – even when they lose their own specific wolf friend in a fight between wolves, such as Skywise does in KotBW 2, 23–30. However, feeling this burden of mortality, the loss off self in the loss of companion makes Skywise more determined to leave his world of origin behind (KotBW 3, 1–3).

During the long quest to find other elves Cutter has to part with his old wolf companion Nightrunner. Cutter does not, at first, realize that his wolf friend cannot continue further, before Nightrunner snaps his teeth at his outstretched hand. The shock and bewilderment of Cutter are explicit in his sending. (OQ 9, 31.) Communication between the two species is clumsy, imperfect, even in important moments like this. [25] However, through empathy and touch Cutter understands how the wolf may be feeling its old age, and their parting must be final. The pictures and words convey a closeness and caring characteristic for the bond of the companion species. The narrator joins in, explaining the consciousness of the wolf: Nightrunner does not know that their farewell expressed in “the language of touch and scent” may be final. Instead, the old animal is connected to the moment and place he is in, and feels the call of the environment: “The old wolf knows only that he is tired, and that the nearby forest beckons him to rest in its cool and shadowy depths.” Skywise offers words of consolation for Cutter, and explains the choice of his wolf friend Starjumper to accompany Nightrunner. In a panel where the two elves are depicted abreast from behind, Cutter only sends: "...Yes." This silent moment, laden with emotions that the characters' faces could not express in full, escorts the two wolves into the forest, and the two journeys, though separate, are united in the narrator's evocative summary: "It is '**the way**', an order of things to be accepted with sadness – but not with despair – for it is a **good** way, unchanged since the first bonding of wolf and elf." (OQ 9, 32–33.)

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[25] It remains a mystery how the wolves overall feel about traveling with their elf friends in distant lands, considering that Nightrunner is the leader of the Wolfrider wolf pack. What is more, we don't know if the wolves experience their relationship with the elves in similar terms of "friendship” like Wolfriders. It can be assumed, however, that their history of kinship must have changed the lifestyle of the wolves as well. Wolves that have not bonded with Wolfriders behave otherwise; see OQ 17, 3.

The scene illustrates how "the way" is rooted to the animal body, in the relationship with another species which shapes one's consciousness, as a focus on the environment. It is easy to interpret this "order of things" as normative, but it is not a universal law. "The way" is a frame of a view of what is good life, of being able to live with others, that stems from the long, specific history of companion species.

In the beginning of the quest, the relationship that the Wolfriders and the wolf pack share is indeterminably described as a strong, "ancient" bond with "trusted allies" (OQ 1, 13). This bond is explained further by an elderly troll, Old Maggoty, who bluntly remarks that the elven "mongrels" all have some wolf blood in their veins (OQ 7, 6). Later, when the Wolfriders meet the ancient Gliders in Blue Mountain, Leetah prevents Cutter from recounting "the colourful history" of the forest-dwellers to Voll by causing a slight accident (OQ 13, 11–12). Leetah and Winnowill, both of whom are healers and have touched Wolfriders, know that because of their heritage they are not immortal like other elves. Winnowill intimidates Leetah so that she would try to convince Wolfriders to leave the Blue Mountain; thus Winnowill could maintain her oblique dominance. The origin of Wolfriders would remain a secret for the Gliders who might shun them because of their "tainted" blood, and their mortality a secret for themselves. However, Cutter overhears the conversation and learns the truth. (OQ 13; 19–21.) Having lost this tool of extortion, Winnowill threatens Cutter's children but, with a fierce leap, Cutter attacks her. Subsequently, the Wolfriders' origin is narrated during a fight between Cutter and Winnowill (OQ 13, 23–29).

The moments of agony are first intensified with two large, dynamic images without separating gutters where the pair is locked in intense, diagonal positions. Cutter's infuriated face dominates the panels, as well as the blurred sphere of pain Winnowill is piercing him with. (OQ 13, 23.) The narrator's voice delay's the experience of time in the scene; on the following page, the narrator recounts how Cutter's blade progresses Winnowill's throat and she realizes that she cannot control him. Winnowill's yell ("**Fool! How much can you bear?!**") briefly interrupts the narrative voice which nevertheless continues by revealing Winnowill's realization: "That which Winnowill mocked - - the taint of the beast in Cutter's blood - - is now the source of her terror. / It is his **Tam** - - all that he is - - elf… wolf… the core of his being." In the pictorial sequence, Cutter's face parallels and seems to transform into a face of a wolf, on which a sketchy figure of a lupine elf simultaneously appears. The blurred lines of the sphere of pain now form the contours of the images, drawing the spectator into the mixed focalization of Winnowill and the narrator. The animal self – the hybrid animal face – that Winnowill thought as weakness, is a source of power and an otherness Winnowill cannot understand or control. It stirs a sharp realization in free indirect speech: "**The wolf holds her in his jaws and will not let go!**" (OQ 13, 24.)

The following flashback into the Wolfriders' history opens up with an echo of Winnowill's intimidating words a few pages earlier (OQ 13, 20). However, their tone seems more neutral and distant when they are accompanying sketchy visual style which serves as if to mark the distance to the present or fade away the uniqueness of characters depicted in that "long ago" (although their actions and feelings are quite specifically related in the following). The captions retrace how in this legendary time, a "firstcomer" called Timmain, "one to whom the world was not an enemy" was capable to use her power in concordance with the harsh environment of the Frozen Mountains. (OQ 13, 25.) The narrative caption blurs into an image of a fiery sphere which resembles earlier images of the high ones struggling to kindle a flame (OQ 4, 12), but in this image the closest, visually contrasted figure rises up to meet the fire. My reading of the sequence assumes that Timmain's powers welled from her readiness to observe and to accept the inherent patterns and life forms of this alien world, a kind of humility. Instead of clinging to fear, rejection and will for self control that would exclude the needs of others, she was able to "fully" embrace the "forces native to the two-mooned planet" (OQ 13, 25). However, encountering another world, uniting with it – or metamorphosing into another being – necessarily entails losses. The following frame shows Timmain the self-shaper blending with the forms of the woods, or becoming "one with the great provider forest": her figure stands tall like the bole of a young tree, her hair and fingers becoming branch-like. In the next image she is kneeling and a wolf that was looming in the background appears on the foreground; she is changing herself into wolf, for as the guardian of her folk and their connector to the world's rhythms, she "felt the white cold grow deeper", and "humbly [- -] sought aid from those who first taught her people to hunt – the wolves". (OQ 13, 25.) It is alertness to the needs of her people that obliges Timmain to give herself to the wolves, so to speak.

The following page tells how Timmain changed herself into wolf form and hunted meat for her tribe, but "[t]he transformation was too complete": she would not return to her former shape but began to run with the wolves. "The elf soul within the beast body was fading" and the elves "were no longer her brethren". However, Timmain gave birth to a half-elf cub, or half-wolf child, which she first raised, then gave to the elves and disappeared, never to be seen again. The cub learned to send and speak and grew "to love his mother's kind as well as his father's". Though to his sire, the leader of the wolfpack, he was "friend and equal", to the elves he became chief, Timmorn Yellow-Eyes – this reflects the relationships of his descendants the Wolfriders. Timmorn led the elves to greener lands and good hunts, and died (most likely while feuding with humans), ever proud of his wolf blood. Still, like his followers who hardly died of old age, he ignored the price of bonding "with the world and its cycle of life": mortality. The flashback ends visually with a line of Timmorn's descendants, who move away from the sketchy style towards clearer and clearer lines, diagonally returning to present and Cutter's angry face.[26] (OQ 13, 26–28.)

This sequence resembles common story lines of many indigenous peoples and their long histories of oral storytelling; metamorphosis and marriage with an animal function as means of explaining relations with the sphere of life. (See Abram 2010, 259, 265–274.) The understanding of certain animals as kindred serves to indicate strengths of a people to themselves and enhances their affinity between them and their surroundings. Here, the fantastic genre gives a concrete and dramatized form to the enigmatic presence of the world and our ties "beyond all untying" with and within it. Magic in fantasy resides in the essence of things, or relates to their intrinsic value, rather than how they are wielded and exploited, or their instrumental value. In other words, magic is presented as spiritual and inherent, not technological. In *Elfquest*, magic is not altogether good or bad, but simply part of characters and their relating with the world and each other. Also, magical abilities are evaluated in various ways by different characters. The narration ultimately depicts the hybridity of Wolfriders not as a source of magical power – magic as efficient tool, the kind that Winnowill appears to appreciate most – but as a life force and energy apt to help them survive in the world as integral part of it. Hybridity, that resembles Haraway's emergent ontology in which species meet, grants Wolfriders a strength or acute presence of taking inherently part in the cycle of life and death.

During the Elfquest series, the "now of wolf thought", or living fully in the present, is discussed repeatedly. In contrast, after the long flashback described above, the importance of remembrance is also notably stressed by Leetah. She stops Cutter from killing Winnowill by by asking him to remember the Bridge of Destiny – the place where he ultimately overcame his own fear in order to save his rival Rayek. She leaps to heal him and asks him to recall why he did it. Cutter, still teeth clenched, thinks: "No elf must die… even if he ***is*** my enemy!" Holding to this principle makes him withdraw. (OQ 13, 29.) The healing vein, the touch of Leetah, connects him to the common belonging he shares with Winnowill.

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[26] This evolutionary succession of ten Wolfrider chieftains is depicted once before (OQ 4, 7–8).

After Cutter and Leetah are left alone, Leetah asks him for forgiveness. Cutter does not seem upset upon learning about the mortality caused by his wolf blood. He experiences a certain sadness, for meeting the old "Mother of memory" Savah had made him dream that he could live forever. However, mortality is easy to accept, for he was raised up to an alertness or awareness of the brevity of life, and the sadness one experiences in full consciousness: "I'm awake now, and the truth is good. I'm just sorry Winnowill tormented you needlessly." (OQ 13, 32) After hearing this, Leetah insists that they must stay at Blue Mountain, for: "***Voll*** is first-born of the high ones -- / -- he knows things about our kind that we can ***never*** learn anywhere else! If only we can make him remember!" (OQ 13, 31–32.)

A couple of issues later, Lord Voll is made to remember with the simple greeting of the preserver Petalwing. Preservers are companion species with the elves, but living apart from them has caused Voll as well as his people to forget much of their shared origin. In the course of *The Original Quest*, remembrance of things past becomes an increasingly influential act of belonging.

3.1.4 Companion species: remembrance and authenticity

The kinship between Wolfriders and wolves is a close relationship of companion species, but the different ties elves have with trolls and preservers are equally significant. The importance of shared history and remembering parts of it that are forgotten or neglected is underlined when the elves encounter preservers.

Preservers are comical, somewhat fairy-like "bugs" who first appear in issue 10 "The Forbidden Grove" of the *Original Quest*, and turn out to be tiny helpers of the elves. They once lived with Gliders in Blue Mountain, but Winnowill sent them away to inhabit Forbidden Grove (which probably gained its name due to preservers' effect on it). Initially, they seem to act without sensible purpose; "What are you good for, anyway? All you do is spit goo on everything!" Cutter angrily questions Petalwing, a tiny preserver who decides to stay with Cutter's family and "take good care of highthings". (OQ 10, 24.) By covering living creatures in this "goo", or "wrapstuff", the preservers are actually performing their function to "preserve" elfin bodies over their travels in time and space, much like mummification was believed to prepare human bodies for travel to the Western Lands in ancient Egypt. In the Forbidden Grove, a place and context where no space-traveling elves inhabit, the preservers' enthusiastic cocooning seems senseless. Their relation to the elves is first hinted by Petalwing with the playful language of the preservers when Cutter is about to leave the grove with his newly found family (image 4).

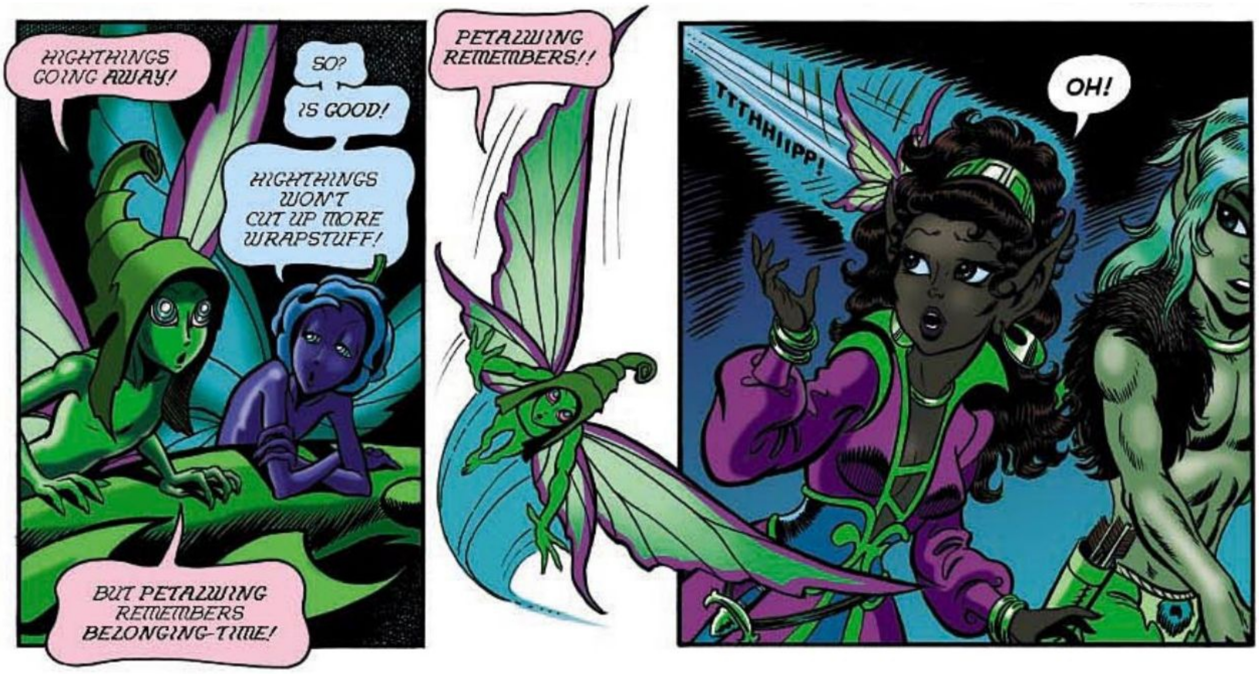
HIGHTHINGS GOING AWAY!
SO?
IS GOOD!
HIGHTHINGS WON'T CUT UP MORE WRAPSTUFF!
BUT PETALWING REMEMBERS BELONGING-TIME!
PETALWING REMEMBERS!!
TTTHHIIPP!
OH!

Image 4: OQ 10, 19.

A sense of urgency and importance, related to the enigmatic expression “belonging-time”, comes across from Petalwing’s gestures and words. The preserver’s appearance for Lord Voll also calls back his memories, makes Voll “remember the tales [his] parents told” of the “first and best home” of the elves, and sets him in an imperative, determined mood to find it (OQ 15, 7–10). By their very existence as companion species that, in significant otherness, determine also what elves are, preservers incite the need for belonging and catalyze the development that leads the elves to the discovery of their origin, as well as the conflicts that result from the deeper understanding of how and why they belong – or don't belong – in the World of Two Moons.

While preservers are willing to help elves in any way they can, trolls regard elves much more suspiciously, even in a hostile way, and would rather live apart from them.[27] However, the paths of these two peoples constantly meet, mostly by necessity. In the course of a war in which the Wolfriders and Go-Backs reclaim the Palace of the High Ones, the elves form a precarious bond with the former king Greymong’s trolls, their former traitors, who have become slaves to the crueler troll king Guttlekraw of the Frozen Mountains. The alliance is tested in many ways; most importantly, the trolls disparage the elves' pride about their ancestors and aim to undermine Wolfriders' self-esteem. In a particularly tense atmosphere, Old Maggoty maliciously asks: "They're not ***real*** elves, are they?" and asks the Go-Back chief Kahvi, do they know what Wolfrider's really are. Kahvi, however, answers straightforwardly with apparent pride and disdain:

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[27] The acquaintance of Wolfriders and trolls is actually relatively recent, which partially explains their wary attitude towards each other. Cutter's father Bearclaw discovered the existence of trolls, because he was eager to know who kept picking the dreamberry bushes clean right under the elves' noses. (OQ 7, 18–19.)

> "**None** of us are what we were in the beginning, you muttering bag of **suet**! / But if we **are** so different from the **high ones** - - why do we feel the call of the palace - - **strong** - - and growing stronger - - / - - the deeper we push into our enemies' lair?"

In the panel where Kahvi ends her rhetorical question, she, another Go-back and Cutter stand beside each other framed by a misty silhouette of the Palace's towers. The image grants an effect of sublime as the elves and the Palace echo the forms of each other. (OQ 18, 5.) The imposing effect of the panel illustrates how the elves can commit themselves to and identify with something virtually transcendent, a place they have not yet seen, a home of which they have no exact knowledge. In a way, the Palace is an "Other": its call needs to be answered, it is unknown, singular, and yet constitutive for the existence of the elves. The elves are "responsible" to it even before they truly know what it is or how it calls them. What they do know is that the Palace somehow explains who they are; it predetermines who they are, it obliges them by calling them. It can be asked if in a similar vein the world as a giant living whole (Gaia) predetermines humanity and calls us to an infinite responsibility, to respect and to answer to the needs of this dwelling that is more than a dwelling. In a way, the Palace is alive – it withholds the spirits of elves, it continues to be their vessel, their material shell ("made from the soil of our dying planet"; see below). Even dust has the potential for new life. After death, elven spirits return to the Palace and grant power to make it fly – somewhat like the organisms of Earth that have died hundreds of millions years ago, the energy of which humans now use in the form of fossil fuels.

The scene in which Kahvi's daughter Vaya is killed by Guttlekraw's trolls, the confusing, violent action settles in the calm moment, a softly drawn, warm-colored whole page panel of Vaya's death (image 5). Here the Palace appears once again as a transcendental entity. The narrator describes: "All her life, Vaya has lived in the shadow of the Frozen Mountains. Now that shadow fades beneath her and she sees – with new eyes – that which she has fought for -- / -- and won!" Two smaller panels form a stark contrast to this vision; they are depicting the point-of-view of an exterior observer, the shadowy and bloody surface of Vaya's life and death, as it could be seen by the trolls. However, Vaya's "new eyes" dominate the entire page, appearing more imposing also as they repeat the form of her already dimming, but still starlit eyes. The many layers give an impression of rising above with ease – indeed of transcending towards the other, the Palace. (OQ 18, 9.)

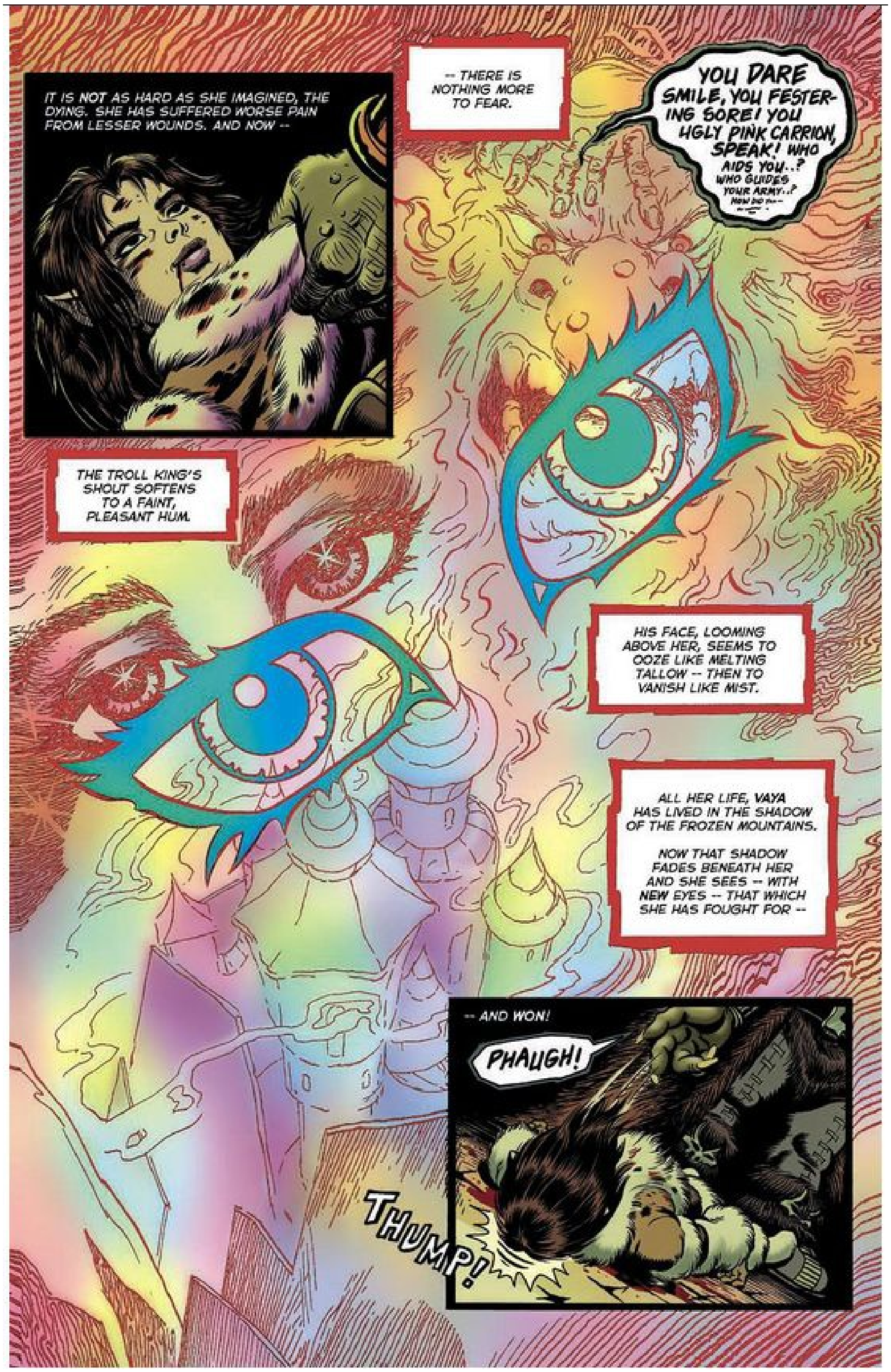
IT IS NOT AS HARD AS SHE IMAGINED, THE DYING. SHE HAS SUFFERED WORSE PAIN FROM LESSER WOUNDS. AND NOW --
-- THERE IS NOTHING MORE TO FEAR.
YOU DARE SMILE, YOU FESTERING SORE! YOU UGLY PINK CARRION, SPEAK! WHO AIDS YOU..? WHO GUIDES YOUR ARMY..? HOW DID YOU--
THE TROLL KING'S SHOUT SOFTENS TO A FAINT, PLEASANT HUM.
HIS FACE, LOOMING ABOVE HER, SEEMS TO OOZE LIKE MELTING TALLOW -- THEN TO VANISH LIKE MIST.
ALL HER LIFE, VAYA HAS LIVED IN THE SHADOW OF THE FROZEN MOUNTAINS.
NOW THAT SHADOW FADES BENEATH HER AND SHE SEES -- WITH NEW EYES -- THAT WHICH SHE HAS FOUGHT FOR --
-- AND WON!
PHAUGH!
THUMP!

Image 5: OQ 18, 9.

The contrasting perspectives of Vaya's death integrated into one spread.

After the war, Wolfriders meet their foremother Timmain in the Palace of the High Ones. Apparently, the Palace's power initiates her metamorphosis from a lone she-wolf to a slender elf. Moreover, the attempt of the compassionate Suntop to communicate with her in wolf-send (despite Leetah's attempts to stop him from approaching the wolf that seems to be sick) may kindle the surprising transformation. (OQ 20, 12–13.) The astonished Wolfriders immediately recognize the metamorphosed High One “not because of legend's teachings - - / - - but through a sense they all share”, for “she is flesh of their flesh, and they are hers”. Dewshine is the first to approach her; “reverently” she “offers the hide of her slain wolf friend” to shelter the shivering High One. The importance of bloodline is accentuated with the first words Timmain speaks. She looks at Dewshine who folds the hide around her, and whispers: “Child...?” The next panel illustrates her keen perception, reflected in the equivocal blend of emotions in

Dewshine’s face; “A child... **bearing** child?” (OQ 20, 13–14.) Overall, Timmain's comportment seems strange and even childlike due to her sensitivity to the atmosphere, the physical and spiritual aspects she senses in it. She is altered by the long history of living in a wolf body, but blended with the consciousness of a High One who has traveled among the stars, this otherness becomes almost unbearable to her earthly descendants in sending, that is far more immediate communication: Strongbow rejects this proximity that becomes almost violent to his self, depicted from a first-person perspective of a wolf running on a path of stars.[28] (OQ 20, 16).

Enwrapped in preserver cocooning, Timmain tells the story of the High Ones through the voice of Cutter's son Suntop and the “Scroll of Colors” that depicts time, space, and spirit in images that also the comics reader can comprehend. High Ones were originally a people who evolved in a world “elsewhere”, and developed technology that helped them to travel through space to other worlds when their world could not sustain their population any more. As their “tools and weapons” gave them power, they did not look inside themselves to find the “gift you call magic” that “slept in their bodies”. It was only when some of them returned to the planet of their birth and chose to “aid the used-up world they found”, that these “caretakers” discovered their inner powers and “eased the aging land through the last of its life”. While sustaining their planet, they also explored the possibilities of their forces and found that “shape and substance [- -] could be changed by will”. As they risked to lose meaning of the material world, the High Ones faced a choice that “defined [their] nature” forever. Sending one’s spirit “out” of the flesh and materiality – the tranquility of these “little deaths” – was tempting to the High Ones, but they “chose form and all the pleasures and pains that go with it!” (OQ 20, 24–25.) They chose the cascades of emotions experienced in the sensual, interacting body. Timmain's explanation gives the impression that the other alternative would have been to leave material reality altogether, never to return to bodily life.

Timmain tells how she and other High Ones hungered for experience, and evokes a figure of rebirth or regeneration, when she describes how each group of explorers formed star vessel about them: “-- like a folded blossom, a **shell** made from our dying soil.” (OQ 20, 25.) It reflects the wondrous quality that new green plants, springing from seemingly battered ground, have for the sensing animal bodies. Perhaps the words and images Timmain uses in narrating the history of her kind are already transformed as metaphors of sensual quality that would make sense to the Wolfriders, Go-Backs and trolls shaped by the World of Two Moons (and to human readers shaped by Earth). In this fantasy world, the secret potentials of the material, bodily existence also manifest as magic; many elves discover their magical gifts through maturation or major life events.[29]

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[28] Later issues, in which Timmain returns to wolf form, suggest that her hybrid being makes communication more complex and enigmatic. Perhaps the most striking moment is in *Kings of the Broken Wheel* (5, 27) when she faces Skywise, who seems astonished in seeing her lupine eyes (the panels depict Timmain's steady gaze and Skywise's wide eyes in parallel); by wolf-send, Timmain tells him to “Seek one voice among the many!” The mysterious command is interpreted in the next issue by Rayek who, in turn, faces Timmain's silent, somehow demanding and passive gaze – embodiment of the face in which the trace of infinity, the face of the Other, lights up. Timmain's cryptic words mean that her own voice is blended within the collective scream of the High Ones that Suntop has heard echoed through time – a scream in which no individual differences can be heard. (KotBW 6, 3, 8.)

The High Ones were an alien race who left their dying planet and ventured out to the space and time in search of others of their kind. However, they took with them the only two surviving species of their birthplace, winged insects and ground-digging apes – "as humbling reminders of the beings who had but one shape and limited life span". In the course of time, these animals were affected by the shape-changing magic, gained thought and speech and became as long-lived as their companions whose servants and pets they were: they became preservers, eager helpers, and independent trolls who had their own plans. Timmain's band of travelers longed to reunite with others of their long lost kin: They observed beings similar to themselves in the folklore of the humans dwelling in the World of Two Moons. When trying to enter the world in the form of these creatures, the High Ones shipwrecked in the wrong time, because their troll servants rebelled and cut open the preserver cocoons in which the guiding elves were navigating "outside of time". (OQ 20, 26–27.) Thus the trolls rooted all the companion species to the time, place, and material reality of the World of Two Moons. Bewildered, these aliens met a harsh, early world in which their magic worked poorly, and were slaughtered by primitive humans. Timmain ends her long story by telling to the elves and trolls:

> "You are the sturdy result of generations of change. / But the **Wolfriders** are **more**! They alone share blood with beasts born of this world. It was my **gift** to my **son**! / He was the **first** of us to have the right to call this land his own! / If you choose, Wolfriders, you too have that right -- / -- and none can... take it from you..." (OQ 20, 29.)

When Timmain, through Suntop, utters these last words, paralleling scenes on the borders of the pages emphasize the connection and continuity that the elves share in this moment. Suntop personifies this "touching" or "link" of the elves to their grounds of belonging (as the wisdom or power figures Savah and Winnowill observe on both sides of the spread). (OQ 20, 28–29). Timmain's words assure the authentic existence of Wolfriders. *The Original Quest* – indeed a quest for origin – ends with the elves returning to live in the woods, replenished with a deeper understanding of their unique way of belonging into their world (OQ 20, 40).

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[29] In *Kings of the Broken Wheel*, the flight inside the Palace acts as this kind of major life event that connects the elves spiritually to their origins and makes "magic more potent, visions more clear". See KotBW 5, 26.

Interestingly Timmain's story depicts the whole planet as an organism that has a lifespan, a living and dying being. The very distant ancestors of the elves originally depended on their land “until they tamed it, and made it depend on them” (OQ 20, 24). This is a problematic phrasing as it simplifies the complex ties of interdependence that presumably have existed in the physical world of the elves ancestors, its many life forms and non-living factors. We have to note, however, that Timmain is translating the history “in words you can understand” (OQ 20 23), “you” being the elves, the trolls, and the reader present in the scene. Perhaps this discourse also reflects the way the elves' ancestors regarded their world, as a system of life that was fully ordered by their species. This is a folly that seems to touch humans as well, and is present also in main-stream environmentalism, or “shallow ecology movement” (see Naess 1989). In reality, the planet as a systemic whole does not *need* humans. If (and when) human species ceases to exist, the processes of the universe will simply continue.

According to my reading of Timmain's adapted history, the ancestors of the elves did discover their inner magic in realizing their responsibility for exploiting their planet of origin, and in striving to sustain the remaining diversity on it. The active responsibility *for* the others led to a fuller “Self-realization” (see Naess 1989). Apparently, the biodiversity was nevertheless extremely diminished, for the ancestors of trolls and preservers were “the last animals left”. Timmain’s origin story is a calm warning against consuming and depleting the world, a story of development, destruction, survival, and adaption. In these aspects it reflects the responsibility, the caring for the material existence of neighboring species; elves, preservers, and trolls are fellow travelers, mutually affected by each other.

The ties of interdependence come to flesh in the learning about the history as companion species – with all its errors, betrayals, conflicting motives, abuse of the other, and aid and sympathy for the other. Kahvi, the chieftess of Go-Backs who has been battling with the trolls all her life, aggressively underlines that it was the fault of “these greedy elf-killers” that the High Ones fell, and they can never be trusted. Picknose, who has just been freed from the slavery of his own kind, under the troll king Guttlekraw, angrily protests: “It's a slave's **right** to rebel! Your fancy ancestors kept us as **pets!** / **You** have to answer for **that**!” Interestingly, when the two are about to assault each other, Picknose calls Kahvi “**mocker, with no true shape of your own!**”(OQ 20, 32.) Thus Picknose keeps undermining the authentic existence of elves.

Cutter, however, breaks off with the war-making Kahvi sees as the way of the world. Putting his hand on the (surprised-looking) Picknose's shoulder and opposing Kahvi's eyes, he says: “If there's **any** other way to live with our so-called enemies -- / -- we'll find it!" (OQ 20, 33.) In reality, Wolfriders already have a history of peaceful communications with the trolls; e.g. mutual trading (OQ 1, 23), and even a tipsy of drinking together with the trolls as their servants in OQ 7, "The Dreamberry Tales".

After regaining the Palace, Rayek is agonized to transform his kind to "creatures of fire [they once were], the fire that changes all". In lock-sending with Timmain, he regrets the "fatal mistake" made by their ancestors in taking the trolls with them, and questions her: "-- Those **cursed, stinking pets**! Why didn't you leave them behind**, Timmain --**" The High One's calm face is outlined within the preserver cocoon, as she answers: "-- When we abandoned our spent star, child? / The trolls were the last beings beside ourselves to survive – they and the winged preservers. Without us they'd have perished." (SaBM 1, 7–8.) It is precisely the plain and temperate quality of her expression – its *saying* – that speaks out an ethically made decision to act *for* the other (and the finality of it, as the scene ends with Timmain's words). For this kind of decision one does not need to feel regret or culpability, even if it has costs or dire consequences for oneself. This is ethics in action, a basis on which a singular subject is established. I quote Levinas:

> "It is my inescapable and incontrovertible answerability to the other that makes me an individual 'I'. So that I become a responsible or ethical 'I' to the extent that I agree to depose or dethrone myself – to abdicate my position of centrality – in favor of the vulnerable other. [- -] As soon as I acknowledge that it is 'I' who am responsible, I accept that my freedom is anteceded by an obligation to the other. Ethics redefines subjectivity as this heteronomous responsibility, in contrast to autonomous freedom. [- -] Consequently, the other is the richest and the poorest of beings: the richest, at an ethical level, in that it always comes before me, its right-to-be preceding mine; the poorest, at an ontological or political level, in that without me it can do nothing – it is utterly vulnerable and exposed. The other haunts our ontological existence and keeps the psyche awake, in a state of vigilant insomnia. Even though we are ontologically free to refuse the other, we remain forever accused, with a bad conscience." (Leinas and Kearney 1986, 26–28.)

The attempt to refuse the primacy of existence of the other seems to haunt some characters in *Elfquest*. They are generally the restless souls such as Rayek or Winnowill who seek power – a modification of the subject's aim for autonomous freedom – rather than fuller realization of their interdependency on others. The remembrance that becomes more concrete, more shared, and more corporeal significant otherness, is dangerous to one's sameness (what Kahvi and Rayek, for example, think life should be), for it calls one to question one's own right to be. However, if the I understands the Other's singularity as something that can never be fully appropriated to itself, the I may understand itself in-relation. In *Elfquest,* this happens in the form of recognition, on an individual or rather inter-subjective level.

3.2 Recognition

3.2.1 Integration: Cutter and Leetah

The *Elfquest* narrative creates thematic tension often by creating sudden bonds between elven characters through recognition. For the elves, recognition is a joining of two souls which usually happens unexpectedly, and cannot be forced. It is also means that a child will be born for the recognized two. Elves can reproduce without recognition; Go-Backs hardly even remember the concept (OQ 16, 26), probably because during their short, harsh lives they may not have time to wait for recognition to happen. However, children born out of recognition have “special gifts” and “attract interested spirits who make magic more potent, visions more clear” (as Timmain explains in OQ 20, 18). Moreover, though “soul meets soul when eyes meet eyes” (OQ 3, 13), recognition does not wholly correspond to the romantic idea of “love at first sight”. Rather, it is an obsessive and often painful connection, and distinct from love as firm, secure, and pleasurable affection. (OQ 5, 18.)

In the initial volumes of *Elfquest*, the recognition between Cutter, young chief of the Wolfriders, and Leetah, the healer of the Sunfolk, works as a settling of differences. Their recognition takes place dramatically during the Wolfriders' raid to the Sun Village. The Wolfriders are worn out after their long crossing of the desert; when Skywise and Cutter discover the Sun Village, Skywise sends, in joyous amazement: “elves! just like us!”, but Cutter, feeling betrayed by the trolls as well as banished by the humans, grimly disagrees; the strange people they observe are not like Wolfriders. Therefore the elves will take what they need without asking. (OQ 2, 12–13.)

During the raid for water and food, the eyes of Cutter and Leetah meet – her eyes are described “as green as fresh, young leaves” which intensifies the vision the exhausted forest-born Wolfrider must be having in this blazing, barren land. The narrator tells how Cutter “suddenly knows a different kind of thirst - - as he drinks in the sight of her!” The subject-to-subject transition of the frames draws the two characters' thunderstruck gazes together in a harmonious relation. The following frames show Cutter's threatening, enigmatic figure from Leetah's side, and the jar of water she was carrying that crashes to the ground as he grabs her with him. (OQ 2, 15–16.) This highly dramatized scene depicts the irrationality and inexplicability of the moment of recognition while it also mirrors a primeval habit of stealing maidens of another tribe. This moment of recognition initiates the tension between Cutter and Rayek, Leetah's friend and lover, who become rivals first for Leetah's attention and affection.

In a later scene where Cutter discusses with Leetah's father Suntoucher, his hesitant words and Suntoucher's thoughts imply that in that moment of recognition Cutter "had no choice" to do otherwise (OQ 2, 30). Recognition is thus seen unquestioned and essential for elves (Cutter says that he needs Leetah "the way green growing things need **rain**", OQ 5, 8), but social and moral factors can make it very problematic indeed. When Wolfriders discuss the situation of their chief who forgets to eat and sleep due to recognition unfulfilled, Scouter repeats Cutter's description of recognition: "Recognition is like sitting in a thorn bush gulping over-ripe dreamberries[30] with a sand flea up your nose!" Scouter's humorous befuddlement indicates that recognition disrupts hedonic or subjective well-being; nevertheless, "it's supposed to be good for [elves]" (OQ 5, 3) – that is, it is believed to be good for their eudaimonic well-being, the realization of their potential and the renewal of their kind.

When Cutter and Leetah reconcile with their recognition, they refer to the environments where they have lived and which they identify with; Cutter, shaded in the panel, concedes: "Maybe I ***am*** a bar… barbarian! I've lived by the night… hunted and killed in darkness." Leetah's visual and verbal expression contrasts with Cutter's shadowed face: "And here all is light." She is surrounded by the sphere of sun in the center panel; the sun and her figure order the whole composition of the page as she explains that the Sunfolk live an ordered, balanced life governed by "the daystar". Due to their long, safe history in their village Sorrow's End, they don't need soul names, which are a kind of mental-spiritual mechanism that the Wolfriders have developed in order to "guard [their] deep-most private selves." (OQ 5, 27.) Leetah accepts recognition as a part of life's order, an identity founded on deep connection with the environment and other living creatures – against which one sometimes struggles but which one has to accept as part of oneself.

There is an ellipse of seven years in the narration between issues 5 and 6 of OQ, but it is summarized in Leetah's recollection. Walking by her lifemate's side, she "cannot recall just when the power of recognition faded before an even stronger bonding force -- / -- love." (OQ 6, 9.) Interestingly, throughout the whole series, love is framed as a phenomenon much less problematic than recognition; it is firm, secure attachment, care and affection, and “much more pleasant” (see, for example OQ 5, 3; OQ 6, 10; KotBW 7, 22; *Dreamtime*, 42). Love is connected to trust, safety and sustainability. It needs time, whereas recognition happens instantaneously and, if fulfilled, fades over time – thus recognition has similarities with the experience of falling in love. Nevertheless, recognition brings two elves in close “knowing” of each other; it is a phenomenon that unveils the existence of the soul, or the authentic self, and obligates the recognized pair in a different way than love would. Thus, by turning the sometimes fleeting or unintelligible bonds of communion we have with each other into plot devices, fantasy genre calls us to examine the differences in them.

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[30] "Dreamberries", and the brew trolls make of it, have an intoxicating effect on the elves. Pike, the Wolfrider most fond of them, carries some seeds with him from the Holt that is destroyed, and the Wolfriders later take the plant with them into distant lands.

One has to note a specific trouble Leetah must face when experiencing recognition. Once she has healed a Wolfrider (Redlance), she has come to know about their wolf blood and mortality (see chapter 3.1.3). In *Elfquest,* animals are not anthropomorphic (if we wish to use this term that tends to set nature and culture in dualistic positions); they are really “other”, something that cannot be fitted in well-organized systems of the “I” or the “same”, be these totalizing systems elven or human. This otherness that Leetah cannot appropriate into herself, immortal as she is, entails a deep loss for her: if she accepts recognition, she must accept losing her mortal lifemate and children to death. On a scene where the Wolfriders greet their wolf friends joyfully and the Sunfolk observe them a short distance away, the narrator explains: “[The Sunfolk] are not a little confounded by the dual nature of the Wolfriders, who seem as charmingly innocent as children, yet are brothers to vicious predators. For **Leetah**, the paradox is irreconcilable – more so because it affects her directly.” (OQ 5, 12.) A while Later, Leetah speaks about the conflict in her heart with Savah, telling that Cutter is “like a **wild animal** to [her]”, and seems particularly worried about the children they would have (OQ 5, 18). The wolf that Leetah recognizes in Cutter (especially in the blending of Cutter's face to a wolf's face in her dream, OQ 4, 5) is as much his “real” or bodily, material presence, as it is spiritual and symbolic. Thus, in Wolfriders, the intertwined and merged relationship of companion species is substantiated to the extent that Leetah must personally decide if she will become part of that relationship, that messy naturalcultural ontology.

Many works of fantasy metaphorically reform human characteristics and experiences in a more visible, concrete form where they can be observed and understood on a new level. The daemons, animal companions connected to and personifying a person’s soul in Philip Pulman’s *His Dark Materials* serve as a good example. *Elfquest* also slightly externalizes the spirits of elves in their secret soul names.[31] Of all the elves, only Wolfriders appear to have soul names. Apparently, these names are not given by anyone, but they simply come into being. They are short and plain in essence (like spirits!) – so simple that they become inexplicable. Leetah needs several issues for pondering over the meaning of a "strange word" she keeps hearing in her mind: "Tam", Cutter's secret soul name, all that he is (OQ 2, 28). Soul names thus capture the otherness that escapes the knowing of the I.

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[31] These kinds of soul names are not unique to *Elfquest*. For example, the dwarfs in Tolkien's realm have their “own secret and 'inner' names, their true names” that are not revealed to others. See Tolkien 1995, Appendix F, 1106.

Normally soul names are concealed, so if two persons share soul names of each other, it indicates strong trust and closeness between them. Cutter and his friend Skywise have this kind of bond.[32] It is unclear whether they have shared the names consciously or come to know them spontaneously, though Cutter seems to suggest that the bond was not chosen, but emergent from their birth or early childhood, when he tells Leetah: "**Skywise** knows my soul name. He has **always** known it." Both friends smile affectionately, and Leetah embraces Skywise, saying: "Of **course**! Brothers in all but **blood**! I should have **guessed**!" (OQ 10, 14.) Years later Cutter and Skywise discuss the chosen recognition of Nightfall and Redlance (see chapter 3.2.3), and their humorous dialogue explains that the two friends have, in a way, recognized but not when it comes to children: "Yes for the soul... no for having cubs" (KotBW 4, 16). Especially later issues of *Kings of the Broken Wheel* frame Skywise as a member of Cutter's family.

In integration, the other does not become me nor I become the other; though I give myself, my substance for the other, differences continue to matter. Differences sustain love – or, "differences make good sparks," as Kahvi would say (see KotBW 7, 17). Quite fittingly for my reading of recognition as a manifestation of responsibility of *Elfquest,* in his translator's introduction to *Otherwise than Being* Lingis describes it thus:

> "Responsibility [- -] involves a recognition not of the form but of the force – vocative and imperative and not causal, informative or even indicative force – of the other, of alterity itself. It is realized as a response to the other facing. This recognition is not a cognitive act, that is, an identifying, re-presenting, re-cognizing act. It is effected in expressive acts by which one [- -] exposes oneself, to the other. [- -] Concretely the acts by which one recognizes the other are acts of exposing, giving, of one's very substance to another. [- -] The figure of maternity is an authentic figure of responsibility." (Lingis 1981, xiii.)

The force of the Other is, in *Elfquest*, felt in one's soul. While the soul is beyond the limits of rational explanation in the comics series, the concept remains inexplicable also to the modern science. Soul can be associated with consciousness, which is presumably the complex pattern connecting and merging our various neural processes. Still, is the ability of introspection present in human consciousness essential for the soul to exist? Hardly, because humans can act in unconscious ways and not be deemed “soulless”. Is the ability to experience emotions enough for the soul to exist? If a person is in incurable coma, is she still a person despite not feeling anything? Could we be said to have souls, if we didn't interact with each other? If we complicate the question further, can only individual, animate creatures have souls, or can interconnected systems or things perceived as wholes, such as the landscape, have a soul?

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[32] The bond is not sealed or invulnerable. In OQ 19, 19–21, Skywise's "heart begins to harden with the first stirrings of resentment", as Cutter refuses to help him in his moment of fright.

One way to determine where a soul exists is the experience of being affected by it and sensing affinity with it. In *Elfquest*, Clearbrook does not hesitate on the matter, when, with her beloved, she contemplates the new, unknown land in which they have hunted, and which they might be about to leave: “Everything has a soul, even a land. I could almost say I've **recognized** this one! (KotBW 6, 9.) Thus recognition comes to manifest the connectedness and interrelatedness with one's environment, or the ecosystems one is part of as the greater Self.

In the realm of elves, one can be hurt or destroyed by misusing their soul name; in other words, by using another being as a means to an ends. This is exemplified in the recognition of Dewshine and Tyldak, in which Winnowill interrupts.

3.2.2 Obligation and freedom: Dewshine and Tyldak

An unexpected recognition takes place between Dewshine, a fragile-looking Wolfrider maiden, and Tyldak, a Glider whom Winnowill has shaped so that his body resembles a flying reptile, with wings and talons. Their personal relationship once again reflects the advances of their tribes, which are now much more cumbersome than they were upon the first meeting of Wolfriders and Sunfolk. At the outset, their recognition is framed as a mystery in narrative: Cutter's and One-Eye's questions about Dewshine's whereabouts are answered by serious, pained looks of her father Treestump and her lover Scouter. Their confusion is echoed in Clearbrook's elliptic words that end the scene: “She... wouldn't come with us when you sent the call. It's difficult, **Cutter**... None of us dreamed it could happen!” (OQ 12, 3.)

The emotions of Dewshine and Tyldak are also concealed, at first. Mixed emotions that could not be described in words are portrayed as long, fixed gazes that they exchange, and the way they are drawn toward each other in the form of physical approaches. When Dewshine and Tyldak speak about their relationship, they do not talk directly but vehemently address other persons: Tyldak objects Winnowill's sarcasm by saying that he does not, and would not, own Dewshine, and Dewshine withdraws from him, exclaiming: "No one owns me! I'm a Wolfrider! I...I'm free!" She runs away, having no other response that Winnowill's resounding laughter. (OQ 12, 5.) The scene where Tyldak arrives to take Dewshine with him is impregnated with severe tension: narrow, elongated panels with matte black backgrounds limit the "air" of the scene and depict the characters' stern and pained expressions. In the final panel, the lines of the frame dissolve into unpredictable open space where the pair walks; Cutter finally breaks the silence in words, giving a name to this strange relationship: "Is it - - / *recognition*?" (OQ 12, 5, 10.)

Only in a later moment of conflict does Tyldak talk to Dewshine directly. Winnowill has imprisoned the preserver Petalwing and plans to kill it; she shares the plan with Tyldak (who acts as a minion of this "Dark Lord"). Dewshine overhears them and frees the preserver by crushing the cage that holds it. She uses a statue or a "symbol" of Tyldak as her club (OQ 13, 6). This is metaphorically important, as the scene exposes the souls or true selves of both elves in relation to each other; it serves as a prime example of "[e]thics, as the extreme exposure and sensitivity of one subjectivity to another" (Levinas and Kearney 1986, 29). After Tyldak has furiously struck a blow to Dewshine's face, the frames focus on Dewshine's hurt, timid, reproving expression as she crouches on the floor. Just then, the narrator describes, Tyldak feels that "her eyes pierce him to the deepest part of his soul", and despite his resistance, she "invades his entire being", her soul name crying "within him". He kneels beside her, discovering to his own amazement: "Lree... I cannot hurt you!" (OQ 13, 6–7.) The way the Other obliges in sheer passivity and vulnerability, is exemplified here. As Perpich quotes Levinas (1987, 55):

> "To be sure, the other is exposed to all my powers, succumbs to all my ruses, all my crimes. Or he resists me with all his force and all the unpredictable resources of his own freedom. I measure myself against him. But he can also – and here is where he presents me his face – oppose himself to me beyond all measure, with the total uncoveredness and nakedness of his defenseless eyes, the straightforwardness, the absolute frankness of his gaze. The… true exteriority is in this gaze which forbids me my conquest." (Perpich 2008, 61.)

When Tyldak speaks Dewshine's soul name, "Lree", the act can be observed primarily as *saying*. As Levinas explains: "Saying is ethical sincerity insofar as it is exposition. As such, this *saying* is irreducible to the ontological definability of the *said*. Saying is what makes the self-exposure of sincerity possible; it is a way of giving everything, of not keeping anything for oneself." (Levinas and Kearney, 1986, 28; italics in the original.) Tyldak is saying all that Dewshine is (as the concept of soul name denotes), passively surrendering her essence to her, and in that way we witness an ethical moment that "precedes our interest in being" (Levinas and Kearney 1986, 29).

Yet, in this moment of absolute frankness and vulnerability, Winnowill's presence is revealed, breaking the intimacy; the Third or the realm of politics immediately enters, or rather it is already present. Now, knowing Dewshine's soul name, Winnowill can control and hurt her. Tyldak protests against her abuse, but Winnowill reminds him that she has made (shaped) him to what he dreamed of becoming. Winnowill is seen from a low angle taking the statue of Tyldak and holding it in her hands. He glances at the statue while submitting to Winnowill's reprimand: "I… have never… forgotten." (OQ 13, 7–9.) This pictorial representation, both iconic and symbolic, emphasizes the control Winnowill has over both Dewshine and Tyldak. "There are ***no*** secrets inside **Blue Mountain**, save those ***I*** choose to keep", she says, meaning the secrets of souls (OQ 13, 9). For Winnowill, the other living beings hold no mystery, for she considers them as means of to fulfill her needs. Her totalizing view of the world governed by power, control, and protection is unsympathetic to the extreme sensitivity between the two others.

The relationship of the recognized pair can be seen not only as and I-Other relationship but as a field of conflicting powers or disoriented identities. When Cutter discovers that Dewshine and Tyldak have recognized, Scouter exclaims, distressed: "It's **wrong**! **Tyldak** treats her like she's less than **nothing**! And **she** feels – **ashamed**! Like she isn't one of **us** any more!" (OQ 12, 12.) Once again (see above), Scouter questions the truth the elves know: that recognition is good for elves. He validates the wrongness of the situation with Dewshine's lack of identification or belonging with her tribe.

The questioning of Wolfrider identity, the fear of losing the core of who you are, is prominent in this issue entitled: "What is the way?" In the front cover Winnowill's subtly smiling face rules over the scene: a triangle of Dewshine, Strongbow and Tyldak, the latter drawn decoratively over Winnowill's forehead. The plot line of the issue covers also Strongbow's withdrawal from the tribe; he goes "back to the wolves" because someone "has to keep 'the way' alive". He leaves with Moonshade, who won't abandon him, forcing the "Door" to open for them to exit ("Door" is another motionless Glider who has become her function, in this case magically shaping a pathway through solid rock). (OQ 12, 29–32.)

The struggles of the two Wolfriders to retain their identity parallel each other. Dewshine's “No one owns me!” is reflected in Strongbow's “No one holds me!” when he forces “Door” to open the way out. (OQ 12, 6; 31.) The issue depicts a struggle for personal and communal integrity and wholeness; foreign influences can be assimilated or adopted, but with the risk or fear of losing autonomous freedom and self-management. It is also on this matter that Tyldak questions Wolfriders on their right to call themselves elves; in his view, they have been corrupted by the world. Dewshine responds to him in the same panel, gazing him and asking his right to be, demanding from him his own subjectivity: “What **are** you, **Tyldak**? Your body... your words... your very thoughts.... are they your own -- / -- or **Winnowill's**?” (OQ 14, 11.) Thus both endanger the other's right to be in their relationship of special vulnerability.

Finally, both Dewshine and Tyldak face the weakening effects of “recognition rejected”. Others reason with them, trying to make them see their recognition as a gift or blessing that benefits all elves. In an act of opening to the needs of the other and bearing responsibility, Scouter promises to be a father to the child Dewshine “must bear”. The pace of the narration is delayed when Scouter makes his promise; the panels focus on Scouters earnest expression, and how Dewshine turns to look and smile at him, and, expressing trust and affection, embraces him. The two Gliders are shown static at a distance; Tyldak looks at the two lovers motionlessly while Lord Voll bows his head, reflecting his humbled words in sending and the stir of pain in them: “When was the last time such tenderness graced our existence, **Tyldak**?” His next words are shown in a narrative caption over Wolfriders' approving faces: “Do you not **envy** them, these '**savages**' from the world outside?” (OQ, 15, 6.) The choice of placing Voll’s quotation in caption – mode of narration – creates a more impersonal effect, distanced from the lovers' tenderness. It reinforces the self-irony in Voll's words. Recognition does not call only Wolfriders to question their right to be themselves; also the Gliders face a need to question the right of their existence.

The mismatched pair has to accept the recognition and resolve their difference in some way, as it is impossible to simply ignore the other. They come to see a possibility of freedom. This development happens in their social circumstances, as seen above, and it comes to light between them with few exchanged words in a series of five panels. Two trapezium-formed panels on the sides enact the rapprochement of the characters: [Dewshine:] “We... **can't** be lifemates.” [Tyldak:] “I know... / But we **can** set each other free.” Two frames between these words mark a pause, in which the spirits of the elves are reflected seeing each other; Deshine's face is long and furred like a wolf's, Tyldak appears as he was before the shaping of his body to a winged one. In the fourth frame, where Tyldak folds the Wolfrider in his wings, their initial position of is reversed, contributing to the continuity and movement of the scene; the two characters become closer, and they seem to take each other's places. The frames are laden over a larger, airy image, where Tyldak flies off with Dewshine holding on to him. (OQ 15, 7.) Tyldak and Dewshine finally accept each other in difference, and share a certain tenderness because others were supporting them. They are not isolated egos but actors in their social, historical environment. They cannot choose or unchoose recognition, and they cannot adopt the lifestyle of the other, but what comes to them as a torture, pain, and breakup of their identity, also, paradoxically, allows them to express their true selves. Though the third party – history, tradition, moral choices, the Other being commanded their Other – always intervenes, the ethical relation brings out the subjectivity of the I.

3.2.3 Choice: Nightfall and Redlance

A scene after the war to reclaim the Palace illustrates the healing power of acceptance and commitment. In this scene, the recognition of Redlance and Nightfall is presented as regaining one's identity in an act of openness.

In the previous issue, the king Guttlekraw's trolls had made a foray into the Go-Back lodge where children were left guarded only by few adults and the wolf pack. In this fighting sequence the narrator told how Redlance discovers how "moments of truth are always faced alone". Fiercely and suddenly, he shapes his wooden staff into spikes that pierce the hands of a troll who has grabbed it: "the tree-shaper's benign power suddenly becomes a weapon!" (OQ 19, 22) After the victory of the war, a band of Wolfriders return to the lodge, unaware of the ambush attack. Nightfall pushes a dead troll's body aside to find Redlance. He is in a state of shock; in other words, his being has escaped deep beyond "images of too-recent horror" and "brutal, instinctive urges" and does not respond to Nightfall's pledges that the fighting and fear are over (image 6). Nightfall, as a being that is "Twen" (her soul name), searches within his shocked, chaotic and unresponsive mind until she discovers a star, "small, injured, reaching through the darkness to strengthen its light with hers". (OQ 20, 4–5.) The star sends waveringly: "Twen? I do not want to come closer… I do not want to see!" The faltering star embodies Redlance's injured self. His denial of terror is a defense mechanism, but not good enough to strengthen him.

The frailty star contrasts with another star that is clear-lined and extends to the full width of the page; at the center of it stands Nightfall, naked and calm, lifting her arms and openly facing the reader – or Redlance. She offers him a kind of redemption: “Let me wash you clean of the sights you should never have had to see - - or deeds you should never have had to do!” Nightfall's role is depicted in the metaphor of weapons, but in contrast, she firmly describes “**you**”, Redlance, as “the flower, the tree, the vine!” She makes him a definite promise: “Never will I, or anyone, force you to be other than what you are -- /-- **never again!**”

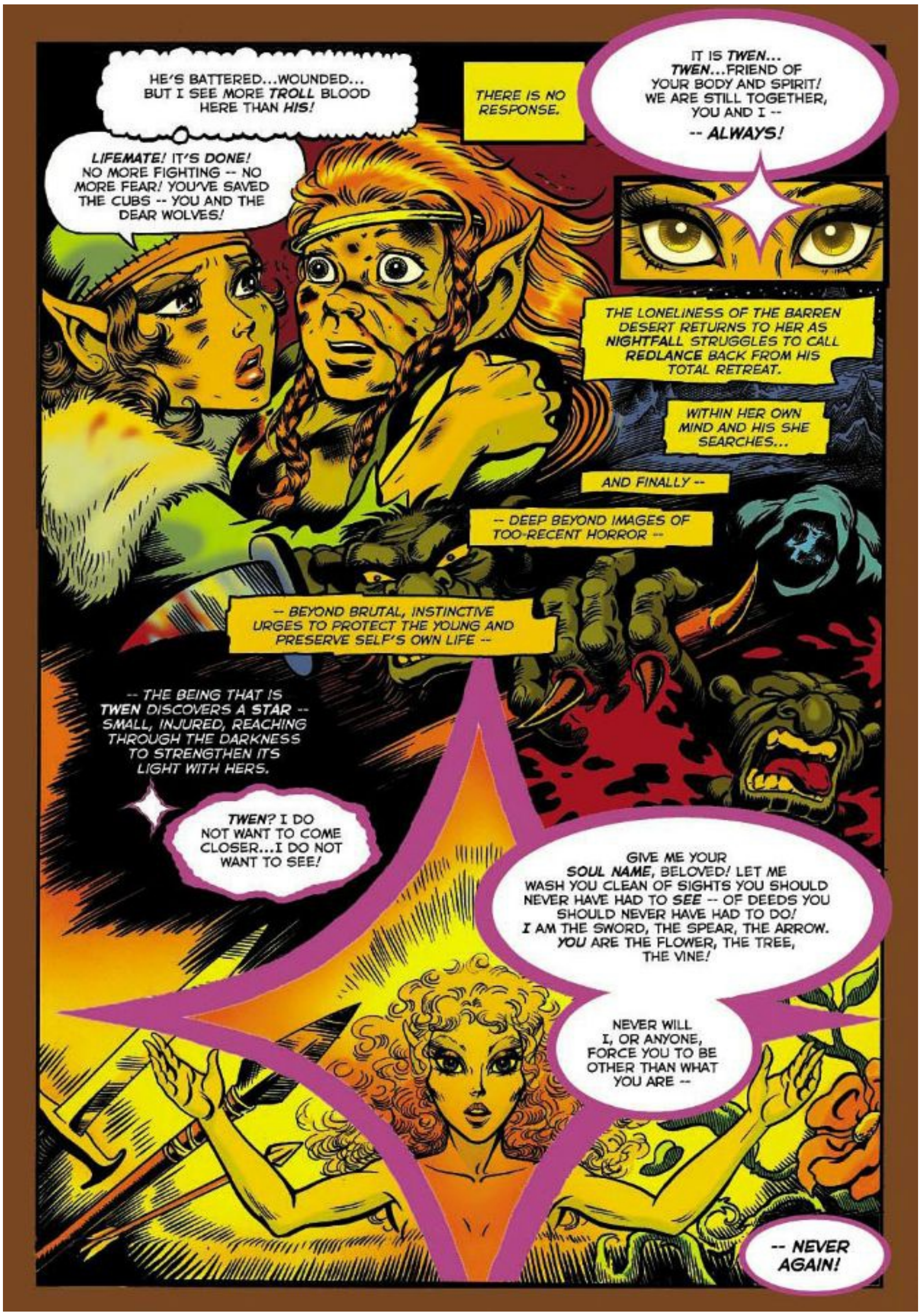
HE'S BATTERED...WOUNDED... BUT I SEE MORE TROLL BLOOD HERE THAN HIS!
LIFEMATE! IT'S DONE! NO MORE FIGHTING -- NO MORE FEAR! YOU'VE SAVED THE CUBS -- YOU AND THE DEAR WOLVES!
THERE IS NO RESPONSE.
IT IS TWEN... TWEN...FRIEND OF YOUR BODY AND SPIRIT! WE ARE STILL TOGETHER, YOU AND I -- -- ALWAYS!
THE LONELINESS OF THE BARREN DESERT RETURNS TO HER AS NIGHTFALL STRUGGLES TO CALL REDLANCE BACK FROM HIS TOTAL RETREAT.
WITHIN HER OWN MIND AND HIS SHE SEARCHES...
AND FINALLY --
-- DEEP BEYOND IMAGES OF TOO-RECENT HORROR --
-- BEYOND BRUTAL, INSTINCTIVE URGES TO PROTECT THE YOUNG AND PRESERVE SELF'S OWN LIFE --
-- THE BEING THAT IS TWEN DISCOVERS A STAR -- SMALL, INJURED, REACHING THROUGH THE DARKNESS TO STRENGTHEN ITS LIGHT WITH HERS.
TWEN? I DO NOT WANT TO COME CLOSER...I DO NOT WANT TO SEE!
GIVE ME YOUR SOUL NAME, BELOVED! LET ME WASH YOU CLEAN OF SIGHTS YOU SHOULD NEVER HAVE HAD TO SEE -- OF DEEDS YOU SHOULD NEVER HAVE HAD TO DO! I AM THE SWORD, THE SPEAR, THE ARROW. YOU ARE THE FLOWER, THE TREE, THE VINE!
NEVER WILL I, OR ANYONE, FORCE YOU TO BE OTHER THAN WHAT YOU ARE --
-- NEVER AGAIN!

Image 6: OQ 20, 4.

The symmetrical composition of the bottom of the page both sets the metal blades and the rounder forms of plants apart, but also brings them towards each other in a diagonal, dynamic movement from the corners of the frame. The absence of gutters blends all the elements of the page into continuity where mental and physical experiences, hopes and traumatic memories meet in an act of going towards the other. The star and the figure of Nightfall seem to push away the darkness and terrors that Redlance’s mind is laden with, and balance the composition of the page – without them this sequence would look much more disorientated, but with them it concludes in balance that draws the more unstable visual and verbal elements into symmetry.

The sequence also traces back to a similar experience of the past. Nightfall feels how the “loneliness of the barren desert returns to her” in her own mental struggle to reach Redlance. The background of the caption shows shadowy rock formations; it alludes to the time she waited for the doubtful return of their tribe, guarding Redlance who had been tortured by humans. In the desert, Nightfall tried to call Redlance back to himself by asking him to remember the important, shared moments of their lives. She attempted to unite with Redlance even beyond death, by offering her soul name, her very substance to him, but got no answer. Redlance had “sunk in a dark pit to escape pain and await the end”, in which Nightfall could not venture. Instead, she was prepared to end his pain with her knife once she would “know there’s no hope left”. (OQ 2, 17–18.) A close-up panel of her eyes echoes two other frames in the earlier sequence. Still, earlier her eyes were filled with tears, agonized and closing upon themselves; now they are calm and open. (OQ 20, 4 and OQ 2, 18.)

The many elements of the page suggest that Nightfall and Redlance are engaged in an identity work, a reforming of the self. This is particularly apparent in the promise of Nightfall. According to Ricoeur, promise making reveals that there is a difference within the self, between idem identity and ipse identity, or character and selfhood. Idem identity is about sameness, that one remains one quantitatively and qualitatively. Nevertheless, describing a person as a "set of distinctive marks" or charasteristics is not enough to answer to the question: "Who am I?" The answer to that question is ipse identity, that does not need to be grounded on something permanent. In vowing to retain a sameness through the changes, or in this case, promising not to force another identity on the other, one takes up a stand towards one's character, preserving or altering it; thus the ipse identity is revealed in connection with the character that belongs to the order of idem identity. (Vessey par. 3–4.) The ability to choose the sameness of character thus reveals how interconnected the self is, how the ipseity manifests itself in the accountability.

Ricoeur sees that our narrative identities are entangled: many others are present in the story I tell of my self, and these others are reforming my identity beyond my own will. I act similarly in the stories of others. Ricoeur proposes three models for the recognition and "integration of identity and alterity" (Ricoeur 1996, quoted in Vessey): translation, exchange of memories, and forgiveness. Translating another's ideas to one's own is not simply about appropriating them, but about elevating oneself to respect them. Thus translation is a kind of "linguistic hospitality", "a matter of living with the other in order to take the other to one's home as a guest". The exchange of memories arises out of "narrative hospitality"; by sharing narratives in which we are co-authors we make them legitimate. The third form of recognition or hospitality is deeper still: the act of forgiving functions as a kind of absolution, for it "frees the other not from the effects of the past, but from the debts of the past", and thus opens up the future (Ibid.) These models are also present in the recognition of Nightfall and Redlance.

In the earlier sequence, Nightfall's attempt to share memories was not strong enough to bring Redlance back to himself. In the latter, the memories of her own painful loneliness, and "too-recent horror" are acknowledged, but set aside, as that line of narrative is established; Nightfall works deeper, in the present, according to the present and future need to strenghten the identity of her lifemate. She translates the core of herself, and of Redlance's self, into the images of weapons and of plants; they both are valuable. The way she liberates Redlance from the ties of the past, the memories that would hinder the development of his identity both as character and selfhood, demonstrates the deep level of recognition. As Vessey explains: "One specific way of sharing memories goes beyond simply recognition. Forgiveness enables one's character for the present by freeing it of its obligations from the past." In a way, my forgiveness is the acceptance of the other, who also is my persecutor, who makes me “wanting and faulty” in my responsibility for this other. This kind of settling of differences could be seen, in the end, in the recognitions of Cutter and Leetah, and of Dewshine and Tyldak.

In the frames following Nightfall's "absolution", their sending stars, now similar, approach each other, exchange soul names in a most simple, vocative way, by asking *who* the other is, and become “ONE!”, that is, a single voice at the heart of a suddenly expanding or exploding star (OQ 20, 5). These sending stars embody more ipseity than idem identity. Normally, most of these kinds of effects in *Elfquest* have no special characteristics, but are about the same – what matters most is the facts of using of them, and their place in relation to the other content of the panels. What do the sending stars do in these two pages? They approach each other, and in speaking to each other, they enact forgiving as possibility of a new future. Forgiveness establishes a sharing of trust and commitment between the two spirits, and the safety and immediacy of choice. In the two previous recognitions discussed, the recognizing elves simply come to know the souls of each other. This time the two have chosen to expose their core selves, to give themselves to the other in all their differences. Nightfall explains to the still bemused Redlance, that what they had hoped would come to them, they’ve chosen: it is “more than recognition” (ibid.). Seen in the frame of ethics, this choice is paradoxically extreme passivity: “It is to be on the hither side of one's own nuclear identity, still identifiable and protected; it is to be emptied even of the quasi-formal identity of a being someone. [- -] It is to be an undeclinable *One*, speaking, that is, exposing one's very exposedness. The act of speaking is the passivity in passivity." (Levinas 1981, 92; italics by Levinas.)

In the same panel where the two realize their choice, the encountering of the other is also immediately tied to encountering the third, the realm of morality. A short dialogue in the background between Treestump and a Go-Back child establishes Redlance's identity as part of collective sharing of memories. The Go-Back points at him, asking: "What's wrong with **him**?" Treestump answers: "Ask what's **right** with him, cub. War isn't 'the way', and **Redlance** knows that better than **any** of us." (OQ 20, 5.) Even in his shock and drawing out of the world, Redlance is seen as part of a larger, collective story, the life philosophy of "the way".

The choosing of Redlance and Nightfall seems reciprocal, but it can also be seen as an asymmetrical relation to the other that becomes two-sided. It is passivity towards the other, of not being able to fulfill one's responsibility, of being exposed, and an active substitution of oneself for the call and the need of the helpless other. The potentially traumatic experience is fended off by the act of letting another be whatever he is, and by trusting to a future that is open and unknown. Paradoxically, giving space to another that means recognizing the space between oneself and the other, which in turn makes it easier to cross the space voluntarily. This is love as wakefulness.

In later volumes, the couple continues to sustain and to nourish their separate, but joined and complementary selves. For example, Nightfall calms down Redlance's hateful impulses by referring to his special identity: "Lifemate… remember who you are. Leave thoughts of combat to those who haven't your special gifts." (KotBW 1, 8.) Later, Leetah helps them to conceive a child who they will name Tyleet, which means "healer's gift" (KotBW 4, 14–18; KotBW 7, 10).

3.3 Healing

3.3.1 Winnowill’s evil: absence of love

Leetah appears as the prototype of a healer in *Elfquest*. Some other healers are referred to in the issues examined in this study, but they are present only in memory or in their mother's womb; Leetah acts to save lives, heal injuries, evoke hidden capacities and enhance integrity in other persons. She values her own powers greatly, seeing them as a source of pride and part of her identity (OQ 8, 4). Leetah is visually characterized by the colors of life: she is clothed in colors of red, green and golden yellow, which go well with the dark hue of her skin and her auburn locks. Winnowill, the healer of Gliders, opposes Leetah visually: Winnowill is tall, pale-skinned, and clothed in black and white. The contrasting of the two characters produces tensions, even more so as in their dialogue they are related in terms of kinship and similarity (they refer to the other as “sister”; see OQ 13, 19; SaBM 8, 27; and KotBW 9, 13). Leetah and Winnowill reflect each other, revealing alternative paths of choice in somewhat similar conflicts; they act much like like the archetypal characters of hero, and the hero's shadow. Leetah herself realizes their close rapport, when she holds Skywise to her chest, taking away his wolf blood to give him the time he asks, in a far-away time where they have been abducted by Rayek (see chapter 3.4.3): “Pain given... blood changed... though the difference lies in the **why** of it... /...there is **nothing** I do, it seems, that **Winnowill** has not already done... / …nothing!” (KotBW 8, 20.)

It seems that Leetah needs to know the person who is injured or whom she is about to transform. The quality of this knowing is characterized by acceptance and honesty. It is also transformative with regard to herself. After healing a human boy, Leetah confesses to Cutter: “**Tam**... I am **lost**! I - I think I will never be myself again! / Humans... are so -- so **set** in their mold!” (SatBM 8, 23; see also chapter 3.1.2.2). Usually the healing requires physical closeness, or touch. In reality, the “laying on of hands” is a ritual as old as recorded history (and probably older) used by faith healers throughout the world. (Karren et al. 2002, 494.) The touch of a person who has faith in the curative effects of a drug or a treatment possibly transmits the most subtle messages of hope and trust from one body to the other. Faith is at its best when it is reciprocal. Leetah herself urges Nightfall, whom she helps to conceive a child, holding her reassuringly: “Believe..! It is what I need from you most.” (KotBW 4, 15.)

Though healer acts as a mediator of good, her powers can turn against her. The wrong that Leetah does when resisting death too fervently is discussed in chapter 3.3.3 as part of the development of the bereaved Clearbrook. The same kind of inability to let go, the obsession to use one's powers for one's own purposes rather than in service *for* the other, presents itself in the actions of Winnowill. In her, illness and evilness are assimilated. Leetah attempts to heal Winnowill once by herself during the Wolfrider's first visit in the Blue Mountain and a second time few years later, united with her family, at the end of *Siege at Blue Mountain*. The healings make some progress but cannot be completed during neither of the occasions. The scenes of healing demonstrate most clearly how *Elfquest* presents of evil as mental illness, or spiritual wounds – at least partially inflicted by oneself upon oneself.

Winnowill captures the mind of Savah, the wise "mother of memory" of the Sunfolk, within a dark, immaterial void through which spirits may travel. (OQ 8, 28–34) Cutter's son Suntop, whom Winnowill has also kidnapped, tries to reach Savah through the mind of Winnowill, and loses himself in the void. (OQ 14, 18–19.) Strongbow wounds Winnowill, and on that moment the spirits of Suntop and Savah find each other within the void as Winnowill's mental grip loosens on them: physically in pain, she cannot keep the spirits apart. Embracing his mentor Savah, Suntop tells her: "***Winnowill*** tried to ***own*** you! She's ***evil***! I know what that means now!" The white contours of their heads cross, and their calm expressions, closed eyes and harmonious face-to-face position contribute to the serenity and sense of trust of the scene. In contact, their spirits seem to gain fuller presence in the dark void, as the area of their heads becomes more white. Savah accepts Suntop's insight of what is evil, but she gives it a relational meaning: "Think of it as the absence of love. Then it will not seem so frightening. ***Winnowill*** needs healing in both body and mind." (OQ 14, 26–27.) Suntop exits the void and returns to his senses; he tells his mother the message of Savah: Leetah can heal Winnowill. The wounded Glider tries to escape, still seizing Suntop and followed by angry Wolfriders and "much vexed" Petalwing. When Winnowill is too weak to resist, Leetah approaches her with an almost tender, but determined expression. The panel shows Winnowill's face with a pained expression, a blend of fear and sadness, as a sequence of captions relate the healing process:

> "Soft brown hands caress pearly flesh, close upon a wound much deeper than blood, muscle or bone. Even as it soothes, the touch **burns** with its searing purity. / **Winnowill**, who mocked the Wolfriders' tainted blood, cannot bear the blazing reality of all that a true healer can be. / She herself is tainted - - by **choice**. But all that she has become will change - - / - - unless she makes the **final** choice!" (OQ 14, 31.)

Pictures of the healing touch, with a circling, shifting point-of-view, parallel four static close-up frames of Savah, lying still. Another kind of "movement" takes place here: Savah's background is slowly lit up.[33] When the captions progress to describe Winnowill’s choices, the frames first show her from a bird’s eye view high on a spiraling staircase, and then a close-up of her foot, stepping backwards into thin air. In fear of facing a true, painful healing and a change of herself, Winnowill decides to fall. Below, a tear appears under Savah’s motionless eyelid. Then Winnowill slips out of Leetah’s hands. The following frame shows her tiny crushed body far below, with Leetah’s bewildered words: “She… just stepped off… the edge!” Savah’s eyes open, a tear falling down her face, as she whispers: “Free…” (OQ 14, 31–32.) Savah seems to have witnessed Winnowill's inner struggle and to feel less joy of her own mental release than sorrow of her capturer's decision: for Winnowill, the freedom of keeping to her ego might mean her own death. Healing requires pain, and mental healing requires feeling the consequences of one’s actions. It may be unbearably painful to discover that one had alternatives, for example in Winnowill's case to become ”a true healer”, and that nevertheless one chose to mistreat oneself or abuse others.

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[33] The images reverse the mysterious, darkening capture of the spirit of Savah in OQ 8, 28–30, which parallels the other scene where Cutter and Skywise discover that elves are dwelling in Blue Mountain. Interestingly, the mental

The following page shows Winnowill frailly pleading “Help me… my… son…” and reaching out towards Two-Edge’s voice which fades away into distance, still cheerfully singing its riddles and rhymes. The volume ends with a silent frame with the sad-looking, silent Wolfriders who look down on her, gathered together and seeking comfort from each other. (OQ 14, 33.) The contrast emphasizes how Winnowill is left alone, with no one, as Leetah exclaimed few pages earlier.

A brief scene in the next issue further develops the loneliness of Winnowill, when she has lost control over her world. The sequence of panels which reveal that she is not dead, but very weak, parallels the turning point of another scene, in which Voll remembers the function of preservers as guides to the Palace of the High Ones. Winnowill's face is concealed; she is helpless, extremely passive. Instead, we see the darkly grinning Two-Edge who tells her that the changes she feared have begun to take place; again, he moves away from his mother. The visual perspective is of an observer somewhat distanced from the relationship of these two characters. The tone of the words he says in the parting could be pitiful, perhaps mocking: “**Winnowill**... poor **Winnowill**... delay she could... prevent she could not!” (OQ 15, 9.) In a way, Two-Edge seems to validate Winnowill's purpose to protect Voll, and foreshadow that the protection is now broken.

In *Siege at Blue Mountain*, Winnowill’s destructive endeavors are more determined, but so is the attempt to heal her, as Leetah, Cutter and Suntop are united “with one heart, one mind, and one goal”, with Rayek

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capture (and the release from it) are depicted in phases, as in slow motion, and outside the character: the world outside becomes dim to her.

helping them. Here, the healing process draws the reader into Winnowill's personal history, identity and exposes her trauma. The sequence reveals Winnowill's secrets and choices – the "tearing of the mask" visually takes place as scenes situated within her crouched body and her robe, which is usually impenetrably black and predominates the space of panels with its length. Echoes of Two-Edge's voice and of her own are heard in the narrative captions; they are virtually echoing within her body (image 7).

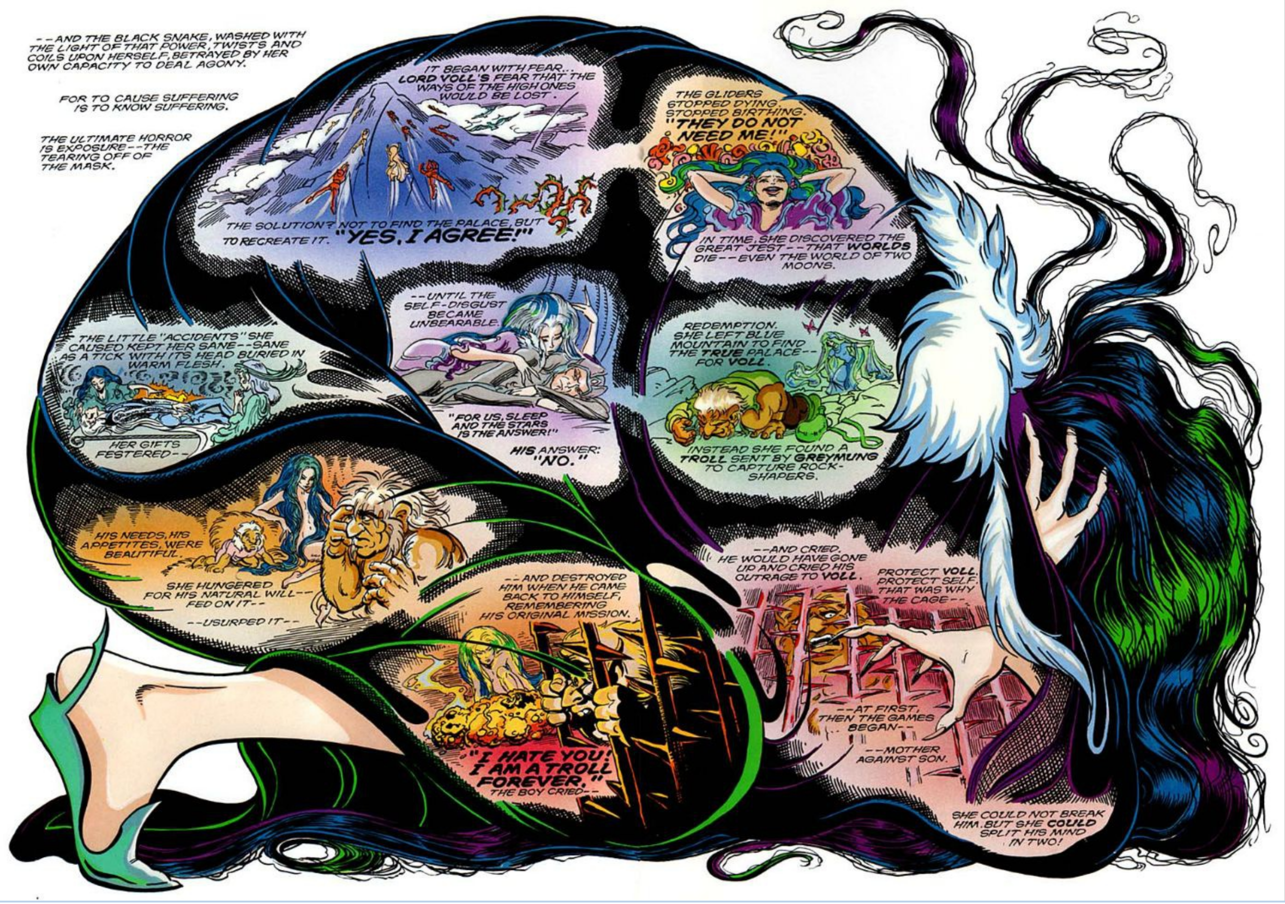
--AND THE BLACK SNAKE, WASHED WITH THE LIGHT OF THAT POWER, TWISTS AND COILS UPON HERSELF, BETRAYED BY HER OWN CAPACITY TO DEAL AGONY.
FOR TO CAUSE SUFFERING IS TO KNOW SUFFERING.
THE ULTIMATE HORROR IS EXPOSURE--THE TEARING OFF OF THE MASK.
IT BEGAN WITH FEAR... LORD VOLL'S FEAR THAT THE WAYS OF THE HIGH ONES WOULD BE LOST.
THE SOLUTION? NOT TO FIND THE PALACE, BUT TO RECREATE IT. "YES, I AGREE!"
THE GLIDERS STOPPED DYING. STOPPED BIRTHING. "THEY DO NOT NEED ME!"
IN TIME, SHE DISCOVERED THE GREAT JEST--THAT WORLDS DIE--EVEN THE WORLD OF TWO MOONS.
--UNTIL THE SELF-DISGUST BECAME UNBEARABLE.
"FOR US, SLEEP AND THE STARS IS THE ANSWER!"
HIS ANSWER: "NO."
THE LITTLE "ACCIDENTS" SHE CAUSED KEPT HER SANE--SANE AS A TICK WITH ITS HEAD BURIED IN WARM FLESH.
HER GIFTS FESTERED--
REDEMPTION. SHE LEFT BLUE MOUNTAIN TO FIND THE TRUE PALACE--FOR VOLL.
INSTEAD SHE FOUND A TROLL SENT BY GREYMUNG TO CAPTURE ROCK-SHAPERS.
HIS NEEDS, HIS APPETITES, WERE BEAUTIFUL.
SHE HUNGERED FOR HIS NATURAL WILL--FED ON IT--
--USURPED IT--
--AND DESTROYED HIM WHEN HE CAME BACK TO HIMSELF, REMEMBERING HIS ORIGINAL MISSION.
"I HATE YOU! I AM A TROLL FOREVER," THE BOY CRIED--
--AND CRIED. HE WOULD HAVE GONE UP AND CRIED HIS OUTRAGE TO VOLL.
PROTECT VOLL. PROTECT SELF. THAT WAS WHY THE CAGE--
--AT FIRST. THEN THE GAMES BEGAN--
--MOTHER AGAINST SON.
SHE COULD NOT BREAK HIM. BUT SHE COULD SPLIT HIS MIND IN TWO!

Image 7: SaBM 8, 4.

Again Winnowill, the "Black Snake" as she is called by the Wolfriders, is "washed" with the painful healing power. Ultimately, she is tormented or "betrayed by her own capacity to deal agony", "[f]or to cause suffering is to know suffering". (SaBM 8, 4–8.) Winnowill had a desire to be needed, and she had developed a kind of obsession to use her powers – a using and owning that does not respect the will and wishes of others. Perhaps resulting from her need to help, to be needed in times of change, she feeds and delights on the "beautiful" needs of other creatures. Somehow, when Winnowill owns others, usurps them, the emptiness in her own self is replenished. In an earlier sequence, when she ponders on how to respond to Rayek's call and to use him to her advantage, her memories of a similar appropriation of someone else's needs and powers are depicted in a sequence of tall frames: the reader witnesses the turning points of the shared history of Winnowill and Two-Edge. (SaBM 6, 12–15.) In this healing, the willful traumatizing of one's own child, a person to whom one has given one's own substance, is at the center of the pain – this pain characterizes Winnowill's very self.

Winnowill's tragedy is contrasted with the tragedy of her community, the loss of children and regeneration: "The Gliders stopped dying. Stopped birthing: **'They do not need me!'** In time, she discovered the great jest -- that **worlds** die -- even the World of Two Moons." (SaBM 8, 8.) Winnowill must have faced the transience of life: What use there is to live forever if everything around us dies? Do we not become trapped in our sameness, if the cycle of change does not touch us? The only way to resist desperation that Winnowill found was to fight it with bitterness, the bitter humor of neglecting the value in life and drawing away from it. Other Gliders experienced similar triviality of their own existence, as Lord Voll recounts earlier: "something happened to her, to all of us. **Winnowill** vanished for a time, deep within the roots of the mountain". (OQ 15, 4.) Lord Voll's words echo the vagueness of falling into depressive mood as well as Winnowill's radical actions. While others chose to distance themselves from their emotions and dreams, Winnowill chose to explore how needs could be appropriated; it appears that giving birth to Two-Edge, killing his father, and splitting his mind in the "games" they playd also changed Winnowill, caused her deep-buried self-hatred.

Prior to the healing scene, Winnowill's self-doubt arises in a monologue addressed to Windkin, whose wolf blood she has just taken away. In a visual first-person focalization, she sees the face of the child blurred into a face of a troll baby. In Windkin's face, the helpless face of her own child Two-Edge is looking at her, challenging her. She is shocked of this alteration, and confesses to herself that it was "a **grave** error! [- -] That is what comes of going **outside** to find what has lain **within** all the while." (SaBM 5, 19–20.) The only possibility Winnowill could find to save herself from desperation of not being vulnerable to change and alterity, would be flee the dying world to the stars. She also meditated upon the egg that – with the joined forces of elves – would become a star vessel on which they could escape the World of Two Moons. However, Winnowill explains to herself that she tried to help her community "to grow -- but they refused me..! I showed how terrible it would be **not** to grow! And they preferred that!" (SaBM 5, 20.)

Ricoeur sees that each human being has to balance between the voluntary and involuntary dimensions of one's life, and the fragility of each resolution is personal freedom. In *Fallible Man* (1960), he discusses that man's capacity for evil stems from the disproportion of finite and infinite, or "the gap between *bios*, or one’s spatiotemporally located life, and *logos*, one’s use of reason that can grasp universals”. Due to this disproportion we are never fully ourselves in perception, thought, speech, or action, and can misuse our freedom. (Dauenhauer 2011.) Winnowill's evil can be seen as frustration or conflict within herself, which she tries to solve in relation to her community, but faces rejection. This leads her to identify her freedom more in relation to her own fixity, her own voluntary strive for betterment, that leaves less space for the others' influences. The healing exposes to Winnowill herself how she is tied in responsibility for others.

In spirit form, Savah tells Winnowill that her vision can only be realized with love, not power; she must heal *herself.* Winnowill's hatred is echoed in her words, as she thrusts Savah out of *her* way: “Withered **fool**! I know love! It is **despair**!” (SaBM 3, 11–12.) Like Savah says, Winnowill is not fully wrong, for she craves for the fulfilling of potentialities of the elven kind – but as the appropriation of them. What brings us eudaimonia is not the use of power, but relating with the others who have that right to flourish. In order to achieve eudaimonia one must heal herself, or her greater self in relation to the weak, the hungry, the poor.

What seems to shatter Winnowill's self-containment in the moment of healing, are the cries of children that permeate into the scene. Two-Edge’s pain, his face “the very moment she made him mad” rises to Winnowill’s consciousness. Rayek, bemused in a trance-like state, awakens as he feels her memory blend with “the wails of his own babe -- the newborn that somehow he knows is alive”. The cry of Windkin, the sound as physical effect, also penetrates into the scene. (SaBM 8, 5.) This contesting call of children is the key that exposes one to another in one's very exposedness.

When healing Winnowill, Leetah, Cutter and Suntop aim to heal themselves at the same time; all those who have locked minds with Winnowill suffer from anguished dreams (SaBM 4, 11–13). Thus, when the healing begins, Suntop sends: “Now the hurts will **stop**!” (SaBM 8, 3). However, in the end of *Siege at Blue Mountain* Winnowill's healing cannot be brought to conclusion even this time; due to the collapsing of Blue Mountain Leetah has to break away from the healing, and the unconscious Winnowill is wrapped in preserver cocoons. Then Tyldak carries her away despite the others' proests. Ten thousand years later, when Winnowill faces Leetah, she is filled with bitter hatred of having herself thus exposed: Leetah has “raked [her] raw with her touch and left [her] to bleed... alone!” (KotBW 9, 8).

Leetah acknowledges that she could abuse others with her power and ultimately corrupt herself in a peaceful scene in the final pages of *Siege at Blue Mountain.* Cutter and Leetah discuss the withdrawal of the Gliders from the world, and Winnowill's dream of reaching the stars. The couple is ready to go to sleep in their tree den, illuminated by warm candle light. Sleepily, Cutter tells that likes having skin, and will accept death, “but I'll let **this** world decide when”. Here the naked skin of the characters acts as an interface, which concretely connects them with their environment and with the other person.

When Cutter has fallen asleep, a sequence of frames shows Leetah’s hands, growing his hair back to its usual length, and their hasty withdrawal, accompanied by her whisper: “No!” The following frame shows Leetah embracing herself, and the following thought bubbles reveal the temptation she just had to change her lifemate more radically, the feeling of her own frailty and understanding of Winnowill’s decisions: “How **easy** would it be to become like **her** -- / -- to deny others their choices except as they suit **my** desires! / The only difference is **love**. **High ones**… keep me strong! / And be with my suffering sister -- / ‘-- wherever she may be!’” The final words are set in a caption over a large picture that shows the shocked Winnowill, abandoned by Tyldak on a remote island.

How is the only difference, love, to be interpreted here? Levinas's account of ethical responsibility as wakefulness also invokes love that “can never be peaceful or permanent” (Levinas and Kearney 1986, 30). In this light, Leetah's understanding of love seems different from love as peaceful affection, presented in many scenes elsewhere in *Elfquest* and contrasted with recognition (see chapter 3.2.1). Though I would want to understand the other, in love as “insomnia” I cannot. Levinas describes how the other's alterity cannot be totalized, put into the order of knowledge and being: “Man’s relationship with the other is *better* as difference than as unity: sociability is better than fusion. The very value of love is the impossibility of reducing the other to myself, of coinciding into sameness.” (Levinas & Kearney 1986, 22.)

Winnowill's healings reveal that in her want to posses the other she cannot ultimately but fail, or to want others death and even her own death. From a Levinasian view, because the relation one has with a personal other radically differs from the use and appropriation of tools, the only way to possess another subjectivity would be to erase or negate that subjectivity – to kill the other: “a human being is the only sort of being I can wish to murder” (Perpich 2008, 43). Levinas writes (1990, quoted in Perpich 2008, 42):

> “Knowledge seizes hold of its object. It possesses it. Possession denies the independence of being, without destroying that being – it denies and maintains. The face, for its part, is inviolable; those eyes, which are

> absolutely without protection, the most naked part of human body, none the less offer an absolute resistance to possession, an absolute resistance in which the temptation to murder is inscribed: the temptation of absolute negation.”

Levinas leads us to interpret, then, that Winnowill's evil or lovelessness stems from the will to know the other person thoroughly. However, this knowing of the other, or even of oneself, can never be full or certain. Neither can the knowing of good or evil; from an ecopsychological perspective, they need to be explored and questioned in any given situation. In traditional storytelling practices and social systems, this is the regulating and relativist function of trickster characters. (See Heiskanen 2007, 193.) In *Elfquest*, Winnowill's son Two-Edge plays the role of trickster – however, he has obtained this role mostly due to his mental illness and his prolonged identity moratorium.

3.3.2 Two-Edge’s madness

Two-Edge first appears as a mysterious half-elf, half-troll character, mentioned by the troll Picknose as the legendary master smith (OQ 7, 24–26). Trolls and elves speak of the “madness” of Two-Edge, assuming that it arises from hid mixed blood. Two-Edge himself shares that belief in some way. (OQ 19, 4.) At the core of his madness lie a deep uncertainty of his identity and an implacable mental pain. When he was still a child, Two-Edge witnessed his mother Winnowill killing his troll father. He is haunted by the death and the following mental torture. Winnowill shut Two-Edge in a cage; “Then the games began - - mother against son. She could not break him. But she **could** split his mind in two!” (SaBM 8, 4) Playing “games” and confounding others with cryptic riddles serves Two-Edge in structuring his reality. Apparently, his mission is to decode his inner turmoil and his hatred towards Winnowill (“strong and old and carefully nurtured”; see OQ 18, 24) that he perceives as an unsolved conflict between his “two edges”, the troll and the elf in himself.

Games construct the context in which mother and son can communicate. It is a tentative communication meant to test the strengths and weaknesses of the other. Games also serve them to mask themselves, not to expose oneself to the other. The rules of Two-Edge's and Winnowill's games are actually never made very explicit or transparent. In the opening scene of “The Fall”, Two-Edge’s riddling, questioning rhymes, with blurred outlines, drift into Winnowill’s chambers. Winnowill answers him coolly; her thoughts and her secrets are her own. Two-Edge’s chanting takes an icy tone, and the rhythmic composition breaks, as he asks: “Where are **his** bones, **Winnowill**?” Her answer indicates that briefly they engage in some sort of cryptic game: “Ground to powder and scattered on the wind! / **There!** That is as much of the game as I shall play with you.” (OQ 14, 2.) This example, among others, seems to imply that “games” function here as a mask behind which mother and son can hide their true selves and challenge each other relatively safely.

Games are not without risks, and they have differing goals. Two-Edge does contribute to the fall of his mother. When the wounded Winnowill tries to escape to her private chambers she is stopped by Two-Edge who sits, maliciously grinning, on the place of Door (who normally performs the function of opening and shutting the stone door) (OQ 14, 28). The setting and the visual angles impose the domination of son over his mother, and the previous lack of his visual appearance reinforces the menacing effect of his fixed glare. In the opening scene of the issue, Winnowill’s expression was irritated, but now she looks up to his son with a blend of plea and fright on her face. This moment can be interpreted as a reciprocal exposure, a moment when rules of the game change, and the masks are removed – at least momentarily.

When Winnowill has fallen to the ground and reaches towards his son’s voice and laughter, Two-Edge repeats his question – a question that seems to have special, grim importance – “Where are **his** bones…? My **father’s** bones?” However, though Winnowill calls for her “son”, his question remains unanswered, and neither Two-Edge responds to her plea of help. His voice drifts into the distance, mindlessly chanting: “Find us both, my treasure and me… / The sword is the key… the sword is the key…” (OQ 14, 32.)

Two-Edge has played a game of his own lasting many generations; its goal is to bring elves and trolls to war in order to solve on which side he belongs – he would be among the winners, of course, for the game is his. In order to even the odds for both sides, he forges metal armor for Wolfriders and Go-Backs. However, Two-Edge has not realized that trolls are not one among their kind (and neither are elves), and have other intentions than play along his obscure rules. The trolls of king Greymung, leaded by Picknose, who have been enslaved by their Northern cousins under the rule of king Guttlekraw, decide to help the elves in their battle. Their decision is independent, opportunistic and motivated by disappointment (the greedy Picknose thought that Two-Edge meant his “treasure” for him, though the half-troll only intended to lure elves to the Frozen Mountains in order to incite battle). Two-Edge is shocked by the trolls' switchover; later, he separates Picknose's trolls from elves and kidnaps Ekuar, the rock shaper, to balance the chances once again: “I made the armor -- / -- **and** the rules! / The game is **mine**! / I will **not** lose!” (OQ 18, 25–29; 19, 5–9.) When the armored elves attack king Guttlekraw's trolls in his throne room, Two-Edge cries tears of joy, even here speaking to Winnowill: “I have **outdone** you, mother! / What game of yours ever matched **this**?” However, after the trolls have joined the fight beside elves against trolls, Two-Edge's game is shattered. In the ending scene of “Quest's End, Part 1”, his inner turmoil powerfully parallels Leetah's struggle with her healer's mission. The pace of the scene-to-scene transitions between frames depicting character's emotions of joy, compassion, relief, gratitude, sorrow, shame and defeat adds to the bafflement of the sequence: “nothing is decided”. Two-Edge continues Leetah's words in a denial of victory. He seems to diminish from the height of his mother and father, seen as outlines behind him, immobilized by Ekuar, who fixed his his feet to the stone (image 8).

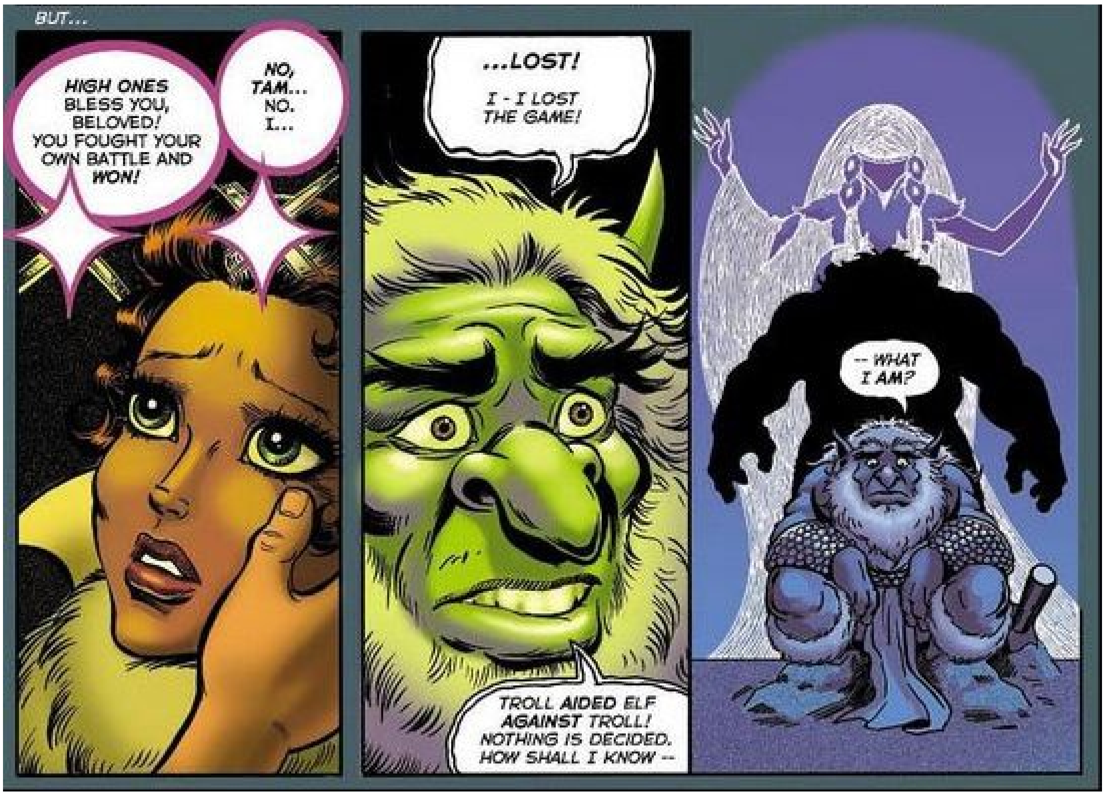
BUT...
HIGH ONES BLESS YOU, BELOVED! YOU FOUGHT YOUR OWN BATTLE AND WON!
NO, TAM... NO. I...
...LOST! I - I LOST THE GAME!
TROLL AIDED ELF AGAINST TROLL! NOTHING IS DECIDED. HOW SHALL I KNOW --
-- WHAT I AM?

Image 8: OQ 19, 31.

The game is a model in which one can (usually) determine winners and losers, but hardly ever the right or wrong. In the end, the rules of the game are not necessarily ethical, or interpreted as ethical. They belong to a different order. When his own game fails Two-Edge, he seems to have no place among any kind. In the initial issue of *Siege at Blue Mountain*, Two-Edge is banished by the newly crowned troll king Picknose to capture the rock shaper Ekuar from the Palace to the trolls' service. Two-Edge wanders in the midst of icy landscapes; the silence of the images, their viewpoint whirling around him like the chilling wind, is explained in narrative captions: “The rhymes, the comforting rhymes have flown. / There are no more words - - / - - to calm the fury of the storm within his divided brain.” (SaBM, 1, 12.) Two-Edge has lost the way to structure his identity, and is delusional (SaBM 1, 13–16).

Later Leetah attempts to heal Two-Edge; she approaches him with grim determination, having in mind "a **special** revenge". For some reason Two-Edge who has mocked the "winners of the Palace" doesn't back off, even though he is trembling. (SaBM 7, 9.) As Leetah lays her hands on Two-Edge, a bond of caring seems to form between them: "healer and healed descend together to the bottom of the pain". Two-Edge cries "unwept tears of a frighteningly long and lonely lifetime" and Leetah holds him in her embrace, whispering: "There… my good child… my sweet little son… there…" The striking effect of the scene is reflected in the astonished and pitiful face of Suntop. However, Two-Edge opens his tearful eyes: "S-Son?" The realization makes him spring away, yelling: "A son - - / - - belongs with those who **want** him!" (SaBM 7, 10.)

Like in the earlier example in OQ, Leetah's weary disappointment after the unsuccessful healing parallels Two-Edge's defeat in regaining his integrity and trust for the others. Even though being called "son" was what Two-Edge "seemed to need most", as Leetah explains to the shocked Moonshade (who sees Two-Edge as "monster" – interestingly, many Wolfriders find it hard to accept hybridity other than their own), it also alerted him and made him flee in terror. Two-Edge's madness feels all the more tragic as it would require mere moments of love and trust to dissipate it: "Close…! A moment more -- / -- and the madness would have left him". (SaBM 7, 11.)

Despite Leetah's disappointment, her healing touch brings about changes in Two-Edge. When Cutter and his family are confronting Winnowill, Two-Edge takes Dewshine's baby Windkin in his arms. When Two-Edge appears on the scene, he is faced with fright and blame – the distressed cries of Winnowill, and the words of Clearbrook, a Wolfrider hurt by Winnowill, kneeling in his proximity. She looks up to Two-Edge who is holding the crying baby, and says what seems almost like a calm observation: "**Two-Edge**… my lifemate **died** because of you…!" Two-Edge flees, the revengeful Clearbrook at his heels. In captions, the narrator conveys the clarity of Two-Edge's mind; he "understands her fury. He would like to tell her so. It feels so good -- / -- to know emotions other than confusion and hate." He finds Tyldak, Windkin's father, shackled in the collapsing throne room, crushes his chains and hands the child to him: "You are his father. **Take him!** [--] Take him where he's wanted most!" (SaBM 8, 6–8.)

It seems that through Leetah's healing Two-Edge came to feel and understand the pain others must be feeling and found a way to communicate with others beyond the shielding frames of games – in honesty and vulnerability. When Tyldak has flown away with Windkin, Two-Edge turns to face Clearbrook who calls him by his name and stabs him with her sword. Just like a few pages earlier, their faces are reflecting each other, their eyes connected, though the visual angle and has changed. On Clearbrook's face the reader no longer sees outrage, but rather pity and a hint of sympathy for the pain of the other. The silent, stationary moment between the two takes place in a collapsing throne room – a contrast that underlines this strange communication, which seems like acceptance. (SaBM 8, 9.)

In the light of a later scene, violence appears here as pain that had to happen; it rather connects than separates the characters. Once the shell-formed Blue Mountain is shattered to the ground, Clearbrook walks out of the dust cloud; calmly, she tells that Two-Edge saved him by sending – a newly gained ability – to a female "Door" to open for her: "I stabbed him… Only then did he send. I felt… saw… forgave. But he stayed behind." (SaBM 8, 18.) This encounter face-to-face seems thus important in the healing process of Two-Edge, but also in that of Clearbrook.

3.3.3 Clearbrook's bereavement

Grief, even with depressive elements, can be seen as a vital, functional factor in the physical, mental, and social process of healing. The development of a Wolfrider character called Clearbrook, linked with the struggles of several others, illustrates the hardships of regaining meaning of life after the loss of a loved one.

Clearbrook loses her lifemate One-Eye in the troll ambush where also Lord Voll is killed when leading the elves towards the Palace of the High Ones. She sees One-Eye slain next to her – it is a sudden, painful blow, shown inside a sharp-edged panel (OQ 15, 29). She calls him by his soul name, but only silence responds. In tears, Clearbrook cuts the long braid of her silvery hair with her sword and places it on One-Eye's chest. (OQ 15, 31.) The braid characterizes her strongly, serving as a clear visual mark of her identity and personality which are also reflected in her tribe name (her soul name is never revealed). The cutting of her hair thus signals a loss of her self.

After the killing Clearbrook is in a state of shock; she remains motionless and stony-faced inside the Go-Backs' lodge, though Treestump tries to sympathize and support her. Clearbrook's immobility contrasts with the pained expressions of Treestump. He offers words of understanding: "The grief... I know it can make you want to die.” As Treestump remembers “how meaningless words [of consolation] seemed” after the death of his own lifemate, his words die away. (OQ 16, 7.) After a while, Clearbrook suddenly breaks away from her dumbness, crying out her estrangement (“What is this place?! / My lifemate – where is he?”) and running wildly out into the snow storm in search of her lifemate. She does not find One-Eye's body. The Go-Backs suggest the trolls have taken it away, for they do not “waste anything”. (OQ 16, 10; 13.)

Clearbrook evidently is in a shocked state and in urgent need of support. When people lose a loved one, they themselves risk a sudden death; life simply becomes “unbearable”. The same phenomenon has been observed among other animals, too. What helps to protect bereaved people, is mainly social support, but also “strong religious belief, rituals, and belief that one can control the bereavement”. (Karren 2002, 426–432)

The bereaved one is part of a social system, a part that is influenced and influences the others. Preparations for a war against Greymung's trolls elicits a grim, fierce side of Clearbrook's grief. Kahvi regards that she is a warrior of “the best kind”– one that hungers for revenge (OQ 16, 27). Wolfriders see the situation differently; on Clearbrook's face Cutter and Strongbow recognize the same ruthless expression as on Bearclaw's face after the monster Madcoil killed Cutter's mother. They sense a “stench” in the air, “a smell of waste - - of **kill-hunger**!” (OQ 18, 2.) The war gives Clearbrook's grief one possible direction for unfolding – revenge which has a somewhat suicidal tone – but she is not the only one possessed by the atmosphere. In this scene Cutter asks Strongbow and Moonshade to remind them all of the Wolfrider identity that Redlance once verbalized: “We're hunters, not murderers.”

Shortly after the death of his beloved that formed a part of herself in recognition – a state of identification and interconnectedness – Clearbrook experiences estrangement from the whole of life and from positive emotions. In this phase of her grieving process it is far too soon to let go of the other person and reform one's personality. However, Clearbrook finds some kind of solace when the elves discover the bodies of One-Eye and Vaya, a Go-Back slain by the trolls. Two-Edge, who is playing his own game, has clad their bodies in metal armor and placed them solemnly next to each other. A silent full-page frame depicts the discovery of the ceremonially laid bodies in a chamber that is both a tomb and an armory. The image is full of contrasts of torch light, darkness and sharp gleams of metal. For the Wolfriders “who leave their dead to the wolves and howl for the departed spirit, the sight is strange and unspeakably sad.” (OQ 18, 21–22.) The physical setting, though it seems unfamiliar, gives form to the grief of Wolfriders – it thus acts like a ritual.

Clearbrook weeps by One-Eye's body (wrapped in Petalwing's preserver cocooning); the tears express her sorrow, though Kahvi urges her to hold on to revenge and leave mourning for later (this is what Kahvi herself does – Vaya was her daughter).

In the final battle with Guttlekraw's trolls, Clearbrook and Scouter (hers and One-Eye's son) fight locked in sending and thus aiding each other. They are depicted in the middle of violent fight; the large, uniform images of characters and the tranquility of long narrative captions construct a sense of serenity in the sequence:

> “A strange calm overtakes the grief-weary pair. Somehow, the sight of One-Eye's body has freed mother and son from revenge-madness and the danger of recklessness. Remembering Scouter's sister, dead long before Scouter was born, Clearbrook defends her only living cub as would a she-wolf! She fights for him, and for Dewshine, and for the happiness the Palace may finally bring them. One-Eye shared and believed in the vision of the “homeplace”. For Clearbrook, now, that is the reason enough to win through.” (OQ 19, 18.)

The process of grieving takes place even in the midst of battle. Here Clearbrook fights for a cause greater than her self, greater than revenge – it can be likened to religious beliefs. There is hope in this sequence: perhaps for happiness, perhaps for an ending or a resolution, but also for a continuation through the young. Hope gives meaning and calmness to the action. It is not just a feeling of general optimism – in times of hardship, that would be both too much and too little to ask. Hope stems from the experiences of trust one has early in life and is “a pragmatic, goal-oriented attitude, a stance a person assumes in the face of difficulty”; it is active in the sense that one generates the means for reaching one's goal. (Karren 2002, 511–512.)

The grieving process of Clearbrook is complicated after the war is won. Apparently, the preserver Petalwing had understood the symbolic gesture of Clearbrook leaving her braid on One-Eye's body in its own way and covered his body in “wrapstuff”, sticky material that stops the effects of time and aging. (OQ 16, 1; OQ 18, 22.) On the moment of his cocooning, One-Eye was still partly alive and his soul became trapped in the moment of parting between life and death. In a flashback, Leetah explains how she sensed it when the elves find his body, and, left alone, cut the wrappings and tried to heal him. However, One-Eye's soul escaped “all but howl[ing] for joy” and Leetah was only able to make his body live, not to force his spirit to return. (OQ 18, 26, 31; OQ 20, 6.) In this situation, Clearbrook experiences another kind of burden; the possibility that her lifemate could return to her, and the dilemma on how to make him do so.

Clearbrook's emotional process crosses and intertwines with Leetah's inner struggle. Leetah experiences horror and disillusionment after she has killed a troll for the first time. Her thoughts on the matter expose a dissociative coping strategy; she looks at her hands that have committed the terrible act, wondering "what can heal them". (OQ 15, 26; OQ 16, 27.) The hands of a healer channel her power and, in a way, define who she is. It is likely that Leetah is driven to try and heal One-Eye in order to mend this integral part of herself, and her identity as life-giver rather than life-taker. Her failure in challenging death acts as a modification of one of the tropes in fantasy: the rules and limits of magic. This time the trope allows the story to discuss how death gives meaning to living, or how death makes us who we are.

When the elves have entered the Palace and met the High One Timmain, Clearbrook pleads for help to bring her lifemate back. Timmain tells her to let One-Eye choose, for "only **Timmorn's** descendants go where they will after death. The rest of us are bound, soul and flesh, to the time and place in which the Palace exists." Scouter and Clearbrook feel the almost palpable spirit of One-Eye, depicted as a colorful whirl in the air; however, Clearbrook cries out in frustration: "Why do you stay apart from yourself – and me??" (OQ 20, 17.) Her pain is calmly answered by Timmain, who prompts her to seek advice within her hybrid self: "Heed your wolf blood. Know what the wolf does not know -- / -- **and** knows". After moments of silence, Clearbrook answers: "The wolf... fights to survive -- But death, when it comes, is neither friend nor enemy. / It **is.**" Timmain's reply emphasizes the meaning of death for her mortal children – the death that makes life meaningful: "It is for *you*, my son's children. / And I think it has made you -- / -- strongest of all!" (OQ 20, 18.) By her words and her very existence, the choice to become hybrid herself, Timmain grants legitimacy and authenticity to the different kinds of knowing, stemming from different grounds of belonging. In this example, the recognition of one's animal self, or the difference in one's identity as a result of intermingling as companion species, benefits the healing process. The scene also exemplifies pedagogy or education as an adopting of communal heritage to one's individual situation.

At the end of the *Original Quest*, Clearbrook is still not fully ready to accept the death of her lifemate. She commands Petalwing to re-wrap One-Eye's body, so that it would not wither away, and she would stand a chance to bring her lifemate's spirit back. The body is left guarded in the Palace, and Clearbrook returns with her tribe to establish a new holt in the Forbidden Grove.

In *Siege at Blue Mountain* Clearbrook works determinedly to find Windkin that Winnowill has kidnapped, and whom she considers as her grandson. When Cutter, Leetah and Suntop attempt to heal Winnowill, Two-Edge appears on the scene, takes Windkin and flees. Clearbrook recognizes the half-elf, half-troll, this old enemy that she sees as the responsible for One-Eye's death, and springs after him.

In the moment when Clearbrook wounds Two-Edge, described in previous chapter, she forgives him. The origin of Two-Edge's madness in torture and pain. It is perhaps the vulnerability of Two-Edge's face, his exposedness in the sending we don't hear but which is between the two characters, that helps Clearbrook accept suffering and death as necessary, sad facts in the uncertain order of life. The view of injustice inherent in being vulnerable to death is reflected a few pages later in the narrator's words that translate Scouter's distress and a kind of clarity and acceptance under it: “This, too, is just life.” (SaBM 8, 18.) The forgiveness finally releases Clearbrook from her sorrow, or transforms it into a productive power.

In *Kings of the Broken Wheel* Clearbrook helps Strongbow to atone for killing another elf, Kureel of Gliders. Though Strongbow shot him down to save his son, he is haunted by the knowing that he has “killed a brother”. Even in the healing, loving circle of four elven tribes, Strongbow cannot cry the tears that would “wash the pain away”. (KotBW 1, 11–13.) However, Rayek transports the Palace, that guards the spirits of deceased elves, to Wolfriders' holt in Forbidden Grove. Clearbrook asks Strongbow to follow him inside the Palace; she helps him to search One-Eye's spirit. Strongbow is depicted eyes closed, kneeling and lifting his hand. The images emphasize how he reverts the common greeting of elves: “My eyes see with joy, my hand touches with joy.” He tells One-Eye's silent spirit: “My eyes see nothing but sorrow... my hand touches nothing but sorrow. Take it... and place it in Kureel's. I want him to know that I'm sorry.” (KotBW 3, 24.) The pain he feels, “like killing myself” is physical, harnessed by shame (ibid. 22–23).

A couple of pages later, Strongbow's pain seems to erupt to all his body, relieving him: the panels return to his hand, now shaking with emotion, his tearful eye and his mouth, opening in a slight smile (KotBW 3, 27). Forgiveness has taken away the shame that transfixes. Clearbrook embraces him, seeing that ”you have both forgiven... / as I forgave **Two-Edge**”. She has cut open One-Eye's preserver cocooning and tells the spirit of his lifemate to go – due to his wolf blood and hybrid belonging he leaves into the beyond that is not the Palace. The last panel, where One-Eye's joyful spirit face with his eyes sparkling overlaps Clearbrook's tearful, loving gaze, shows that the leaving is good. The grief has reached its fulfillment in joy, in the enjoyment for the other that is also wounding.

3.4 Renewal

3.4.1 Passing of time: "the wheel of empty struggle"

What is time? What is our relationship to it? Or what is our relationship to each other in time? Can it be outside of time? Time in *Elfquest* is conceived as cyclic change, but this is not the whole image of it. Rayek explains time as cyclic, like a turning wheel, “at least... our little part in it” (KotBW 6, 11). Thus a moment in distant past will somehow be met in distant future. The “wheel” or “circle” as a metaphor of time or unity is already hinted in Timmain's thoughts in the *Original Quest*: “A broken circle... / Are we its beginning or its end?” (OQ 20, 20.) The unity of the circle is not whole, perhaps never to be made whole: in its simplicity, this view depicts the distance to another being in time, or as time. In the smaller series *Kings of the Broken Wheel*, the old rivals Rayek and Cutter personify this constraint of one’s relationship to the other.

After the elves have won the Palace back and seen the Scroll of Colors that reveals their origin and history, they return to the world outside – except Rayek. The opening of *Siege at Blue Mountain* shows his exhausted body as well as his mental health on the brink, as he overreacts to Kahvi’s taunt of the Scroll of Colors as “gibberish”. (SaBM 1, 3–6.) He has been rereading the Scroll so that he has neglected his needs of nutrition and sleep. Rayek feels that the elves once were “creatures of fire [- -] that changes all”, but became “trapped in the wrong place and time”. Therefore they were “weakened, made small” by the World of Two Moons. He struggles to reach a new level of understanding, learning from Timmain that directions in time and space “mean no more than death does. / That **time** is just things and room to put them in. / Unchoose **things** and you unchoose **time**.” Thus Rayek already foreshadows his later attempt to detach his kind from the cycle of choosing, affecting, and being affected by the alien, material world. He appears both physically and verbally indifferent to the gentle reminders of his friend Ekuar who tries to demonstrate the value of material existence to him. (SaBM 1, 6–7; see image 9.) In this sequence Rayek frames time as choice, and choosing not to choose material things as freedom from the grip of time, from acting under limitations (such as “eating, sleeping, loving, hurting”). However, the Other is not a “thing”; the face of the Other opens up an ethical dimension which binds us as time. In our ethical relation we are extraordinarily obliged and passive.

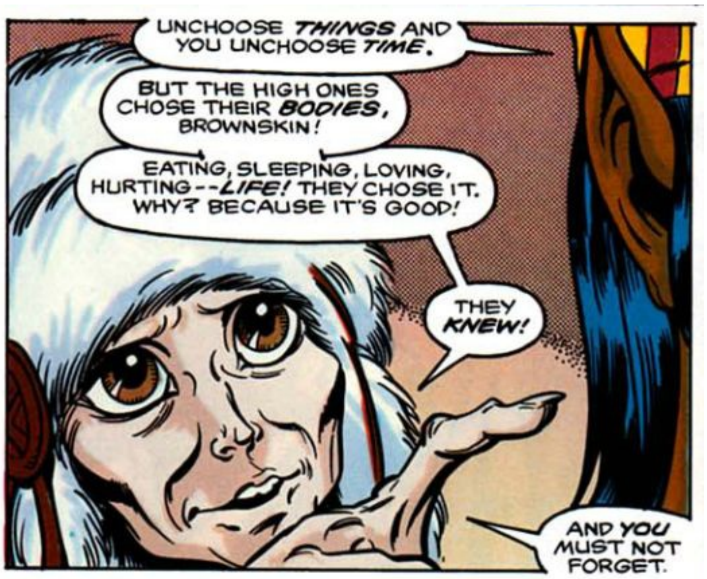
UNCHOOSE THINGS AND YOU UNCHOOSE TIME.
BUT THE HIGH ONES CHOSE THEIR BODIES, BROWNSKIN!
EATING, SLEEPING, LOVING, HURTING--LIFE! THEY CHOSE IT. WHY? BECAUSE IT'S GOOD!
THEY KNEW!
AND YOU MUST NOT FORGET.

Image 9: SaBM 1, 6. Ekuar reminds Rayek of the goodness of bodilyexperience.

The call of the Other comes from beyond: it compels me, in making my ego to myself, and obliges me to responsibility. Fantasy genre makes this explicit. The call of the High Ones resonated through the broken wheel of time is mentally heard by young Suntop. He guides Rayek, who transports the elves' "rescuing party" in the Palace to the place where the cry originates. However, no one responds to their united, open sending. As the cry won't halt Suntop cries out his own personal pain and exhaustion. He runs out of the Palace, shouting: "where are you?! Where are you?!" (KotBW 5, 3) Suntop faces agony of the others' non-presence, while the call is obliging, commanding, and needs to be answered. With the aid of Leetah, the cry is given for Rayek to bear.

When the elves discover that in the Palace they can travel in time to stop the "mistake", the troll rebellion that threw the High Ones into prehistory, Rayek insists that the lives of elves have no meaning on the World of Two Moons. According to him, they should "awake to freedom" from "a dream of sorrow and limitation" and leave "this wheel of empty struggle" (KotBW 6, 10, 24). With his face unseen (a visual mark that calls for an interior, psychological reading; see image 10) he questions why no one else seems to understand the way the elves and the World of Two Moons were meant to exist, separate from each other. Rayek sees the role of elves in relation to the world as visitors, and not dwellers. (KotBW 6, 24–25.)

Few issues earlier (KotBW 4, 13), Rayek is clad in a superhero-like costume (though the outfits of other characters, too, often are not the most practical or indistinguishable). The generic implications of superheroes as powerful individuals who are in many ways discrete from their society re-enforce Rayek's detachment from the World of Two Moons. Rayek experiences himself as isolate on the level of his essence or belonging to his community, his environments, even to the time he is experiencing. Naess (1989, 164) warns about identity based on separation. In reality, individual identities are shaped through interaction with various, multiple environmental factors of which one cannot completely isolate oneself. Without this binding, actions may become destructive. With it, good feelings may radiate towards all parts of nature.

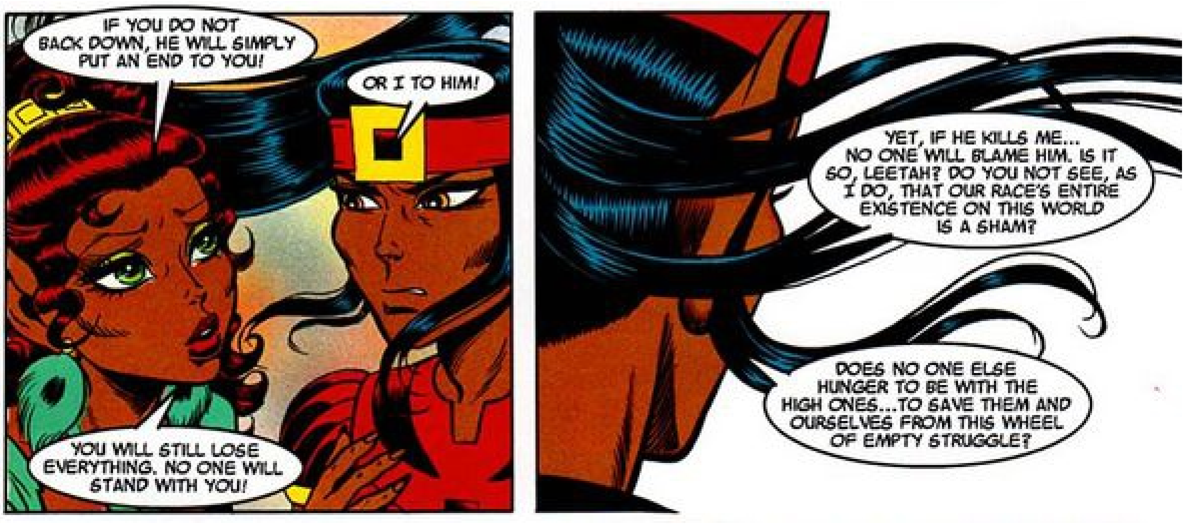
IF YOU DO NOT BACK DOWN, HE WILL SIMPLY PUT AN END TO YOU!
OR I TO HIM!
YOU WILL STILL LOSE EVERYTHING. NO ONE WILL STAND WITH YOU!
YET, IF HE KILLS ME... NO ONE WILL BLAME HIM. IS IT SO, LEETAH? DO YOU NOT SEE, AS I DO, THAT OUR RACE'S ENTIRE EXISTENCE ON THIS WORLD IS A SHAM?
DOES NO ONE ELSE HUNGER TO BE WITH THE HIGH ONES...TO SAVE THEM AND OURSELVES FROM THIS WHEEL OF EMPTY STRUGGLE?

Image 10: KotBW 6, 24.

The wills of Rayek and Cutter clash mostly due to their difference in how they feel they are situated in time and space, life's cycle or grounding. Cutter, who is part of the World of Two Moons, forbids his immortal rival to wipe out the very traces the alien space travelers and their descendants left on it. While Rayek is angered by Cutter's incapacity to “see the greater good”, Cutter posits the choice in “here and now”; when Rayek strikes him down with magical power, Cutter tells him that his power is in his family. Timmain, in her wolf form, enters and interrupts the glare of the opposing sides. Rayek kneels to her and asks her to choose “between the beast life she lives now... / and a timely rescue that would prevent any need for such a shape change. / **Timmain**, you cried out with the others. This banishment... this-this grounding cannot be what you wanted! / It can **un**-happen! And yet your children, the Wolfriders, can still be with you. Is that not best?” (KotBW 6, 13–17.) Timmain was indeed one of the many, who cried out their feelings of “loss! a shattering of hope! love betrayed!” (KotBW 5, 20.) However, she responds to Rayeks questioning in a way that has such a strong impact precisely because she is a wolf. A sequence of silent panels depicts her yellow eyes, in which tears appear, and how she goes towards both Rayek and Cutter, giving them a tender lick on the cheek, respectively, and leaves the room. When words would fail, the wolf body conveys sadness, grief, and acceptance of the others' choices, in approach, touch, and leave-taking – but in shedding tears, the wolf appears not to behave like wolves do. The hybridity is integral in Timmain, it is herself, and she cannot make the choice that Rayek asks her to make. As Timmain-wolf leaves the room, Cutter interprets her behavior: “She won't take sides. For good or ill, what happened to the High Ones happened.” (KotBW 6, 17.)

Rayek needs to accept that one is situated in specific time and space, and otherness that commands oneself beyond measure. He lacks the recognition of others' vulnerability, and of his own vulnerability in relation to the others. In a way, he has not accepted his material being, the "accident" that caused the High Ones to enter into the "wrong" time, death to happen, and his own self to be born.

> “To accept time is to accept death as the impossibility of presence. To be in eternity is to be *one*, to be *oneself* eternally. [- -] The ethical exigency to be responsible for the other undermines the ontological primacy of the meaning of being; it unsettles the natural and political positions we have taken up in the world and predisposes us to a meaning that is other than being, that is otherwise than being (*autrement qu'être*). (Levinas & Kearney 1986, 23.)

Because the other's suffering has such a meaning to me that goes beyond what one wills or chooses, Rayek cannot withdraw from his responsibility. Perhaps it is this struggle to keep to what one wills, and coming to his senses as sensibility for the other, or the coring out of his ego in facing the other, that makes Rayek such a loved character. In his character, the disproportion of *bios* and *logos* is brought to an extreme, and thus he is capable of evil, of fallibility. Like Leetah says: “If only I could cure **you**! But you are not **mad**, you are just wrong... as wrong as anyone has ever been!” (KotBW 9, 6.) In this capacity for evil – and, importantly, for good – coupled with a determination that he knows what is good, he is alike to Winnowill who calls him “lord” and encourages him to embark on his mission to take the elves outside of their material, binding world and its history. This takes place just after Ekuar has wondered wistfully wondered if Rayek would “wipe out the very chance of knowing” his child, “the little baby brownskin who may or may not be...” (KotBW 6, 25–26.) This value of children becomes a key in his personal change.

Rayek attempts to choose un-happening and travel outside the binding rhythm of the world of his birth. Still, after having arrived in the future, he seems to be driven by rush, so that he has no time to think or feel for others. He should collect Timmain and elves from the Sun Village to the Palace, and have Leetah heal Winnowill, so that they would all survive the merging. Somehow he has not realized how other worldly actors may hinder, reject and change his plans. Rayek meets his daughter Venka: like Rayek sees his own features reflected in her calm face, we as readers recognize their similarity and crucial difference. (KotBW 9, 6–7, 15–18.) Venka accompanies him in resisting Winnowill's deadly powers, and stays with him when all the others leave his side. Just before the High One's original Palace arrives, with the dawn, Rayek has to respond to a different obligation than the High One's cry. He sees Wolfriders passively watching him over the water, waiting. Desperate, he asks them to hurry inside the Palace, to “survive the merging”, but Cutter, who's family now stands beside him, calmly replies: “Survive?! Knowing those we leave behind are worse than dead?! No!! We couldn't!” Also Rayek's closest friend, leaves, with no judgment but a simple gesture of caring: “I love you, **brownskin**. / Whatever you do, that won't change.” (KotBW 9, 24–25.)

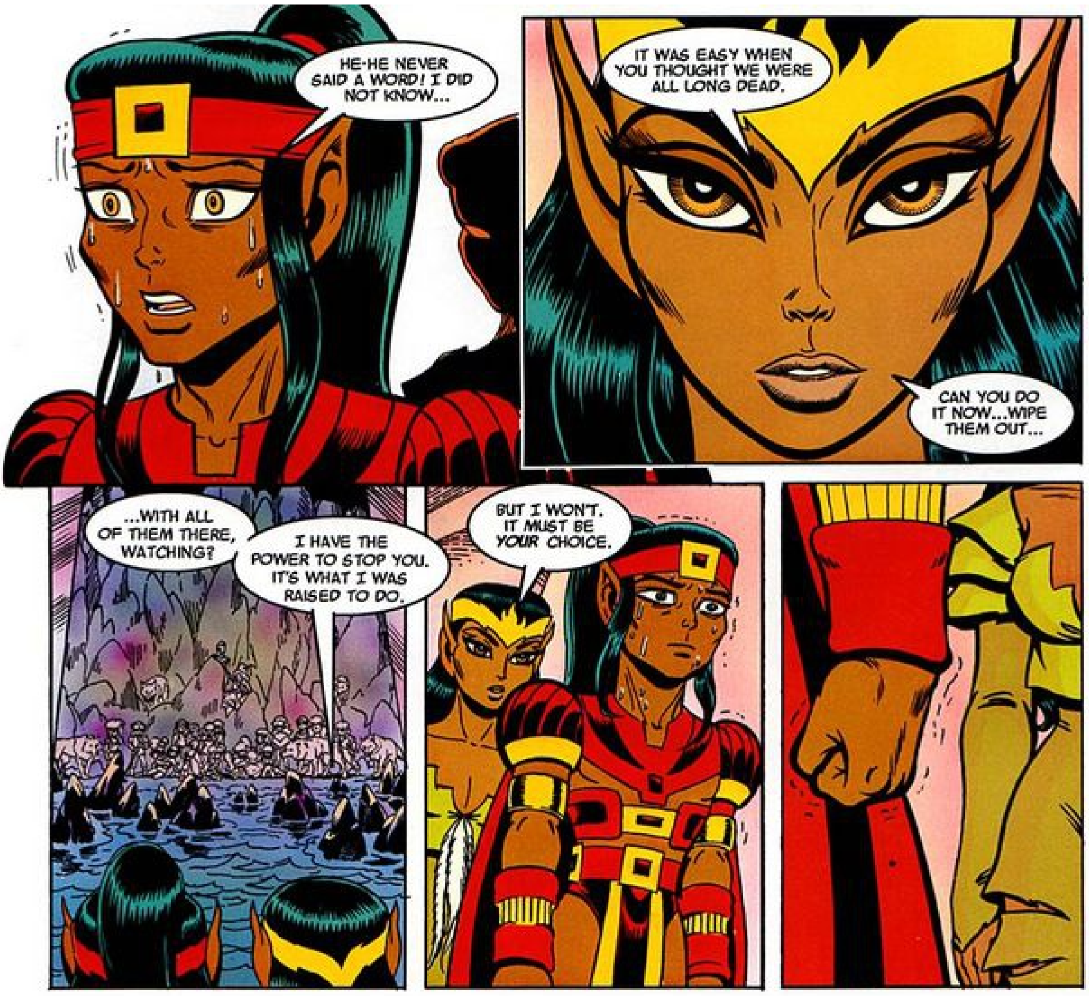
HE-HE NEVER SAID A WORD! I DID NOT KNOW...
IT WAS EASY WHEN YOU THOUGHT WE WERE ALL LONG DEAD.
CAN YOU DO IT NOW...WIPE THEM OUT...
...WITH ALL OF THEM THERE, WATCHING?
I HAVE THE POWER TO STOP YOU. IT'S WHAT I WAS RAISED TO DO.
BUT I WON'T. IT MUST BE YOUR CHOICE.

Image 11: KotBW 9, 25. Rayek faces a terrible choice.

Now Venka questions Rayek, asking if he is really able to do what he intended "...with all of them there, watching?" (Image 11.) Here, the fantasy provides means for us to understand Levinas's writings about encountering the face of the other in a concrete and empathetic form:

> "The approach of the face is the most basic mode of responsibility. As such, the face of the other is verticality and uprightness; it spells a relation of rectitude. The face is not in front of me (*en face de moi*) but above me; it is the other before death, looking through and exposing death. Secondly, the face is the other who asks me not to let him die alone, as if to do so were to become an accomplice in his death. Thus the face says to me: you shall not kill. In the relation to the face I am exposed as a usurper of the place of the other." (Levinas and Kearney, 1986, 23–24.)

In encountering the others' gaze from over the water, it is paradoxically also Rayek who is alone, seeing his *self* exposed in responsibility, his own irredeemable guilt that lies in becoming accomplice in the others' death, or more precisely, in their complete negation as of never having existed. Moreover, Venka remains almost as passive as the others. She withdraws from using power to stop this un-doing. She only tells her father: “It must be **your** choice.” Then, the Palace of the High Ones arrives, the trolls cut open the guiders' cocoons, and Rayek sees it happen, transfixed over panels depicting these moments depicted in panels. (KotBW 9, 25–26)

It can be asked if Rayek even has a choice in his shocked state – perhaps the crucial moment simply passes so quickly that he cannot alter its course. Still, in realizing one's responsibility for the other one also realizes the impossibility of freedom, and hence of choice. Venka inverts the way Rayek has made decisions for others; she obliges him without forcing him. In this relation to the other, the impossibility of full freedom or autonomy, she honors a promise to her mother: to teach Rayek so that he learns. In the following chapter we examine how Venka is raised up to this task as an educational practice that heeds ethics first as its first priority.

3.4.2 Education: “children are never safe”

In the course of *Elfquest,* generations pass: elves are born, age, die, and continue their existence in spirit. The role of children – and the word “children” itself – becomes accentuated in the reading of the series. They are central in many turning points and revelations of the plot. In chapter 3.1.1 we already saw how Lord Voll's cold, reluctant judgment is softened to a warm welcome as soon as he has the chance to “gaze into the eyes of a child [- -] to feel hope again!” (OQ 11, 27, 30–32). Here, Suntop and Ember act as the proof of renewal, and hence, hope. Also, Suntop, Cutter's "enigmatic" son (OQ 6, 7), connects his kind to their origins as he mediates the message of Timmain. The High One herself describes the hybrid existence of Wolfriders, their true belonging to the World of Two Moons, as her gift to her son (OQ 20, 29). What she actually gave her son was the substance of something strange and other to the aliens in the World of Two-Moons, and yet familiar to that world: it was an integration of identity and alterity of wolf and elf. Children, in a sense, are figures of this intermingling, in which they remain somewhat unknown and challenging even in their vulnerability and passivity to the more powerful adults.

Winnowill has the dubious honour to acts as the main "child-harmer" of the series: she kidnaps Suntop (OQ

14) and changes the blood of Windkin, the baby of Dewshine and Tyldak (SaBM 5, 18). Winnowill herself considers Two-Edge as her "grave error" (see chapter 3.3.1). The cry of this tormented child she keeps hearing in her mind ultimately prevents Rayek to fall under her spell, when she is undergoing a painful healing. The cry of Two-Edge, depicted as his face entangled in the folds of Winnowill's robe, "blends in Rayek's mind with the wails of his own babe - - the newborn that somehow he knows is alive" (SaBM 8, 5). This knowing contradicts Rayek's belief that he has no child (see below). The relationship of Rayek with his daughter as well as the fact that, in the end, Winnowill cannot appropriate any of these above-mentioned children to serve her own purposes illustrate the main points of this chapter: that children command us even beyond our very essence, that they are utterly vulnerable and in danger, and that in both of these aspects they embody the power of education as ethical practice.

Venka is the daughter of Rayek and Kahvi, chief of the Go-Backs. Kahvi gives birth to her among her tribe, but tells Rayek that the infant died after birth; that judging by the looks her father was someone else. (SaBM 4, 1–3) Repulsed by Kahvi's apparent lack of sorrow, Rayek leaves the Go-Backs and heads with Two-Edge towards Blue Mountain. Watching them go, Kahvi tells another Go-Back that she had to lie because she wanted Rayek's blood to renew their tribe without him getting involved: "**His** fawn, reared **my** way! That leaves **Rayek out**!" (SaBM 4, 7.)

Eventually, Kahvi will not raise Venka among Go-Backs. Rayek, hurt by Kahvi's seeming cold-heartedness, swears "by the living **High One's soul**" that if the Go-Backs fail to protect his friend Ekuar from the trolls he will wipe their tribe "from the face of this world" (SaBM 4, 6). Once Rayek returns to the Frozen Montains filled with the spirits of Gliders and their powers, and finds out that Ekuar has been captured by trolls, he almost fulfills his vow. He destroys the Go-Back lodge, causing it to collapse. Inside his own baby cries; only the reader witnesses, from the point of view of an approaching observer, the fear and wails of the infant that couldn't possibly be heard from the outside. Nevertheless, in a reflection of her child's face, Kahvi shouts “Noooo!!” and rushes in to shield the child with her own body. In the same moment, Suntop begins to hear a cry for help – the echo of the High Ones crying out their agony. (KotBW 1, 28–30). The coinciding of these calls and responses creates a moment of dramatic tension, a reaching out over space and time.

With the Gliders' power, Rayek creates a gigantic crevasse in the land, separating the Go-Backs from the Palace and their identity: "You **lost** your chance to the stars even as you held it in your hands! Choose **another** name for yourselves... /...for you shall **never** 'go back' to the Palace again!" (KotBW 2, 7–8). Kahvi and her child survive the devastation; she finds her tribe on the other side of the crack, and leaves after Rayek, ultimately crossing the "Vastdeep Sea" with Aroree and Tyldak and arriving at the Wolfriders' Thorny Mountain Holt. (KotBW 6, 19; KotBW 7, 6–9)

Kahvi is determined to "get even" with Rayek, but ultimately it is not her task; however, she gives a hint of her child's future role by stomping on ants, creatures we often ignore though our relation with them is hardly characterized by indifference in our common environments: "Ants can live anywhere! They're tiny, but they're survivors, like my tribe! if you step on them... / they swarm back to bite you, they and their young". Glancing knowingly to her baby, she concludes: "And sometimes the children have sharper stings than their mothers." (KotBW 6, 23.) Venka does personify her mother's saying "differences make good sparks" (KotBW 6, 19), even as a toddler. She reveals surprising abilities on the flight of Kahvi, Venka, Aroree, and Tyldak over the sea. Winnowill, who is only depicted in a visual synecdoche, as wisps of black hair floating in the water, and her dark sending star, mentally commands her former servants Aroree and Tyldak to "come to her" under water. The succession of panels of the spellbound travelers descending towards the sea is broken by a round panel, a close-up on Venka's face. On her forehead we see a star different from all sending stars seen before in the series. Its visual quality gives a sense of order and pure light, and yet is dispersed. It appears on the next panel of the both hidden and present Winnowill, and confuses her, judging by her thought bubble "!?!". (KotBW 7, 6–8.) The novelty of the effect comes to characterize Venka, giving a glimpse of who she is and how she relates with others.

Venka is raised among Wolfriders, or rather a small community of four elven tribes. When Kahvi decides to leave to search for a way back to the Frozen Mountains, she shares a moment with her daughter, explaining that it would be a too long wait for her: "We each do what we're suited for, eh?" Leaning forwards, Venka asks with interest (and this is one of the first things we “hear” from her): "And what should I do, mother, that would please you most?" Here Kahvi looks at her warmly, and says, in a way that prompts readers recognize their ideas of Rayek in function of Venka's character: “All that was best in **Rayek**, and none of the worst, I see in you.” Her expression becomes more severe, when the visual focalization shifts to Venka's side: "Teach him a lesson, that's all I ask. / Teach him so he **learns**." (KotBW 7, 16.) It is important to note that here Kahvi is not driven by her own revenge, her own way of solving problems and "getting even". She has let go of her revenge and flies of with Tyldak. Her daughter is obviously better suited for to teach, and not to hate.

A few scenes in this issue highlight the way Venka approaches her mission; by asking and sharing, she learns about the absent others, about their impact on the people they've touched. Just after Kahvi and Tyldak have flown off, Venka asks Zhantee, a gentle elf from the Sun Village, what was Rayek like before "all this", before the quest began. Zhantee tells of his restlessness and ambition, and his influence, which is also positive: "I think perhaps I am a Wolfrider now, because of **Rayek's** example then." (KotBW 7, 17.) Possibly hundreds of years later, Venka demonstrates that she has not forgotten her mother's request. She asks Zhantee why, after so many years, Cutter does not take a mate. Zhantee simply tells: "He waits for Leetah. I can only share with you... what I keep in my heart. Perhaps it is enough." A flashback from OQ 6 shows Leetah healing. Venka and Zhantee seem to look at the vision, share the trace of tenderness and force in this experience conveyed in Zhantee's words: "To feel her touch... was to laugh and weep at once. I would use **any** excuse to have her gentle hands upon me!" Here Venka recognizes her friend's fondness for Leetah and the waiting he shares with Cutter: "And now, you also wait... /...with a love that seeks only to celebrate their reunion!" In the following panel, where the scene ends, she, however, mirrors her mother's hardening expression a few pages earlier, when Kahvi asked her to teach Rayek: "Unlike my father who parted them without mercy! / I shall remember, **Zhantee**! I, too, can wait!". (KotBW 7, 22.) In these scenes Venka and Zhantee structure their selves by integrating identity and alterity, the heritage of their debts for others and traces left by others. In Ricoeur's terms, they engage in translation of ideas and experiences in their exchange of memories. (See Dauenhauer 2014.)

When Rayek and Venka meet face-to-face thousands of years later, Rayek recognizes the daughter he thought he didn't have. As her first words to him Venka simply asks, in her characteristic goal-oriented manner: "Take me to the Black Snake." Venka's utter calmness contrasts with the emotional expressions of other characters. It could be interpreted as an approach ruled by unaffected, cold logic, but somehow, due to her earlier sharing of experiences and questioning, we see that this is not the case.

In a later sequence, when Aroree has taken Suntop, Ember, and the troll child Trinket among their people, Ekuar and Venka are left alone by the Palace's entrance. Ekuar asks her, with a worried look on his face: “I know you. What will you do to him?” Venka walks away inside the Palace, answering calmly: “The Wolfriders finished my upbringing. / They did not teach me to hate.” (KotBW 9, 21.) This small dialogue is somewhat cryptic. How can Ekuar "know" Venka when they meet for the first time? And if he knows her, why does he tell her so, and ask about her intentions? He may simply mean that he sees how Rayek is Venka's main concern. His words may also point to the sensibility of the other's force on himself. This kind of “knowing” seems like a phrasing of his responsibility for the other in the presence of the third:

approaching the other like a hostage, obliged by her, but being obliged to ask who the other is; Ekuar is not indifferent to the relation of the other with the third, who is also the other's other. This small exchange of words marks an attempt for justice, an attempt to hold different positions together. Venka's words, in her parting, also recognize herself as indebted to the others. The next page shows the widening circles of healing, spreading from Cutter holding Leetah to encompass all the Wolfriders standing beside them among the rocks: this transition posits a similarity between education and communal healing, and a revelation (until now, the reader was not sure if all the Wolfriders, or the four-tribe blend of elves, would exist in this time). (KotBW 9, 21–22.)

Venka, as a child who is brought up in relation to others, like all children are, manifests the way the others form one's subjectivity: as gifts, promises, debts, or acts of resistance, confiding, all taking place in a closeness where the child's needs are provided with one's very substance. Here, I have chosen Venka as a child to figure the ethics in education and its similarities with my theme of healing.

Another, tormented child, and the recognition of his needs was discussed in chapter 3.3.2. Two-Edge also appears in Clearbrook's dream where she is again in Blue Mountain searching for Windkin (see chapter 3.3.3). Two-Edge repeatedly appears, trying to speak to her, but has no chance, as Clearbrook's dream self slashes him with her sword. Only when she is trapped in a hole, and Two-Edge breaks through the wall she realizes that she is dreaming, and that Windkin is safe. In this Two-Egde sternly replies, physically approaching with the repetition of sending balloons, that becomes more forceful: "Children are **never** safe. / **None** of us ever are. / **None of us**…/ **None of us**…/ **None of us**…" (*Dreamtime* 129.) I take this to mean that renewal, development, and continuation should never be taken for granted. They are always in danger, as well as our ethics. Sometimes we forget that each and every one of us is a child, a trace of the past in presence, a keeping or failure of promise – and children are never safe.

3.4.3. Entropy: losing "the way"

In this final chapter of the analysis we return to Cutter, and "the way", the overall life philosophy inherent to the Wolfriders (see chapter 3.1.3) that is challenged in the turmoiling relationships of the fantasy world. The dream, or the "deep knowing" of Strongbow and Moonshade sets his tragedy in a new perspective.

Following “the way” is tested several times in the series. The doubting of Wolfrider identity is especially pertinent in Strongbow's desperation after he has learned about the origin of elves from Timmain: ”Next to her **we're** lower than **worms**! She's had so many shapes -- /-- how can the way mean anything to her?” Speaking in a whisper, that seems both more confessional and more concealed means of communicating – for Strongbow almost always sends – he falls down partly due to physical wounds, partly due to spiritual disintegration: ”If clinging to the way was a kind of blindness -- / -- then I wish... I had never been made -- / -- to **see**!” The new knowledge this ”keeper of the way” has gained shakes the very essence of his life. However, his community re-establishes his identity. Cutter tells Strongbow how he needs him, ”with your roots sunk deep like the Father Tree”. Nightfall speaks out her faith of the possibility to integrate Wolfrider lifestyle with greater knowing, the truth that doesn't have to break us: ”'The way' is a small truth -- / -- inside a bigger one. For me, day to day, the smaller is enough.” In this scene, the characters virtually connect through Cutter, touching him, looking at him, and re-defining ”the way” in relation to him. As a chief, leader of his tribe, Cutter acts as the point of assemblage and negotiation. (OQ 20, 29–31.)

Still, it is possible to lose “the way” not because one gains new knowledge, but in one's relationship to the other in time. This development is shown in the quiet struggle of Cutter in *Kings of the Broken Wheel*, particularly its issue 7, which spans the longest period of time in *Elfquest.* A two-page spread shows all the elves of the Thorny Mountain Holt enjoying a bath by a stream (image 12). The many interactions between characters and their environment invite the reader to contemplate the image with almost decorative qualities, in connection with the lengthy caption:

> “The way, an unspoken law born of blood blending between wolf and elf in the time of the firstcomers. To follow it is to be aware of nothing… ready for nothing… but what happens in the moment. It is the comfort of forgetfulness, the wisdom of being fully awake. It is the now of wolf-thought.” (KotBW 7, 20.)

The caption's narrative voice is actually directly linked to the previous page, which depicts a harsh winter, deaths of children, and the doubts of survival years before in the storyline. The narrator is responding to Cutter's thoughts, as he rejects getting cocooned in “wrapstuff”, outside of time and aging, on the grounds that this “living death”(as Leetah called it) goes against the way. (KotBW 7, 19.) To be situated outside of time and aging, is to be devoid of physicality and involvement which Wolfriders see as the core of their being.

On the spread, the following three captions are placed beside two close-ups on Cutter’s figure, riding the white Timmain-wolf. He looks more aged. His expression, somewhat motionless, unveils sadness and estrangement from the scene of beauty and movement he is looking at by the effect of the narrator's words: “To choose any other path is to be other than Wolfrider. / To be chief, keeper of the way, and yet unable to forget… / …is to be… almost… other than an elf.” (KotBW 7, 20.)

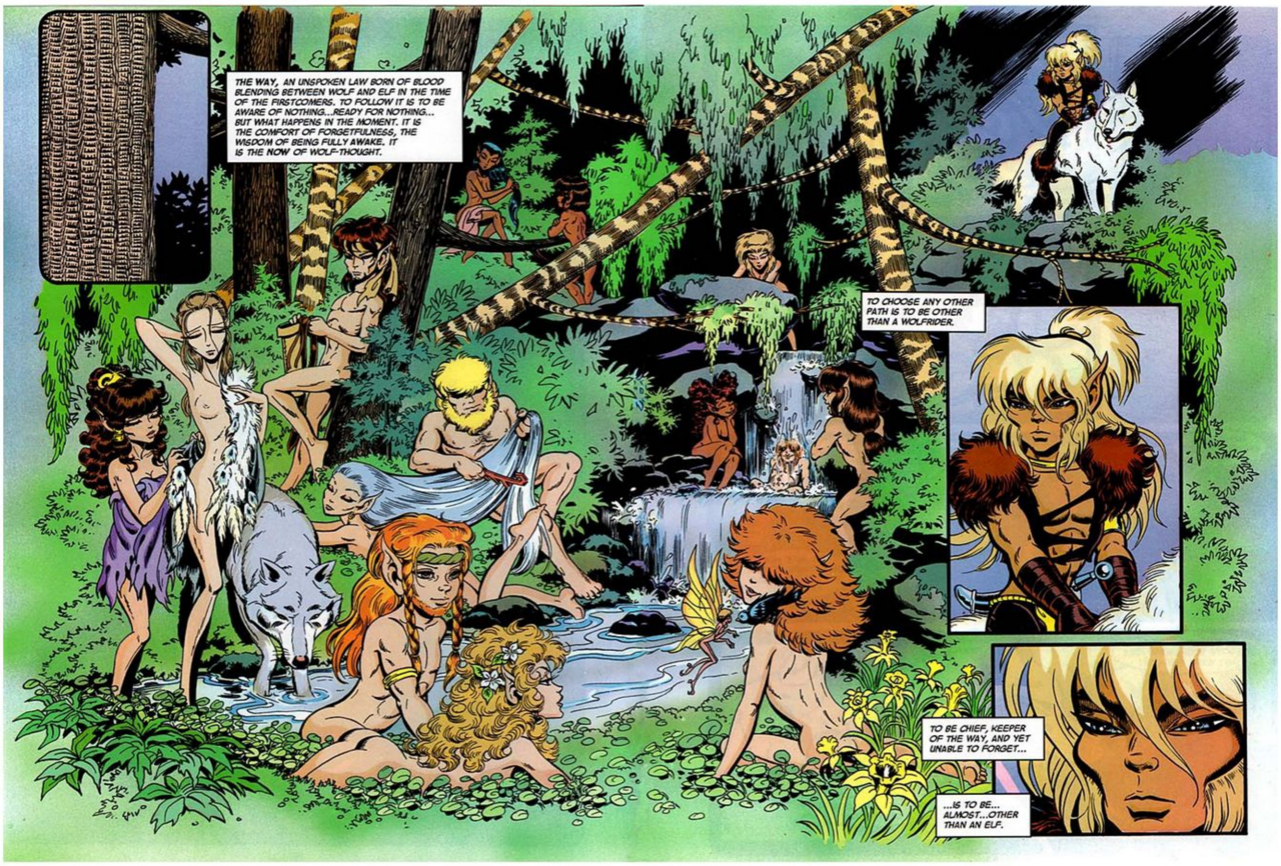
THE WAY, AN UNSPOKEN LAW BORN OF BLOOD BLENDING BETWEEN WOLF AND ELF IN THE TIME OF THE FIRSTCOMERS. TO FOLLOW IT IS TO BE AWARE OF NOTHING...READY FOR NOTHING... BUT WHAT HAPPENS IN THE MOMENT. IT IS THE COMFORT OF FORGETFULNESS, THE WISDOM OF BEING FULLY AWAKE. IT IS THE NOW OF WOLF-THOUGHT.
TO CHOOSE ANY OTHER PATH IS TO BE OTHER THAN A WOLFRIDER.
TO BE CHIEF, KEEPER OF THE WAY, AND YET UNABLE TO FORGET...
...IS TO BE... ALMOST...OTHER THAN AN ELF.

Image 12: KotBW 7, 20. The spread marks the estrangement of Cutter from the way of life of his people.

Almost the whole issue is set in the long period of the story after Rayek took the Palace and Cutter's family away and before they arrive ten thousand years later, and consists of the way the elves are living during their long wait. The wait is made concrete by the notches Cutter cuts on the trunk of a tree – each marks one turn of seasons (KotBW 7, 5). The tree is also depicted in the cover of the issue. Virtually every scene during the long waiting begins with a panel showing the tree trunk – like a clock, shadowing each scene with a reminder of the passing of time. Observing how the tree bark gradually stiffens, and other changes take place in its proximity, the reader feels how Cutter is growing older towards his eventual death, an experience that Cutter himself must be having. At the end of the issue, Cutter, pained by a flint chip from a human arrow caught under his rib, is thinking about his mortality in pouring rain: “**Leetah** knew... but she'd never **say**... how long a Wolfrider's life can last.” Two silent panels show him shuddering, and the worry reflected in the expressions of Timmain-wolf and Petalwing. Cutter continues his thought, with the last words of the issue, the point of view of the observer now more distant from him: “Not long enough, I'm afraid, beloved!” The last page only consists of a series of nine panels like flashes in time depicting the tree trunk exposed to many changes in the weather and its environment. In the last panel, we see the mere remains of a decaying trunk, its surrounding trees cut down, and a human plowing the field nearby. (KotBW 7, 28–29.) What we know of the life of Cutter is thus likened to the life of a tree – even the traces he has left in the world have disappeared.

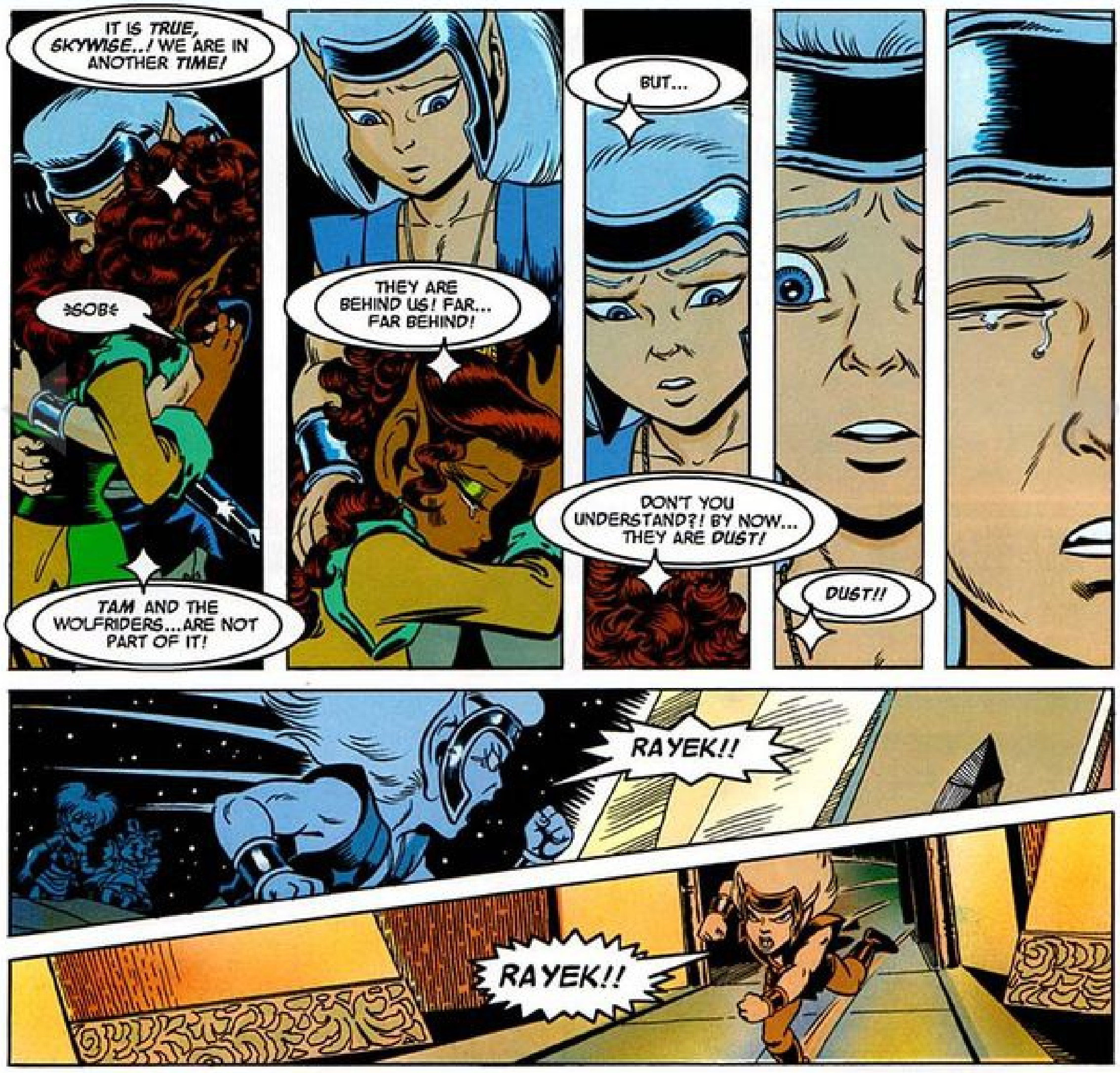
IT IS TRUE, SKYWISE..! WE ARE IN ANOTHER TIME!
SOB
TAM AND THE WOLFRIDERS...ARE NOT PART OF IT!
THEY ARE BEHIND US! FAR... FAR BEHIND!
BUT...
DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND?! BY NOW... THEY ARE DUST!
DUST!!
RAYEK!!
RAYEK!!

Image 13: KotBW 8, 5: Skywise's disbelief turns into a painful realization of loss. The phases of it are intensified in narrow panels that condense the emotional perception of time.

Cutter's stark realization of his own mortality is reflected in the grief of Leetah and Skywise in the following issue. When Leetah learns from Ekuar how much the world has aged since they left, she cries out her terrible agony; in sharply cut panels, both she and Skywise realize their loss, which even engages emotional responses in the reader's own body (KotBW 8, 4–5; see image 12). Later, when the two have in some way comprehended the separation, Skywise pleads Leetah to erase the mortal wolf blood in him: “My soul's brother, my friends, my **time**... they've been **stolen** from me!! [- -] If there's a way back... even if it takes a star's lifetime... I want that chance! [- -] Give me **time**, healer! / **Please!**” The observer's position is distanced from their embrace, as Leetah begins to change his blood. The strangeness of the future world, its lush and majestic environment enfolds them, as she thinks upon her actions which can hardly be distinguished from those of Winnowill's. The setting gives an almost indifferent feel to her solitary self-questioning. (KotBW 8, 19–20.)

When Cutter and Leetah finally meet each other again, it is not a moment of pure joy, but a complex blend of emotions; pain and beauty. Leetah's chest looks shattered, judging by the blood between her breasts, as Cutter's hands lifts her up. Only at the turn of the page the reader sees his face where Leetah's shocked gaze already focuses at the end of previous page: his eyes that reflect the sea line, and his expression with a hint of sadness and worry. Cutter asks her not to give up, and his words transform the gap from now to memory, as they continue in another dialogue in bubble-shaped panels, flash-backs from the time Cutter and his tribe chose to be wrapped in preserver cocooning. (KotBW 9, 19–20.)

Leetah sends to him “Tam... Tam!” and a small circle is forming over them, the hint of a beginning healing. Cutter tells her of choosing “living death” outside of time, abandoning the way of life as presence that constitutes him: “I turned my back on the way, beloved! Better to sleep and know nothing... /…than wake to one more night without you!” On the following page, circles widen from the couple's embrace to integrate all the others who slept in cocoons, the elves and the wolves among the shoreline rocks, the community that chose to support Cutter in his anguish.

Cutter's experience of losing the way as its specific aspect, “the now of wolf thought”, is discussed further in *Dreamtime*. In its final episode, Cutter sends his dream to the tribe: He is on the Bridge of Destiny, where he once contested Rayek and won, saving Rayek's life. In the dream, his goal is to reach Leetah who is standing on the other side of the bridge. When he crawls over it, Rayek flies away with Leetah, and Cutter falls into a bottomless chasm, knowing that he has “failed **everyone**” and “lost something [he'll] **never** get back” (*Dreamtime* 146–147). Cutter breaks of the sending, telling that if he sends how it feels to lose the “now of wolf thought”, the tribe will lose it too “-- and that'll be the **end** of us! I'd rather **die**!” As Venka explains to

Rayek in an earlier scene: “There is no difference between the “**now** of wolf thought” and immortality. / In **either** state the sense of passing time is absent... /...except for **Cutter**.” (Ibid. 42.) The waiting has led him to painfully realize time as loss, of moments and years following each other which can never be retrieved, or never reached: “It's not the **dream** I fear to share … / It's what follows... the **counting**! / When I **found** my family, I thought I'd be **happy** again. Didn't know the sadness would stay.” (Ibid. 148.)

Lingis explains the relationship with alterity in Levinas in a temporal format. In the instant when a subject experiences things, it is already opened to these things as a “fission”, an “internal movement” or “diachrony”, a splitting of identity (we can also conceive this as the difference of idem and ipse identities). Thus, in the actual instant of experience the subject does not “coincide” with itself, but is already “a gaping open of itself and a clinging on to itself”, so that the present bypasses itself (French: *se passe*). What Levinas suggests is that there is a prior, factual “exposure to exteriority itself”, and it has already come to pass beneath the diachrony of present.

> “The present established by consciousness finds itself already in relationship with that past moment. It does not so much retain it as it is held by it, retained by it. [- -] There is a loss, falling away irrevocably, *lapse* of time. The bond with the past is a bond with a dimension of oneself which one cannot regain possession of once more, which prevents complete self-possession – and which yet holds on to one, holds one like a bond. Ageing is this temporalization – by virtue of the temporalization of one's time, one is being carried beyond one's powers.” (Lingis 1981, xix–xx, emphasis in original.)

When Levinas says that ”time means that the other is forever beyond me” (Levinas and Kearney 1986, 21), he means the other who is before me and in relation to whom I am called to myself, a subjectivity able to split into identity and ipseity, sameness and selfhood. On this background, I interpret that the concrete lapse of time in *Kings of the Broken Wheel* forces the absence of the other, recognized as part of oneself, or one's ”soul” (see Leetah's trauma in KotBW 8, 7) on the surface of one's subjective experience. Therefore the sorrow for another may break one's unity in the instant of experience, bring the self in to crisis, as the primacy of the other causes a void in oneself. Cutter, in waiting, becomes extremely sensible to the friction and openness in his self, the deprivation of the significant other who gave him his significance. The pain of not being able to forget and live within the perceived immeadiacy of the present (which, as we have seen, is already a diachrony) makes him tired and agonized. He has experienced aging in being painfully alert to it, losing the translucency of ”the way ”, though in exchange, he has ”gotten good at looking **ahead**” (*Dreamtime* 148). Levinas writes in very corporeal terms on the subjectivity that is ”stuck in its skin, not having its skin to itself, a vulnerability”. Like wrinkles on the skin, time that affects the self beyond present as aging, in relation to which we remain in extreme passivity: ”In self-consciousness there is no longer a *presence* of self to self, but senescence. It is as senescence beyond the recuperation of memory that time, lost time that does not return, is a diachrony, and concerns me.” (Levinas 1981, 51–52) Through our passivity in regard with our own bodily aging and pain, we, as readers, may momentarily enter into Cutter's skin (a skin which, to be sure, has no wrinkles).

If Cutter has lost at least some integral part of the way, how does one experience loss and time when living in the “now of wolf thought”? A glimpse of it may be seen in an earlier sequence of *Dreamtime* where Skot speaks out his frustration of not having the possibility to “share” (experience and emotions) with Strongbow and Moonshade: “There's no getting close to you!” The picture that accompanies this last sentence shows the faces of Moonshade and Strongbow with almost hurt expressions. They invite the Go-Backs Skot and Krim into a strong sending, visible in the panels as a bright-lighted sending stars, expanding and merging together. The faces of Strongbow and Moonshade are not clearly seen; yet in their “feel” they approach the reader in their characteristic visual symbols: pendant depicting two moons and an arrowhead. The iconotext, however, equivotes who is actually approaching (perhaps it is the reader), like in sensibility for the Other who both imposes and welcomes: “**You** decide how close is too close. / **You** set the boundaries… We will honor them. / Here we are **one**, and age means nothing. / Come. Enter **our** dream.” (*Dreamtime* 100.)

The dream itself has no verbal content. In a full-page panel, Strongbow and Moonshade are shown leaping through space with their wolf companions. Their life events are depicted as flowing forms in which we recognize the characters by their emblems: two crescent moons, an arrow, and a bow (Ibid. 101–102.) What interests me is the following spread, where these anthropomorphic forms shape into wolves, which in turn merge into a lone wolf (image 14). The vegetation of the environment menacingly engulfs the wolves that can be seem to express helplessness, distress, and having recourse the other – to the extent that they merge into one. However, when the reaching hands close in on the solitary wolf, it is not absorbed in darkness – or perhaps it is, but the contrast inverts, and the wolf seems to become a form of pure light. The successive distancing of this white figure, lowering its head from a howl, seems to take place in timeless void. It shines its own light in its passivity, in the humble resting of its head.

Skot and Krim ask the couple to go “no deeper”. After sharing their dream Moonshade explains to the Go-Backs that “from **anyone** who invites us or is invited... /…we withhold **nothing** but our soul names”. This manifests the exposure of oneself in encountering the other, but Moonshade also broadens this ethical view to the realm of morality: “We… our wolf friends… we’re all just bits of flesh swirling in a vastdeep sea where **all** is possible! / Nothing ever gets done – nothing **can** – unless we abide by the rules we make.” (Ibid. 104.) Here she portrays the entropy and disorganization of reality. The order, direction, or sense found in the chaos of the material and immaterial world stems from the connecting with others, who reveal our helplessness and limitation.

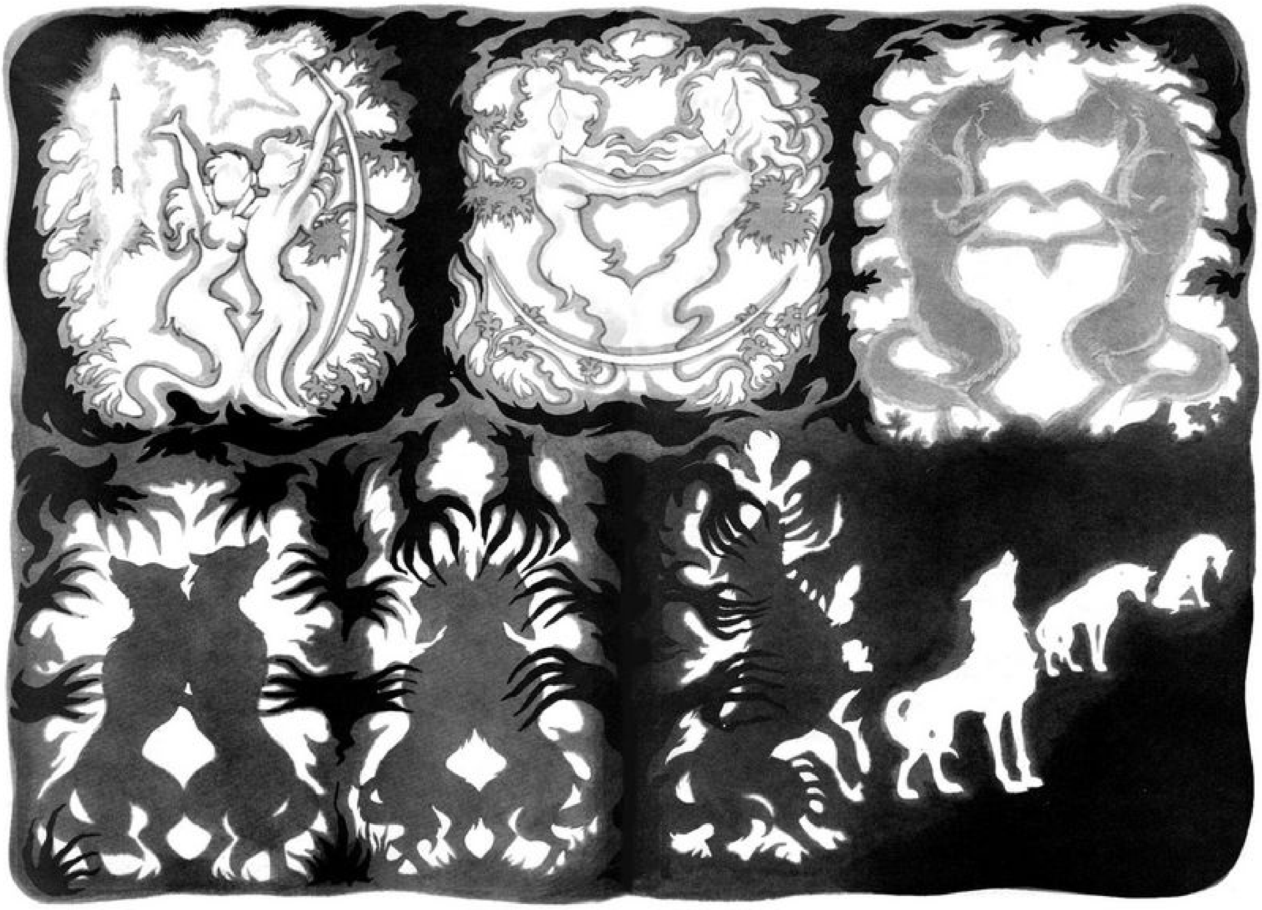

Image 14: *Dreamtime* 103. The spread condenses the communal, relational, animal self to a mere presence.

Later, the dream is interpreted as an action, a relational stance that one can adopt even when things close in on us: “**Strongbow** and **Moonshade** know deepest... forgiving -- and letting be -- is sometimes all we can do.” (Ibid. 154.) In the light of the dreams in *Dreamtime* (e.g. Clearbrook's dream; see above) the elves seem to share a knowing of their risk to become extinct and disappear from the face of the world. In all their immersion in ”the now of wolf thought”, they seem to sense the impossibility of presence.

In the ending of *Dreamtime*, Cutter voices out the one last re-establishment of the faith that Wolfriders have in their hybrid belonging and renewal in the world. Wolfriders and wolves gathered in the howl and the light of dawn permeating through the leaves of tall trees add force to the dynamic, diagonal panel and Cutter's words: “Wolfriders! We're **awake**! We know what we know! / The world has changed, and our small green patch in it will get smaller! / But there's **power** in knowing! If **this** Holt falls, **we** won't! / On my heart I swear there will **always** be a **father tree**, here, now, and in our dreams!” (*Dreamtime* 156.) The destabilizing and dethroning effects of the Other are synchronized in the safe basis of belonging. The alien elements of dreams, the “knowing” that endanger one's sameness, nourish the basis of belonging, that lies in communicating, in communion, in community. This knowing is hybrid knowing, too. Wolfriders are not immortal space travelers, wolves, humans, trolls, preservers, ants, or trees (for example): they are the result of interactions with these organisms and their material-semiotic environments. The self is animal, bestial, vulnerable, and thus made stronger but first of all a subjectivity that is formed in relationship to the Other. Both in companion species and ethics, the relationship is the minimal unit of analysis, of this “knowing” that can or cannot be gained.

4 Facing the Other through *Elfquest*

Spider-Man’s uncle used to say: “With great power there must also come great responsibility.” In reading *Elfquest,* I have explored what this great responsibility could mean for myself as a member of humanity, this fuzzy ontological category in which other species, machines and diverse environments interfere. On the lines of Levinas, I defined ethics as a relationship, a face-to-face encounter with the Other. In my introduction I asked: How does the Other present itself in the reading of *Elfquest*? Can the relationship with the Other be understood through the figure of companion species? Does this otherness constitute human well-being?

One would assume – and perhaps rightly so – that it is a foolish attempt to ask how an unrepresentable Other presents itself in reading of fantasy comics. However, I have argued especially on the basis of Holland (2004) that in our mental immersion in fiction we are momentarily “disinterested” and passive, and at the heart of our ethical relationship with the Other. For a moment we willingly suspend our disbelief, and do not test the veracity of the fantasy world, do not plan to act. We are unaware of our egos but we respond to the story as *ourselves* – paradoxically by placing ourselves under the masks of comics characters, to be carried around with them in their wondrous story world, no less wondrous than our own. Perhaps because our identities that integrate sameness and alterity are construed like narratives, it is so easy for us to slip under the skin of those textual others. We momentarily lose our grip on being and encounter a trace of someone that calls to us – to me – from beyond being. There is nothing magical or “supernatural” in this experience, but perhaps a trace of transcendence. It is also one of the most reviving things we are able to do in the realm of imagination and empathy; becoming subjects in responsibility for the Other.

The so-called realistic fiction usually tends to disguise its generic conventions in the narrative techniques, the level of discourse, whereas fantasy genre explicates them, e.g. the shifts of time and form on the level of the story. Fantasy thus allows more concrete treatment of the basics of our existence – even some aspects of what (or *who*) precedes or goes beyond our existence, calling us to responsibility. The cry for help of the elves predecessors, the High Ones, that Suntop began to hear in *Kings of the Broken Wheel* serves as a good example of how the call of the unknown Other from beyond essence paradoxically compels me to an infinite responsibility for the Other's essential needs. It is a responsibility that cannot be fulfilled: a responsibility ever for the death of the Other. Though this call of another in helplessness and suffering can be responded in many ways, its call cannot be denied: the narrative has to respond to it.

According to Ricoeur, we are, in a way, ourselves narratives: our identity as sameness and alterity is construed in relation to the others' stories – even those that are emergent or that are not allowed to exist, that have become extinct. Companion species is a corporeal, real figure that embodies the historical, material, and semiotic web of interactions and failures, the conflicts and misunderstandings within our collective memory. These interactions constitute both human bodies and textual others – the companion species figure in literary imagination and visual presentations, and in our ethics – I dare say – as interrelatedness and responsibility towards the Other. Like living beings, environmental problems are among us, and we will have to live with them. It is essential that we learn to value the diversity of Earth, also by the remembrance of things past, but it is also imperative to regenerate it. I believe that fiction can alter reality, by calling to our ability to dream and imagine, to regard ourselves and others differently. Like Cutter says in *Dreamtime* (155): "**All** dreams are true... even ones that **seem** backwards from what really happens! / The 'knowing' in us knows **all** sides!" This "knowing in us" can be communicated effectively with narratives, for the process of storytelling is a complex natural-cultural system with a high degree of integrity. It helps to generate wisdom through the presentation and sharing of ethical dilemmas, the choices of various inter-actors which are hardly ever simply right or wrong, good or evil.

If we follow the path of Levinas's thought, the narrative constitution of the self becomes more doubtful than in Ricoeur's. Levinas's description of infinite responsibility seems to undermine human well-being as pleasure or hedonia – but, if we conceive human well-being as ecosocial eudaimonia, a flourishing of one's potentials in relation with others, Levinas's account on sensibility, enjoyment and wounding seem to suggest that subjective well-being becomes possible only in an "obsessive" responsibility for the Other.

The themes of my analysis of *Elfquest* – belonging, recognition, healing, and renewal – were meant to map out the possible dimensions of eudaimonia, the fulfilling of potentials, which depends on one's relationship with others whose right this self-realization also is, and perhaps more than mine. Eudaimonic well-being is related to intrinsic value orientation which was also the underlying motivator for the selection of these themes and particular scenes. They were explored and felt through characters, the upholders of our narrative identities. As an independent comic series where the authors could develop the themes personally important to them, *Elfquest* offered far more ground to explore the nuances than what was needed for the purposes of this study.

The treatment of Belonging showed that the concept and material reality of “home” is manifold, realized in interactions between different species in the course of history. In a way, the dwelling, the settling down to a “safe place” is always in danger. “Home” embodies the *longing* for unity and permanence, but the deliberate shunning of “external” or “savage” influences in order to maintain “originality” may lead one to a depressive stagnation and estrangement, like the Gliders' case shows. The Wolfriders illustrate that if one wishes to live in accordance with one's environment, one has to “move and breathe and **think**” with it. What sense of belonging and knowledge there is to be had, happens in movement and encounter: the happiness or “an orientation toward the objects we come into contact with” (Ahmed 2010, 32). What matters in sense of belonging, is one's historically and materially formed lifestyle, or “the going”, as Go-Backs would put it. Home, then, is not permanent. Even one's ultimate or original home, like the Palace of the High Ones, is shown to be a vessel, made from the “dying soil” of another planet, made to travel the stars in search or experience – it is the stuff that stories are made of.

The troublesome relationships with the humans, these animals of The World of Two Moons, drives the quest for originality or authenticity forward. In one's “obsessive” responsibility for the neighbor, one is “like a stranger, hunted down even in one's home” (Levinas 1981, 92) – and this contesting, compelling relationship for the other forces one to become a subject, an authentic self. It is the humans' undermining of the right of being of elves that forces them to discover their origins and unique sense of belonging in the world. The self is hybrid, and made stronger that way, as an integration of identity and alterity. In vulnerability and proximity, the elves and humans find themselves responsible for one another, obligated to care for the material needs of the Other in honesty and politics of peace. Communication, or the readiness to listen even for a short while the opinions and sentiments of rivals and enemies is the key to survival or success. In the communications with preservers and trolls, those that came from the same place as elves, “the way” of life of Wolfriders and their “now of wolf thought”, or deep immersion in the present, clashes with the motif of remembering. Time, here, is framed as reminiscence and that is “the unity of consciousness and essence” (Levinas 1981, 29). However, the Other contests and challenges the I even in this unity (that is, as sameness and ipseity, already a diachrony). This is the saying that inspires me, in a quite corporeal sense of the term, that has already inspired me to exist as a blend of selfhood and sameness: “The other is in the same, like air in the bottom of the lung, where the structures that are elsewhere differentiable into inside and outside can no longer be fully distinguished.” (Perpich 2008, 121.) The sensibility or “alterity in one's skin” also connects the themes of Belonging and Renewal.

How the same becomes oneself in-relation was examined also in the different cases of Recognition. *Elfquest* epitomizes how in fantasy genre we may concretely trace back even pre-ontological, unrepresentable, philosophical ideas, such as obsessive contact with the Other, a “despite-oneself”, and extreme sensibility, in this case in the form of recognition. This ethical encounter was also shown to fall in the context of morality, community, and justice. All cases of recognition posited the selves of the recognized characters as hostages, but the realm of politics, the making of meaning and negotiation shapes their situations in various forms. Cutter and Leetah come to accept their differences as part of life's order. Dewshine and Tyldak try to deny the other on the basis of their “freedom”, but finally approach each other as their only means of freedom, in the support of their communities which emphasize the importance of renewal and growth that the couple's closeness will bring to them. Redlance and Nightfall “choose” recognition, enabled by forgiveness and providing oneself for the other. In this case, the third theme, Healing, was also apparent.

The theme of Healing examined, firstly, one's capacity for evil as a will to appropriate and to possess. This self-indulging may be seen as protection, such as Winnowill's justifications to her actions with regard to Lord Voll, but also as the will to “negate” the other. The healing of this will to murder took form as exposure; however, her healing remained unaccomplished, could not be tied to love as watchfulness for the needs of the other, as “despite-oneself”. Two-Edge exemplifies both mental and social illness, a disparaged and dispersed identity protected under the comfort of games and rhymes. In face-to-face-encounters with Leetah and Clearbrook, in proximity, Two-Edge is wounded – but enjoyment as eudaimonia, fulfilling of greater cause, orientation toward intrinsic values such as affiliation, becomes also possible for him. Two-Edge and Clearbrook exchange a moment of forgiveness that goes beyond recognition and frees the other from the debts of the past.

Clearbrook's case was another example of healing as the grieving process in its many phases and downfalls, its fragility and progression. It was not a healing done by magic, but complicated by magic, evoking the same kinds of doubts and pain as in deciding between technologically sustained life and euthanasia. Bereveament of a loved one, its shock, revengeful, and even murderous or suicidal aspects were ordered by the meaning she found in life and death. The hybridity of the of body and self holds the heritage of inter-species intermingling, a knowledge *and* ignorance that is self-strengthening. This is what Timmain, the High One who came to regard both Wolfriders and wolves as her children, demonstrated when she asked Clearbrook to “know what the wolf does not know... and knows”.

The chapter on Renewal revealed the pain that lies in the ethical responsibility, the gaining as losing. Cutter, Rayek, and Venka demonstrated how the other is forever beyond me – and how this relationship is conceived as time. In renewal in time, there is also continuity, brought by the healing vein of community and education. Perhaps even Rayek came to see that transcendence is worldly, rooted in our relationships with the unknown creatures we may call others, pets, companion species, or sometimes our own children. It is in relationships vulnerable to failings in which the self realizes itself.

The personal ecosophy that I have searched for through my readings of *Elfquest* emphasizes relational processes in which chaos, loss, and sorrow, are inevitable, bodily forces interacting and counteracting each other within communication. Levinas's thought enters in interesting concordance with postequilibrium ecology; one's relationship with other organisms and processes is not characterized by harmony, but asymmetry and instability. Still, the whole of naturalcultural systems may retain some kind of balance – in justice and comparison of different views. Nature is not the great nurturer, and neither are we humans, these beasts of the World of One Moon.

The Other contesting me gives me my meaning, my self which is a limited and responsible creature trying to respond to the needs of others that aggravate the more I provide for them. This is not an ego, but me, a “Here I am for the others” (Levinas 1981, 185). I doubt if I can ever be this me, in Levinas's sense, for his whole philosophy is a breakdown of being. But, I believe that in serious consideration of philosophy, personal and otherwise, and in the play with it – with texts, iconotexts, and contexts – one can relax from the will of murder and appropriation, and from the ideology of betterment and development that sometimes, it seems, is oriented toward exploiting and ruining the basis of material existence that we share with others. Comics act as mediators which engage their readers bodily, cognitively, metaphorically, and through the strategies of reading, be it identification or deconstruction. Still, the greatest wisdom is found in acting for the other, in clothing the poor, feeding the hungry, in giving one's substance to the use of the Other: the neighbor, the stranger – or perhaps the bacteria that devour me, the atmosphere that breathes the life in me, the machines that replace me, and the planet that shadows me, as the night.

When one enters a new environment, one begins an exploration, letting one's feet, eyes and thoughts wonder around, sensing the textures, spaces, and the traces left by others who have gone before, and others who are here with me – this explorer who becomes me when I approach another. Walking around in fantasy realm, passing on comics pages, is quite similar. Sometimes, in an exploring mood one does not know if there was a goal, if there is an ending to the going, and the environment, albeit familiar, is always changing, always goes further than what one can imagine or perceive. But one has to stop.

Reading comics in a philosophical frame has been an interesting challenge. There is a friction in the analysis: a constant doubting of one's interpretation, which has no meaning in materiality, and which has all its meaning in materiality. A questioning that unsettles the self in its fixity of meaning, and the politics of the self, is the very value of philosophy. This questioning, if one likes, is also both the artlessness and artfulness of art, entertainment, and communication, the pleasure of producerly texts.

Me and my fellow "greedy mind-readers" (Zunshine 2011, 116) have had great pleasure in reading ink and paper, or pixels on screen, as real people and real relationships. However, this pleasure reflects well-being as eudaimonia, a fulfilling of one's potentials, a self-realization that cannot be indifferent to another being. In approach and closeness to the other worldly actors, both enjoyment and wounding become possible. This is the basic ethical dimension that gives meaning to politics, science, and education. Abram (2010, 278) writes: "Our greatest hope for the future rests not in the triumph of any single set of beliefs, but in the acknowledgment of a felt mystery that underlies our doctrines." He means that we may learn to listen to our body's rapport with the world closer and closer, find our own individual voice and rhythm in communion with the voices of others. That is what I have tried to do, in listening to how my body-mind is alerted to fictional and real others in reading comics, this peculiar form of iconotexts. If there's any hope for "the little humanity that adorns the Earth", to quote Levinas's quaint phrasing (1981, 185), then it lies in imagination and our ability to question and challenge ourselves, be challenged by the other in sameness. This primacy of the absolute alterity of the other may help to develop further an ecosocially sound well-being, which should be the underlying purpose of politics and educational practices.

My study was only briefly able to touch upon ethics as the prime motivator of education, and the concrete methods of education of sustainability. However, these social and critical practices, where ethics inspire ecosocial well-being, would merit a thorough exploration. I encourage others to conduct empirical studies, for example drama in education, on how to use Levinasian ethics to inspire readings of popular culture and to promote environmental awareness and action. The ethical encounter with the personal, human Other can also be treated with skepticism, in challenging Levinas and considering the "human" more fluctuating, more entangled with companion species and less set in its mold than I was able to do in this study.

The face of the other puts me in danger. That is what I have experienced in reading *Elfquest*, a painful, yet pleasurable, questioning and searching for myself-in-relation, a quest in which no heroic deeds are done and the ultimate goal remains obscured. It is the joy of being immersed, like in the "now of wolf thought" as "being aware of nothing... ready for nothing... but what happens in the moment". It is sharing a sense of wonder that has a sensual, bodily quality. If I have learned something in the course of this study, it is that knowing as possessing fails us, but we cannot withdraw from our responsibility for others in this world. It is what sustains love for the other who can never be made my own.

I preceded this study with two quotes from another medium characterized by hybridity, immersion and engagement, from a role-playing computer game *Planescape: Torment*. They stress the importance of knowing oneself, the mystery of changing in the essence of mind and matter. If there can be found any sense or knowing of oneself, it lies in the act of saying, speaking and communicating, with its many layers of triteness, failure, appreciation, pain, love, and trust. This is the meaning of my last excerpt from Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* (1995, 232). Let it speak for you, as it speaks for me, of the ethical encounter with the Other and with the world.

They spoke no more of the small news of the Shire far away, nor of the dark shadows and perils that encompassed them, but of the fair things they had seen in the world together, of the Elves, of the stars, of trees, and the gentle fall of bright year in the woods.

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[OQ 2] “Raid at Sorrow’s End”
[OQ 3] “The Challenge”
[OQ 4] “Wolfsong”
[OQ 5] “Voice of the Sun”
[OQ 6] “The Quest Begins”
[OQ 7] “Dreamberry Tales”
[OQ 8] “Hands of the Symbol Maker”
[OQ 9] “The Lodestone”
[OQ 10] “The Forbidden Grove”
[OQ 11] “Lair of the Bird Spirits”
[OQ 12] “What is the Way?”
[OQ 13] “The Secret of the Wolfriders”
[OQ 14] “The Fall”
[OQ 15] “The Quest Usurped”
[OQ 16] “The Go-Backs”
[OQ 17] “The First War”
[OQ 18] “The Treasure”
[OQ 19] “Quest’s End Part 1”
[OQ 20] “Quest’s End Part 2”

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