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# Mythopoetic Imaginarium of J. R. R. Tolkien

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Митолошко-поетички имагинаријум Џ.Р.Р.

Толкина

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**Чланови комисије:**

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**Датум одбране:** .....

## Mythopoeic Imaginarium of J. R. R. Tolkien

### Abstract

John Ronald Reuel Tolkien (1892-1973), Oxford professor of Anglo-Saxon and English Language and Literature, was a man who 'retold the cosmos' by inventing a new history of the world, thus creating the possibilities for a new future. It is a well-known fact that Tolkien felt aggravated by the loss of Anglo-Saxon mythology to oblivion – a fate that befell many other mythological systems. Where genuine historical sources cease to exist, Tolkien recognized a need for sources of a different kind, setting himself on a narrative quest for the forgotten ancient belief, aiming to recount the truth of man and world that also had to have been the goal of the original storytellers – those real or imaginary creators of myths, epics and fairytales. Just as he was a pioneer in the interpretation of Old English literature, offering the very first reading of *Beowulf* as epic of literary and not only historical merit, in publishing *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-55) Tolkien instigated a massive landslide, the debris of which is still at our feet: the establishing of epic fantasy as a new genre that confronts factual and fantastical history, blurring (and, as we shall attempt to prove, transcending) the boundary between the natural and the supernatural. J. R. R. Tolkien's mythopoeic cosmogony, in its grand scope and detail, enabled its creator to enter the modern era through the main gate, while the stronghold it has in fairytale and myth created a fairly unique phenomenon whose very structure defies accustomed modes of literary interpretation. The understanding of literature as fiction proves insufficient in disentangling Tolkien's intricate narrative weave – imagination must be apprehended as veracity in order to perceive the belief in spiritual truths that Tolkien felt mythology preserved and mythopoeia – being a creative act of narrative kind – revealed and brought closer. That is, within Tolkien's imaginarium, imagination is not shaped into fiction as much as creation is recognized as truth. Tolkien's entire opus serves as a certain apology of the fairy-story, that infinite supplier of beauty for this, and the other, world. Consequently, the main difficulty in critical reception lies precisely in the fact that Tolkien's works are permeated with too much 'Faërie' to be interpreted as novels and too much realism to be interpreted as fairy-stories. Therein we encounter another relevant question that

needs to be addresses, the role of the storyteller in the context of myth, both of ancient and modern times. The myth, which was once fact, now is only history, and it is upon us to examine whether, and to which extent, an ‘artificial’ creation can lay claim to imagination as the truth. To that effect, it is important to consider the fate of myth, especially in modern times, as well as the position of the artist who maintains not the mythic narrative but the mythic quality – the mythopoet as the modern mythmaker.

**Key-words:** J. R. R. Tolkien, myth, mythopoeia, fantasy, fairy-story, imagination

**Scientific Area:** Social Sciences and Humanities

**Scientific Field:** Philology

**UDC:**

## Митолошко-поетички имагинаријум Џ. Р. Р. Толкина

### Резиме

Оксфордски професор староенглеског језика и енглеске књижевности Џон Роналд Рејел Толкин (1892-1973), човек је који је „препричао космос,“ измишљајући нову историју света и отварајући могућности за нову будућност. Познато је да је Толкин био погођен недостатком „праве“ англосаксонске митологије – а слична судбина важи и за бројне друге изгубљене митолошке системе. Тамо где престају реални историјски извори, Толкин је препознао потребу за изворима друге врсте, и дао се у наративну потрагу за изгубљеном пра-вером, у циљу приповедања истине о човеку и свету коју су за наум морали имати и првобитни приповедачи – ти фиктивни или реални творци митова, епова и бајки. Као што је био пионир у тумачењу староенглеске књижевности па тако изнедрио прво читање „Беовулфа“ као пева од књижевног а не само историјског значаја, Толкин је објављивањем трилогије „Господар прстенова“ (1954-55) отпочео одрон чије смо лавине и данас сведоци: формирање епске фантастике као жанра који сучељава физичку и фиктивну историју па самим тим замагљује (покушаћемо да докажемо да и трансцендује) границу између природног и натприродног. Митопоетска космогонија Џ. Р. Р. Толкина, детаљна и обимна каква јесте, увела је свог творца на велика врата савременог доба, док је њено упориште у миту и бајци створило готово јединствен феномен, чија структура пркоси класичном виду књижевног тумачења. Разумевање књижевности као фикције није довољно да би се расплело Толкиново наративно клупко – имагинација се мора сагледати као истина да би се дошло до оне вере у духовне истине за које је Толкин сматрао да митологија садржи а митопоетика – будући креативни чин наративног типа – обзнањује и приближава. Односно, Толкинов имагинаријум није простор у којем се имагинација обликује као фикција, већ се креација препознаје као истина. Читав Толкинов опус као да је својеврсна апологија бајке као изворника истине и лепоте овога – и онога – света. Проблем критичке рецепције управо се огледа у томе што су Толкинова дела сувише бајке да би се тумачила као романи, а сувише романи да би се тумачила као (модерне) бајке. Ту се назире још једно релевантно питање

којим ћемо се позабавити у оквиру овог истраживања, улога приповедача у контексту мита, како древног тако и модерног времена. Мит, који је некад био истина, данас је само историја, а пред нама је да испитамо да ли и у којој мери једна „вештачка“ творевина може да положи право на имагинацију као истину. У ту сврху је важно сагледати судбину мита, посебно у модерно доба, као и положај онога који у животу одржава не митски наратив већ митски карактер – митопоету као савременог митотворца.

**Кључне речи:** Џ. Р. Р. Толкин, мит, митопеја, фантазија, бајка, имагинација

**Научна област:** Друштвено-хуманистичке науке

**Ужа научна област:** Филологија

**УДК:**



## Мифологические и поэтические фантазии Дж. Р. Р. Толкина

### Резюме

Джон Рональд Руэл Толкин (1892-1973) занимал должности профессора англосаксонского языка и английского языка и литературы Оксфордского университета. Это человек, который “пересказал космос,” изобретая новую историю мира и раскрывая возможности для нового будущего. Известно, что Толкин страдал от отсутствия “реальной” англосаксонской мифологии, но аналогичная судьба постигла и многие другие потерянные мифологические системы. Там где остановились реальные исторические источники, Толкин признает необходимость для других типов источников, и он начал поиски потерянной пра-веры путем повествования, с целью рассказа истины о человеке и мире, которые имели в плане и первоначальные рассказчики - эти фиктивные или реальные создатели мифов, эпосов и сказок. Толкин был пионером в интерпретации древнеанглийской литературы, так как породил первое чтение “Беовульфа,” как стихотворение от литературного и исторического значения. Публикацией трилогии “Властелин колец” (1954-55) начался обвал лавины, которую мы наблюдаем сегодня: создание Эпической фантастики как жанра, который противопоставляет физическую и фиктивную истории и таким образом стирает (попробуем доказать, что оно трансцендентальное) границу между естественным и сверхъестественным. Мифопоэтическая космогония Дж. Р. Р. Толкина, подробная и обширная, ввела своего создателя через переднюю дверь современной эпохи, а ее опоры находятся в мифе и сказке, создали почти уникальное явление, структура которого не поддается классической форме литературной интерпретации. Понимание литературы как фикции, не достаточно, чтобы разворачивался повествовательный клубок Толкина – фантазию нужно увидеть как истину для того, чтобы прийти к этой вере в духовную истину, за которую Толкин считал что существует в мифологии, а метапоэтика – как будущий творческий акт повествовательного типа, раскрывается и приближается. То есть, фантазия Толкина не пространство, где фантазия формируется как фикция, но признается в качестве истинного творения. Весь опус Толкина

представляет своего рода апологию сказки как изначальной истины и красоты одного и другого мира. Проблема критического восприятия действительности выражается в том, что работы Толкина слишком как сказка чтобы интерпретировать их как роман, и наоборот слишком романы чтобы интерпретировать их как (современные) сказки. Есть проблески другого соответствующего вопроса, который будет рассматриваться в контексте данного исследования, а это роль рассказчика в контексте мифа, как древних так и современных времен. Миф, который когда-то был истинный, сегодня только история, но перед нами стоит вопрос в какой степени “искусственное” творение может претендовать на воображение как истину. Для этого, важно рассмотреть судьбу мифа, особенно в современную эпоху, и положение этого кто в жизни не только сохраняет мифический рассказ но и мифический персонаж – метапоэту как современного мифотворца.

**Ключевые слова:** Дж. Р. Р. Толкин, миф, мифопея, фантастика, сказка, фантазия

**Научные интересы:** Социальные и гуманитарные науки

**Специальные темы:** Филология

**УДК:**

*There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.*

*John, 1: 6-8 (ESV)*

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## List of Abbreviations

**Bio:** Refers to *J. R. R. Tolkien: A Biography* by Humphrey Carpenter (Houghton Mifflin, New York, 2000).

**BW:** Refers to *Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics* (essay) by J. R. R. Tolkien, in *The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays*, ed. Christopher Tolkien (HarperCollins, London, 1997).

**FS:** Refers to *On Fairy-Stories* (essay) by J. R. R. Tolkien, in *The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays*, ed. Christopher Tolkien (HarperCollins, London, 1997).

**HoMe** (I-XII): Refers to *The History of Middle-earth*, volumes I-XII, ed. Christopher Tolkien. For publication information, see list on pp. 19-20 and Bibliography.

**Hobbit:** Refers to *The Hobbit or There and Back Again* by J. R. R. Tolkien, with a *Preface* by Christopher Tolkien (HarperCollins, London, 2011).

**LotR:** Refers to *The Lord of the Rings* by J. R. R. Tolkien. Given that too many editions of the work exist, it is customary to refer the reader to Book and Chapter number (here used is the 1966 version of the text *i.e.* second revised edition).

**LT:** Refers to *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, ed. Humphrey Carpenter with Christopher Tolkien (George Allen & Unwin, London, 1981), cited here by letter number and page.

**MP:** Refers to *Mythopoeia* (poem) by J. R. R. Tolkien, in *Tree and Leaf* (Unwin Hyman, London, 1988), cited here by verse number.

**Sil:** Refers to *The Silmarillion* by J. R. R. Tolkien, ed. Christopher Tolkien (Grafton, London, 1992).

**Vice:** Refers to *A Secret Vice* (essay) by J. R. R. Tolkien, in *The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays*, ed. Christopher Tolkien (HarperCollins, London, 1997).

## PROLOGUE

*The entire Cosmos and in it a World; upon the world Man and all around him Art:* this is the situation of Life that intrigued J. R. R. Tolkien so deeply, the riddle he spent his entire life deciphering, and one to which he devoted most of his writings. This might seem odd to all those who consider Tolkien merely a children’s storyteller, although not all such interpretations are cast malevolently. After all, Tolkien did tell stories, stories of dragons and enchanted forests, stories of evil and magic, stories of heroes and quests – and some of these were in fact written *to* children, including, most notably, *The Hobbit*. Yet, beneath these symbols that Tolkien either borrowed directly from or at the very least immersed into his beloved *Faërie*<sup>1</sup> (naive as they may seem, although selected rather purposefully and precisely because some of their “childlike” qualities), beneath the mythological (mythopoeic) patterns, lies a philosophical, metaphysical and theological quest, begotten by the cosmic riddle of being, deeply entwined with matters of art and the creating potential of the human mind, especially that of its most elusive faculties: *fantasy-weaving*. Armed with fantasy, Tolkien quickly realized that he had been faced with no ordinary riddle; Man may have solved the riddle of the Sphinx once long ago – by being the answer, but the sacred riddle game was far from over. Humbled before the great Riddle of Life, Tolkien recognized that this particular riddle did not depend on knowing the right answer but on asking the right question. In fact, the answer was already there; Life itself was both the answer and the condition – the human condition and the condition of play.

For Tolkien, the quest for the question had indeed turned out to be one long game of “Riddles in the Dark,” as holds the title to Chapter V of *The Hobbit*. Yet, Tolkien had knowingly set out into the darkness, tunneling and feeling his way through the narrow murky corridors and secret passages of the fantasy-weaving mind, toward the World of Story (since both questions and answers are inevitably stories). There, in the riddling dark, he found himself not up against a Sphinx but up against a Gollum, a peculiar little creature with a peculiar secret (and a magical Ring in his pocket!), one nasty-looking

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<sup>1</sup> Tolkien’s preferred spelling of Fairy/Faery, representing the entirety of the fairy-story world, and ultimately Fantasy itself.



yet riddle-loving fellow, almost entirely eaten away by the treacherous darkness, yet one who had not forgotten something sacred:

For one thing Gollum had learned long, long ago was never, never, to cheat at the riddle-game, which is a sacred one and of immense antiquity.<sup>2</sup>

What was it about this riddle that made it thus important in Tolkien's constellation of things and powerful enough to outweigh the darkness? Tolkien delivered this insight, rather than answer, through an equally riddling, long and open (unfinished!) account of the world (and upon it man, and around him art); brewed in languages known and unknown; carved in the likeness of those ancient storytelling formulae that long ago gave utterance to the sacred mystical alliance of fantasy and truth (from myth to fairy-story and unto history); shaped upon a labyrinth of philosophical, metaphysical and theological tunnels, through the vast expansion of which he traced the sacred thread of creation and the vitality of its presence within the nature of world, man and art.

Perhaps such an insight would have resounded far less passionately in the modern mind had Tolkien theoretically or polemically raised these questions in academic spirit or had he framed his deliberations into any of the more likely literary styles, especially bearing in mind that the maiden period of modern literature abounded in likely and unlikely forms, christened by a variety of fresh perspectives on the nature of the (modern) world. Yet, Tolkien opted for a profoundly peculiar path, one which provoked a deeply passionate response both from the reading public and the critical body, giving way to an inundation of unconcealed emotion – for it is emotion, and usually very strong emotion, that guided not only the readers (somewhat more expectedly) but also the critics of both disposition. Such a deluge created in its course a massive rift between the opposing poles of understanding and approaching Tolkien, a riddle in itself that amounted to a veritable cultural phenomenon. There was something profoundly

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<sup>2</sup> Anderson, Douglas A., ed.: *The Annotated Hobbit*, Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 2002, p. 128, note 25. This particular passage is taken from Chapter V “Riddles in the Dark” (§68) of the original 1937 edition of *The Hobbit*, as supplied by Anderson. The Chapter became somewhat infamous as it suffered considerable alterations when Tolkien revised *The Hobbit* in 1951 in order to provide a more suitable linking to *The Lord of the Rings*, which was originally intended as its sequel. In the subsequently edited versions the sentence reads: “He knew, of course, that the riddle-game was sacred and of immense antiquity, and even wicked creatures were afraid to cheat when they played at it” (*Hobbit*, p. 75). For a detailed discussion of the textual history and the changes and alterations see: Rateliff, John D.: *The History of The Hobbit. Part I: Mr. Baggins. Part II: Return to Bag-End*, HarperCollins, London, 2007.

indigestible about this man – and his story – that the modernist academic framework simply could not tolerate. At the same time, it was something that the readers found indispensable. At the heart of both lay precisely that which Tolkien discovered in the darkness, which he brought to light in the fullest peculiarity of its shape.

The secret sanctity that Tolkien recognized in the shadows of those murky corridors was sanctity of an indeed peculiar nature. It was the sanctity of fantastic creation. Surely, this discovery was but recognition for Tolkien, who had been a traveler through the *Perilous realm* (of fantasy), since his earliest days. From the time when he was a young boy, Tolkien had wandered through the enchanted lands, not as a trespasser, as he once asserted all men were, but as a keen observer and avid listener, profoundly captivated by the beauties of sight and sound that blazed before him. Myths and fairy-stories called out to him and Tolkien surrendered to their enchantment gladly. He may not have been aware of it then, but the Doom of Storytelling had already befallen him. Hardly surprising, Tolkien wrote his first story at the age of seven. It was a story about a dragon. In fact, it was a story about a *green great dragon*! Yet, another wonder struck young Tolkien at this point. He was riddled to learn from his mother that you could only have *great green dragons*, but not *green great dragons*.<sup>3</sup> Why not, he wondered! Besides, why was such a creature even called a *dragon*, or *green* for that matter? He was as enchanted as he was bewildered, by the sheer *beauty of words* – even the plainest of them – and by the power words held over the story owing to the inner workings of language. As Tolkien would himself pen down years later:

It was in fairy-stories that I first divined the potency of the words, and the wonder of things, such as stone, and wood, and iron; tree and grass; house and fire; bread and wine.<sup>4</sup>

Certainly, the young wanderer had decades of journeying through the darkness before he would stumble upon Gollum (both the *creature* and the *word* itself) and chance upon the magical Ring; there were multitudes of questions to ask, and plenty more wonders to suffer, before he would become the Bard of Story we know of today. This was but the beginning of the road for the man who would ultimately retell the

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<sup>3</sup> *LT* 163, p. 229.

<sup>4</sup> *FS*, p. 147.

entire Cosmos, in pursuit of the truth that he believed to be hidden within the realm of Fantasy.

For Tolkien, the man who came to understand his art not as creation but *sub-creation*, a recognition rather than invention, and ultimately, even – redemption, the fantasy world (story world) was holy ground. Tolkien's entire being thrived on stories, these pearls brought from the other side, unearthed in the deeps of one of mankind's oldest treasure troves, where strange secrets lay. It would only be fair to say, as the subtitle to *The Hobbit* divulges, that Tolkien made a lifelong tradition out of travelling *there and back again*, into Faërie and back, each time bringing more pieces of fantasy into reality – and vice versa; while delivering extensive writings, maps, charts and illustrations, as journals and testimonies to these travels.

Yes, the story of John Ronald Reuel Tolkien is the story of the Man who retold the Cosmos, the Storyteller who re-enchanted the World, the Gardener (and Guardian) of Fantasy. It is a story about a man who in the age of giants chose to be but a small creature, a *hobbit*; in the vast expanses of great literature, a mere storyteller – yet, a storyteller with a peculiar secret, one who despite the surrounding dark had not forgotten something sacred. The literary 'battlefield' upon which Tolkien raised his narrative tent was the field of fairy-story, seemingly the most unlikely candidate to be a channel of modern literary communication and a peculiar turf indeed upon which to place one's reflections regarding aesthetic, moral and religious values as expressions of the inner life of the being. Yet undoubtedly for Tolkien, quite like the riddle game, the fairy-story itself was a sacred form of immense antiquity. In it Tolkien saw reflected most clearly the universal truths recognized long ago, creational principles that had set the stage for the unraveling of the drama (and the riddle) of Life. Most importantly, within the fairy-story he found cherished precisely that which was nearly forgotten or abandoned under what he perceived as the shadow of the rising artificiality of modern life: genuine unbridled joy inherent in the hope that by upholding sacred principles the gloom of the shadow can be pierced by inner light of virtue.

G. K. Chesterton once so aptly noted, in a rather similar vein, that children needed fairytales not to tell them that dragons exist, since children already knew this, they needed fairytales to tell them that dragons could be defeated:

Fairy tales do not give the child his first idea of bogey. What fairy tales give the child is his first clear idea of the possible defeat of bogey. The baby has known the dragon intimately ever since he had an imagination. What the fairy tale provides for him is a St. George to kill the dragon.<sup>5</sup>

Whether disenchanted adults also needed to be reminded of the existence of dragons before they could realize how these could be defeated (and how the shadow could be lifted) is an entirely different matter, one that Tolkien implicitly addressed throughout his Saga<sup>6</sup> (at times more explicitly within his essayistic writings), especially with regard to the process of rationalistic disenchantment that thrived within modernity, cradling a sense of overall embitterment and world-weariness that invariably proclaimed hope a senseless and a childish venture. And although Tolkien's search for things lost and forgotten operated on a number of different levels, and called upon an equally abundant variety of fairy-story aspects that warrant attention in their own right, it is undeniably the vision of Hope – what Tolkien recognized and labeled as the “eucatastrophe” of fairy-story – that he sought to re-forge most fervently, one he felt was abating in the Age of the Machine.

And I was there led to the view that it [eucatastrophe] produces its peculiar effect because it is a sudden glimpse of Truth, your whole nature chained in material cause and effect, the chain of death, feels a sudden relief as if a major limb out of joint had suddenly snapped back. It perceives [...] that this is indeed how things really do work in the Great World for which our nature is made.<sup>7</sup>

Indeed, Tolkien was a lifelong fellow of both myths and fairy-stories, and, in his mind, their potency was neither in collision with truth nor with fantasy, for he saw them (and used them) as fantastic and sacred relics of imagination, mystical ingredients comprised of universal truths of old. Like the adjoining pieces of Tolkien's Saga, these ingredients also became indivisible, and it is with difficulty that one might ascertain

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<sup>5</sup> Chesterton, G. K.: “The Red Angel” in *Tremendous Trifles* (Ch. xviii), Methuen & Co., London, 1909, p. 130.

<sup>6</sup> The term “Saga” is Tolkien's own favored expression, meant to imply a unity between (in story, not publication, order): *The Silmarillion*, *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. Tolkien believed these to be intricately related pieces that make up one single and indivisible story. This notion will be discussed at length in Chapter 1 (esp. in: 1.2. *The One Saga*).

<sup>7</sup> *LT* 89, p. 116.

where myth becomes legend, where legend becomes fairy-story, or how they all fuse into the riddle of Tolkien's imaginarium, weaving fantasy to yield truth, and weaving truth to yield fantasy.

We have come from God [...] and inevitably the myths woven by us, though they contain error, will also reflect a splintered fragment of the true light, the eternal truth that is with God. Indeed only by myth-making, only by becoming a 'sub-creator' and inventing stories, can Man aspire to the state of perfection that he knew before the Fall. Our myths may be misguided, but they steer however shakily towards the true harbour, while materialistic 'progress' leads only to a yawning abyss and the Iron Crown of the power of evil.<sup>8</sup>

Indeed, it was there in the dark, in the shadows of the *Perilous realm*, home to Fairy-world, that J. R. R. Tolkien discovered a flickering light, and through it gleaned at what he believed to be a refraction of an old sacred truth, one he recognized as a distant memory, trapped under the rubble of civilizational growth and nearly forgotten to the artificiality and disillusionment, which revealed a certain sickness behind ideas of modern progress. This memory indeed belonged to the long ago; not only to the past, although it once lived in the ideas of the ancients, but to 'the before', the time when myths and legends shaped the world, forging belief on the inseparable blend of fantasy and truth.

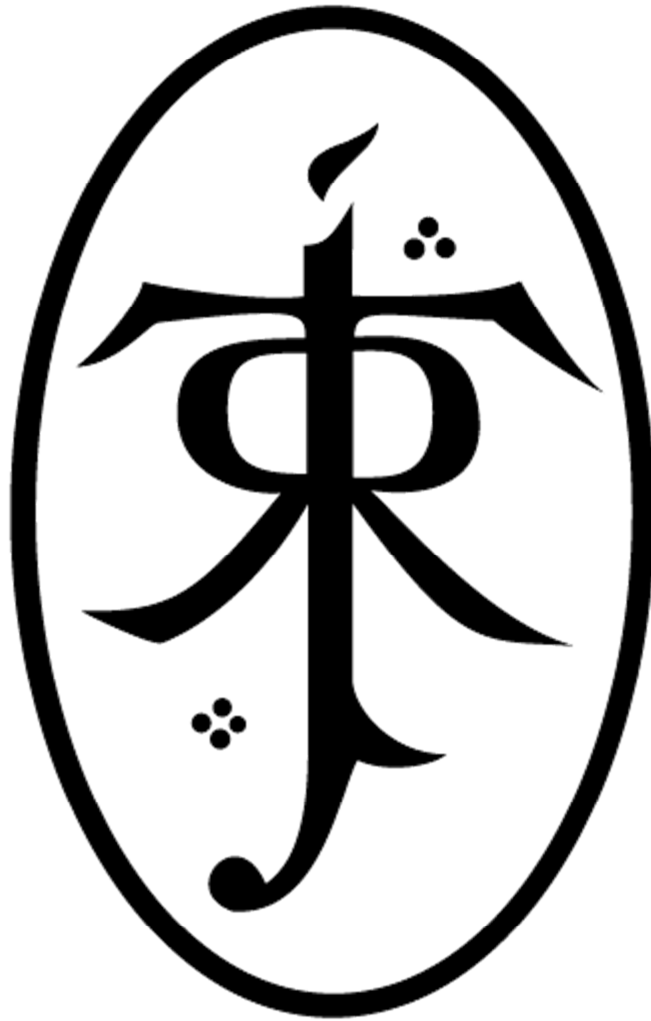
As Tolkien followed the enchanted light, it gave rise to an entire cosmos, the fantastic reality of Tolkien's vision in the grand scope of its shape, one he would develop in its many facets throughout his adult life, within what he deemed an act of sub-creation, man's right – and duty – to create by the law of his own Creation.

*Though all the crannies of the world we filled  
with Elves and Goblins, though we dared to build  
Gods and their houses out of dark and light,  
and sowed the seed of dragons, 'twas our right*

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<sup>8</sup> *Bio*, pp. 197-198.

*(used or misused). The right has not decayed.  
We make still by the law in which we're made.<sup>9</sup>*



**Figure 1: The monogram of J. R. R. T.**

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<sup>9</sup> *MP*, vv. 65-70.

## INTRODUCTION

For the purpose of setting forth our story of J. R. R. Tolkien (personal as it must be, since without personal investment no story can be told, and since a certain personal literary appetite invariably dictates the choice of topic to present as one's doctoral thesis – and objective as it must be, given the nature of the work in question and equally in the intention to propose a reading of Tolkien which could, hopefully, objectively prove that Tolkien's literary endeavors, elucidated by his essayistic reflections and lifelong development of theories of myth and fairy-story *in vivo*, are well worth of academic attention and deserving of the new mythology they have created), I shall allow myself to offer a brief personal explanation and background to my involvement with Tolkien, before we move to the questions our quest intends to raise.

As a child, I possessed what is best described as a voracious *appetite for marvels*, an 'affliction' I later discovered Tolkien had also been 'suffering from'; although this was a suffering that brought little save for profound joy to me, invariably coloring my view of the world. Insatiably, I wolfed down anything that had even the remote sense of Faërie present, all sorts of myths and legends from different parts of the world, and certainly, fairytales. Most of all, I was drawn to the many fantastical creatures, mermaids, unicorns, centaurs, the Cerberus, the Phoenix, the Firebird. For a long time the most precious book in my collection was Jorje Luis Borges' *Manual de Zoologica Fantastica*. The original Spanish title is much closer to the Serbian translation which still occupies an important place on my shelf: *Priručnik fantastične zoologije*.<sup>10</sup> When years later I discovered that in English this title read "Book of Imaginary Beings" I was nearly heartbroken – and close to insulted – there *is* a profound difference between fantastic and imaginary! The first of the creatures there mentioned, as they were recorded alphabetically, was "A Bao A Qu" whose name I enlisted my mother into helping me pronounce, for I wanted it 'done right' (I later spent hours practicing the pronunciation of his name). The sad fate of the poor A Bao A Qu, creature whose skin

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<sup>10</sup> Borhes, Horhe Luis: *Priručnik fantastične zoologije*, prev. Ivan Ott, Znanje, Zagreb, 1980.

felt like peach fuzz when touched, spoke to me deeply, in mysterious (yet not unfamiliar) languages, and I re-read this page-long story more times than memory now permits me to record. Not once did it fail to bring me to tears. From Borges I learned that A Bao A Qu lived from the beginning of time at the bottom of the staircase of the “Tower of Victory in Chitor,” a place just as fantastical to me as A Bao A Qu himself. From the top of this tower, one could see the most beautiful landscape in the world, but only those of purest spirit managed to climb all the way up. The fate of the poor A Bao A Qu was sadly tied to the success of the climbers: sleeping, invisible, at the bottom of the steps, A Bao A Qu would awaken only when a climber would start his journey, following him up the stairs. As the climber would progress upward so would A Bao A Qu gain color and substance, giving out a faint blue light. But, the imperfect climbers, failing to achieve purity of soul that casts no shadow, would get stuck half way up, and this meant ultimate suffering for the poor A Bao A Qu, who would them himself, half formed and unfulfilled, fall back down to the bottom, giving out but a soft whimper, his life, and light, quenching. So gentle was his cry that it would sound like the rustling of silk. Alas, the last sentence said that the poor A Bao A Qu ever managed to reach the top of the stairs only once! This caused such tremor inside my soul that I wished more than anything to climb up those stairs somehow, just so that the poor A Bao A Qu could live. Oh, how I wished to touch his peach-fuzz skin, and tell him there is hope yet for a pure heart!

Then I ‘met’ Tolkien, at the age of twelve, when my father gave me *The Hobbit* in Serbian translation,<sup>11</sup> with the words, “you should definitely read this, you know, this man invented an entire *cosmogony* of his own.” I had, of course, absolutely no idea what a *cosmogony* was, nor did I want an explanation. The *sound* of the word itself was more than enough to convince me this man had somehow mapped out a road I was destined to take, the possibilities arising from its very utterance revealing precisely an entire enchanted cosmos. Interestingly, my father no longer remembers ever having said those words, but those fateful words I shall never forget. I disliked, and still do, the illustration on the cover<sup>12</sup> that portrayed the back of a mounted figure (I simply could not fathom why somebody would draw the back of a ‘hobbit’ when I wanted to see

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<sup>11</sup> Tolkin, Dž. R. R.: *Hobit*, prev. Milan & Mary Milišić, Nolit, Beograd, 1975.

<sup>12</sup> Illustration by Bojan Bem.



fantasy up front). However, when I opened the book I saw there was a *map* attached to it, and I instantly knew it would take me exactly where I wanted to go, through a magical door, into the heart of fantasy and back. And it did. After reading *The Hobbit*, I needed no persuasion to turn to the Serbian translation of *The Lord of the Rings*<sup>13</sup> shortly thereafter. Both as a reader and as a translator, I believe now – or rather feel – this is one of the best examples of translating genius (both craft and inspiration wise) that ever occurred in Serbian language, (sadly, such a fate was not in the cards for many of the subsequent translators of Tolkien<sup>14</sup>). There is no saying what would have happened had the translation failed me, whether I would have eventually reached for the original after all or would have simply turned away from the path of Tolkien, disenchanted. Fortunately, I never had to make such a choice. *The Lord of the Rings* spoke to me just like Borges' story of A Bao A Qu once did, in new mysterious languages. These were, naturally, the languages of the soul, less unknown than one might expect. Surely this was a concept more easily acceptable by a child, unburdened by adult interpretations of fantasy, language, or of soul – which by no means stands to imply they are confined to children, or that they *should* be confined to children, quite the contrary (as Tolkien proved to me then, and continues to prove to me today). Here was a story woven out of purity, woven out of *faith*, its themes of loss and sacrifice a reminder that every soul becomes at one point stuck somewhere along the staircase, its themes of fellowship, courage and perseverance in fact a formula for the climb up the tower (not the dark tower, but the *true* tower), its wars a testimony to the conflicts raging inside the human heart and mind, its beauty a *purifier*, its legacy of fantasy – faith in *reality*. My appetite for marvels had reached a *catharsis by enchantment* (I had not known then this was in fact not a catharsis but a *eucatastrophe*). Joy and sorrow overwhelmed me both at once, and I wept, I wept because my soul had remembered its fairytale home, and I wept tears of gratitude – to the storyteller who showed *me* there is hope yet for a pure heart!

I was therefore already a *faithful Tolkienist*, as many like me have come to be called, when in high school I arrived at the gates of *The Silmarillion*, this time in

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<sup>13</sup> Tolkin, Dž. R. R.: *Gospodar prstenova*, prev. Zoran Stanojević, Nolit, Beograd, 1981.

<sup>14</sup> One exception is surely Nevena Pajović's translation of the poem *Mythopoeia* (tr. *Mitopeja*), published in: Tolkin, Dž. R. R.: *Drvo i list*, prev. Nevena Pajović, SKZ, Beograd, 1993.

original English (a book I acquired by ‘fortunate circumstance’). The opening story: an account of Creation! God speaking to the beings he had created out of his thought, not in words but in *melodies*; Fantasy taken to an entirely new level; Myth fully brought to life. Finally, I realized what my father had meant when he told me that a man had created an entire *cosmogony*. Every myth and legend I had read up to that moment gained new meaning in light of this finding – mythmaking is not lost to the world after all! At this point, I decided to delve deeper and ordered a collection of Tolkien’s essays enigmatically entitled *The Monsters and the Critics* (a book not easy to come by at the time). I was immediately drawn to the essay *On Fairy-Stories* where line after line I found myself exclaiming (often aloud), “Yes! That’s *exactly* how it is!” One piece of the puzzle at a time, I read Tolkien’s essays, letters, other short tales, and the *Unfinished Tales*. It was not until the turn of the millennium that I discovered Christopher Tolkien’s *History of Middle-earth* and alongside it, the already vast field of Tolkien criticism. I was as intrigued by the first as I was appalled by the latter – and both offered new vistas. The twelve volumes of Christopher Tolkien’s “History” provided a deep insight into the lifelong evolution of Tolkien’s creative genius, corroborating what I could only surmise from his essays and letters. The first two volumes struck a particular cord with me as they contained a work called *The Book of Lost Tales*, referred to in the “Forward” as the ‘distant forerunner’ of Tolkien’s *legendarium*. I finally understood why criticism so often portrayed *The Silmarillion* as an ‘artificial’ (or ‘imagined’) mythology ‘of England’, although I failed, and still fail (or rather *decline*), to agree both on the part of it being English and certainly on the part of it being artificial. In fact, I found a large portion of the existing Tolkien criticism to be simply venomous. Tolkien’s work was not only discarded, or ignored by the academia, disturbing as that would be, but was viciously attacked, often without any grounded argument (or any argument at all). As I came to realize, the epithet of artificial was in truth the mildest of the series of assaults ventured against Tolkien (another such mild yet to me equally incomprehensible assault was that his work was referred to as an ‘allegory’). Admittedly, as Tolkien had once risen to champion for myth and fairy-story (and for *Beowulf!*), other critics were (increasingly) rising to champion for him, yet some (though certainly not all) of these ‘defenders’ were disturbingly fanatical in their own excess of passionate reaction, often zealous to the point of drowning any real claim or argument just as readily. Lastly, it

was the defenders who ‘discovered’ allegory. Such defenses, I believed, were far more detrimental to the understanding of Tolkien’s work than the rise of the unfounded accusations laid against it. Notably, there *was*, and *is*, sound criticism in existence – Tom A. Shippey, Verlyn Flieger, Patrick Curry, Jason Fisher, Brian Rosebury, Michael Drout, to name only a few. Yet, these sound voices were often nearly suffocated by the maddening battle-cries coming from the pens of the warring factions (this has always reminded me of ‘the battle of melodies’ in the opening cosmogony of *The Silmarillion*, when a “loud, and vain, and endlessly repeated”<sup>15</sup> voice wanted to assert its own dominion over the harmony – which resulted in The Fall.)

Somewhere in between the enchantment and the outrage, I began fantasizing that one day I would add my own voice to the sound. If anything would ever be important enough to call my doctoral thesis, I thought as a teenager, it would have to be the work of Tolkien. Surely, this was *merely fantasy*, a juvenile dream, since my only *real* qualifications were my own intimate encounters with the myth- and fairy-world I had nourished since childhood, and the equally old sympathy I had harbored for the Middle-earth storyteller. (Yet, it was the sort of sympathy Tolkien harbored for the *Beowulf*-poet, not entirely neglectable, as in Tolkien’s case it allowed for an otherwise impossible *fantastic knowledge*, enabling him to go so far as to pinpoint, despite the lack of any *real* evidence, the precise “given” moment at which the imagination behind the *Beowulf* poem arose.<sup>16</sup>) Moreover, any attempt at academic involvement with Tolkien was certainly aggravated by the fact that Tolkien’s name, as one sound critic had put it, was “the kiss-of-death” in academic circles.<sup>17</sup> While this was uttered in reference to the British and American circles, I scarcely dared hope Serbia was an exception, with the situation concerning Tolkien being, if anything, more *obscure*, and the storyteller who enchanted me even more *irrelevant* (or at best, misunderstood). I therefore became greatly indebted to my English literature professor and doctoral

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<sup>15</sup> *Sil*, p. 17.

<sup>16</sup> *BW*, p. 20. Tom Shippey (to whom all Tolkien critics are indebted) explains Tolkien’s lifelong allegiance to *Beowulf* as “work [that] had always been something personal, even freakish, and it took someone with the same instincts to explain it. [...] This is not the terminology of strict scholarship, though that does not prove the opinion wrong” (Shippey, Tom: *The Road to Middle-earth*, Rev. and exp. ed., Houghton Mifflin, New York, 2003, p. 47)

<sup>17</sup> Curry, Patrick: “Tolkien and his Critics: A Critique,” pp. 75-139 in Thomas Honegger, ed.: *Root and Branch: Approaches towards Understanding Tolkien*, 2nd ed., Walking Tree Publishers, Zurich, 2005, p. 76.

mentor Zoran Paunović who had enough latitude of mind and benevolence of heart to enable me to pursue my dream – surely, a testimony to the fact that fantasy can be more than *merely* a juvenile illusion.

However, if Fantasy is not merely an illusion, idle work of fancy or simply invention (even if artistic), how do we define it? More precisely, how does it play into that correlation which Tolkien mapped out as the fundamental riddle – the relation between Art and Reality, Man and World? In Tolkien’s mind, clearly, it was Fantasy, both in relation to the Divine and in relation to Man, that provided the vision for the shaping of the World, and it was Fantasy that enabled Man to shroud himself in Art within the created universe. Quite naturally so, it was also Fantasy that opened the doors to Faërie, the perilous world of story, where *real time* met with mythical *before time* and the *once upon a time*, on the verges of which Tolkien encountered Gollum and discovered a riddling light in the darkness (and a magical Ring). In the presence of the Light of Fantasy, Tolkien stood awe-struck; not only was he profoundly enchanted by its sheer beauty and might (which alone could easily account for Tolkien’s lifelong allegiance to Fantasy), but more importantly, Tolkien stood firm in the belief that in gazing upon this mystic light he had in fact been blessed by glimpsing a refraction of an old and sacred truth, one that had been hidden or forgotten, or simply never yet told. Within the Tolkienian riddle of realities (the relation between the Primary i.e. material and Secondary i.e. artistic Plane of existence), Fantasy clearly has a pivotal role in the understanding of Man (and World), and yet to profess to hold a ready-made answer to its nature, or consequently the truth it held for Tolkien, would be as rash and perilous as cheating at a riddle-game.

### ***The Riddle of Interpretation***

Writing to Milton Waldman in 1951, Tolkien goes to great lengths to underline that his knowledge of fairy-stories and myths is not “learned,” while, as he continues via footnote, he did “think *about* them a great deal.”<sup>18</sup> This profound difference, in all its flamboyant inaccuracy – given that Tolkien was a very learned man indeed, *especially*

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<sup>18</sup> *LT* 131, p. 167.

in the matters of fairy-stories and myths – goes to the very core of understanding Tolkien’s view on the nature of these concepts, as vision spectrums that are not to be observed under the lens of science, but *felt*, by readers or listeners, in the depths of our beings, as echoes of a natural truth that does not suffer analytical vivisection. Tolkien also voiced this sentiment in his famous 1936 lecture on *Beowulf*<sup>19</sup> cautioning against the pitfalls of bringing investigative tools into a realm where fantasy is alive:

The significance of a myth is not easily to be pinned on paper by analytical reasoning. It is at its best when it is presented by a poet who feels rather than makes explicit what his theme portends; who presents it incarnate in the world of history and geography, as our poet has done. Its defender is thus at a disadvantage: unless he is careful, and speaks in parables, he will kill what he is studying by vivisection, and he will be left with a formal or mechanical allegory, and what is more, probably with one that will not work. For myth is alive at once and in all its parts, and dies before it can be dissected.<sup>20</sup>

Clearly, the ‘disadvantage’ of such defenses is the Tolkienian legacy that befalls our quest as well, given that *some* questions must be asked and some answers must be attempted. Indeed, an interpreter standing at the gates of Tolkien’s World is at a loss, his trepidation paralleled only by the joy he had once experienced approaching those very same gates back when he was but a humble reader-wanderer unburdened by the consequences that arise from any given study. Analytical criticism is the enemy of the delicate weave of fantasy; it is a big bag of tools, full of measuring implements, digging apparatuses and sharp swords. Its ‘clear-cut’ judgments *are* the death of Enchantment, and it is hardly surprising that it is not Grendel or the Dragon but *the critics* that Tolkien portrayed as the real monsters.

This is obviously the reason why Tolkien’s treatment of fantasy, and his favored narrative vessels of it: myth and fairy-story, was hardly ever academic. The existing exceptions, albeit in good measure, are several of Tolkien’s essays, originally conceived and delivered as lectures during the course of the 1930s, including the one on *Beowulf*

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<sup>19</sup> Tolkien’s *Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics* was the Sir Israel Gollancz Memorial Lecture delivered to the British Academy in 1936. In 1983 it became the titular piece to a collection of Tolkien’s essays edited by Tolkien’s son Christopher Tolkien.

<sup>20</sup> *BW*, p. 15.

and most notably two other: *On Fairy-Stories* (1939) and *A Secret Vice* (1931). Yet this is clearly a disproportionately small contribution from an otherwise great *scriblerus* whose ‘fantastic Saga’ on the other hand encompasses some million and a half words. Even more revealing is the fact that Tolkien’s academic quests, while insightful, are riddled with warnings. Fantasy dwellers are not too fond of trespassers, Tolkien solemnly declares at the very beginning of the essay *On Fairy-Stories*, rather neatly portraying the matter at hand. It is a bold enough venture for a man to wander Faërie, but it is “dangerous for him to ask too many questions, lest the gates should be shut and the keys be lost.”<sup>21</sup> A grim prospect indeed! Fortunately, Tolkien does not leave us stranded in the dark without a compass (or a map, in his accustomed fashion). Instead, he goes on to allow, almost reassuringly, that a certain benevolent level of ‘impertinence’ is however permissible (note that the warning addresses not questions altogether, but *too many* questions). Clearly, this coincides with the ‘careful’ treatment of myth that Tolkien professed in *Beowulf*, hinting at the existence of *certain* possibilities for elucidation. However, what Tolkien remains adamantly against is “using the stories not as they were meant to be used, but as a quarry from which to dig evidence, or information.”<sup>22</sup> Moreover, he complements this line of thought with a rather striking image, one that would come to haunt the minds of numerous interpreters venturing to approach Tolkien’s gate (or at the very least the careful ones):

In Dasent’s words I would say: ‘We must be satisfied with the soup that is set before us, and not desire to see the bones of the ox out of which it has been boiled.’<sup>23</sup>

Yet, Tolkien’s forewarnings, in all their grim vividness – one can nearly hear the roar of gates slamming shut, feel the stench of a rotting dissected carcass with its bones turned inside out – are not meant to deny one entrance, but rather to remind us that in dealing with fantasy it is only the disenchantment that is truly grim.

When the nine companions arrive at the entrance of Moria in Book II, Chapter 4 of *The Lord of the Rings* (chapter notably entitled *A Journey in the Dark*), they are

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<sup>21</sup> *FS*, p. 109.

<sup>22</sup> *FS*, p. 119.

<sup>23</sup> *FS*, p. 120.

baffled to find that the enchanted Doors are nowhere to be seen, and we are soon to learn that it is only the “eyes that know what to look for” that “may discover the signs.” Our own situation at the gate of Tolkien’s world is rather similar. Yet, knowing what to look for, even if we presume ourselves possessive of such worthy knowledge, is not the end of the trial. Finding the doors is one thing, but opening them is another.<sup>24</sup> To begin with, there is no key. Moreover, the doors cannot be opened by force. “From the inside you may thrust them open with your hands. From the outside nothing will move them save the spell of command.” The ancient elven inscription on the archway clearly corroborates this: “Speak, friend, and enter.” If you are a friend you will know the password, you need but say it and the doors will open. Nevertheless, the quest soon proves to be more difficult than imagined, as Tolkien tantalizes us with yet another riddle. While Gandalf tries “every spell in all the tongues of Elves or Men or Orcs that was ever used for such a purpose,” his vast knowledge eventually fails him. The doors remain shut. Of course, Tolkien *will* give us the answer, in all its startling simplicity:

With a suddenness that startled them all the wizard sprang to his feet. He was laughing! ‘I have it!’ he cried. ‘Of course, of course! Absurdly simple, like most riddles when you see the answer.’ Picking up his staff he stood before the rock and said in a clear voice: *Mellon!* [...] I had only to speak the Elvish word for *friend* and the doors opened. Quite simple. Too simple for a learned lore-master in these suspicious days.<sup>25</sup>

Indeed, the matter is simple, only a Faërie-Friend may pass through the enchanted doors, as Tolkien certainly was, and as many of his readers, and some of his critics, recognized themselves to be as well. In a sense, Tolkien philosophically, and even spiritually, aligned himself with Fairy-story and Myth, and they became his greatest allies, directing the *mythopoeic* course of his writings. Evidently, Tolkien had explored fantasy throughout his life, carefully shaping theories, or rather philosophies, of myth and fairy-story just as extensively, yet his preferred expression was not that of a learned man, or more precisely not that of a man learned in theory, but a man learned in enchantment. “To the elvish craft, Enchantment, Fantasy aspires,” Tolkien declares,

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<sup>24</sup> Of course, there is also the third instance. “The road may lead *to* Moria, but how can we hope that it will lead *through* Moria?” Aragorn asks of Gandalf (*LotR* II: 4, emphasis mine).

<sup>25</sup> *LotR* II: 4.

“and when it is successful of all forms of human art most nearly approaches.”<sup>26</sup> By one path or another, all of Tolkien’s writings, including the academic ones, pass through the enchanted realm. Even in his letters, the treatment of fantasy is intuitive rather than analytical. Ultimately, Tolkien revealed to us the *methodos* (in the ancient sense: *path*) for a journey through the very fabric of imagination, without which it is our reality that falls at a disadvantage. He equipped us for our quest not with dissecting instruments but with gifts of elven-kind, like *lembas*, the waybread, “more strengthening than any food made by Men.”<sup>27</sup>

Before Tolkien’s gate, we are called to identify ourselves: friend or foe, monster or defender. Tolkien recognized the beauty and power of both *mythos* and *poiesis* in *Beowulf*, and approached the *Beowulf*-poet as a defender of his myth incarnate; in our case, it is Tolkien the mytho-poet we endeavor to approach, and the world he *imagined* in order to incarnate his myth into it. Whether Tolkien’s fantastic myth needs any defense is a question to be raised in its own time, yet its incarnation, peculiar not only on the narrative, but *cultural*, level as well, certainly calls for a careful consideration of its *living* state. Ultimately, it is not a matter of asking questions, or even their amount, but their *nature*, and more specifically a matter of their accordance with, and respect of, the laws of Enchantment; certainly, the same laws apply to the expected, or unexpected, answers. Indeed, all of the concepts relevant to our quest, whether representative of Tolkien’s (sub-) creative process or the narrative embodiment of it, are riddled by the enchantment they are intended to invoke. Only when treated indissolubly from it they can tell their true story. In a sense, this is the great interpretational challenge, as there seems to be no *direct* approach to Tolkien: instead, one is bound to partake in the riddle-game the storyteller sets before us, and abide by its sacred ancient rules.

With this in mind, we enter the *mythopoeic imaginarium* of the British writer, poet, philologist and university professor John Ronald Reuel Tolkien (1892-1973), bard of ancient storytelling and mythmaker of modern time. *Mellon!*

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<sup>26</sup> *FS*, p. 143.

<sup>27</sup> *LotR* II: 8.



## *Treatment of Sources*

With respect to Tolkien's fiction, our quest is primarily concerned with the intricate narrative unity that Tolkien referred to as his great *Saga*, sundered through publication and other circumstance into three individual works:

*The Hobbit: or There and Back Again*, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1937 (second revised edition 1951).<sup>28</sup>

*The Lord of the Rings*, in three volumes, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1954-5 (second revised edition 1966).<sup>29</sup>

*The Silmarillion*, ed. Christopher Tolkien, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1977.<sup>30</sup>

One might easily speak of the publication-riddle that revolves around these manuscripts, or at the very least their very own publication saga, given that *The Silmarillion*, conceived back in 1914 and thus the initial piece in Tolkien's imaginarium (not only was it first to be developed, but its story effectively instigates that of the other two), was in fact the last part of the *Saga* to appear in print, four long decades after *The Hobbit* and two decades after *The Lord of the Rings*. To aggravate the matters of such a reversed publication, *The Silmarillion* appeared only posthumously as a work edited by Tolkien's son Christopher Tolkien, adding to the interpretational conundrum.

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<sup>28</sup> A second (heavily) revised edition appeared in 1951, and a third (lightly) revised edition in 1966. There are major differences between the first and the second edition, mainly as the 1951 version had been adjusted to the expected publication of *The Lord of the Rings*. While other editions subsequently appeared featuring error corrections and illustrations (by Tolkien and other artists), these were the only two editions overseen by Tolkien.

<sup>29</sup> The separation of *The Lord of the Rings* into three separate volumes was a matter of editorial division, which was never to the liking of Tolkien. The work initially appeared as *The Fellowship of the Ring: being the first part of The Lord of the Rings*, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1954; *The Two Towers: being the second part of The Lord of the Rings*, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1954; and *The Return of the King: being the third part of The Lord of the Rings*, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1955. However, the natural division of the work is into six Books with their Chapters, and this is the only division Tolkien ever truly forwarded. A revised second edition appeared in 1966 featuring extensive Indexes and a new "Forward." In America, the volumes were initially published in 1954-56, with the second paperback edition appearing in 1965 (and in hardcover in 1967). Numerous other editions are in existence today, as the publication drama around this work included copyright issues, production problems, printer's errors and various corrections by Tolkien that were implemented at various stages. In 2004, HarperCollins published its 50th anniversary edition with literally hundreds of corrections to the text and appendices.

<sup>30</sup> For the sake of clarity, we shall, by way of Christopher Tolkien, refer to the published work as *The Silmarillion* (in italics) while 'The Silmarillion' (in inverted commas) shall stand to signify the work in a more wide-ranging way, in any or all of its forms, of which there are several.

Nonetheless, the editorial undertaking enabled the text to appear in complete and cohesive form, which in turn allows for linear unity between these three pieces.

Yet, the living state of Tolkien's writings was actually far from cohesive at any given moment: while Tolkien essentially devoted his life to the shaping of one story-world, the many details that went into its making suffered constant revision and, naturally, expansion. In 1980, Christopher Tolkien began publishing the numerous fragmentary and often divergent texts, interlinked by his own commentary, providing a particular narrative extension to the main body of the Saga and a history of the creation of Tolkien's fantastic world. These inevitably come into our story as well, as supporting narrative sources and background to the main literary pillars of Tolkien's imaginarium:

*Unfinished Tales of Numenor and Middle-earth*, ed. Christopher Tolkien, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1980.

*The History of Middle-earth*, volumes I-XII:

- I. *The Book of Lost Tales, Part I*, ed. Christopher Tolkien, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1983.
- II. *The Book of Lost Tales, Part II*, ed. Christopher Tolkien, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1984.
- III. *The Lays of Beleriand*, ed. Christopher Tolkien, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1985.
- IV. *The Shaping of Middle-earth*, ed. Christopher Tolkien, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1986.
- V. *The Lost Road and Other Writings*, ed. Christopher Tolkien, Unwin Hyman, London, 1987.
- VI. *The Return of the Shadow*, Christopher Tolkien, Unwin Hyman, London, 1988.
- VII. *The Treason of Isengard*, Christopher Tolkien, Unwin Hyman, London, 1989.
- VIII. *The War of the Ring*, Christopher Tolkien, Unwin Hyman, London, 1990.
- IX. *Sauron Defeated* ed. Christopher Tolkien, HarperCollins, London, 1992.
- X. *Morgoth's Ring*, ed. Christopher Tolkien, HarperCollins, London, 1993.
- XI. *The War of the Jewels*, ed. Christopher Tolkien, HarperCollins, London, 1994.

XII. *The Peoples of Middle-earth*, ed. Christopher Tolkien, HarperCollins, London, 1996.

On a par with Tolkien's narrative fiction, integral to our quest are collections of Tolkien's essays and letters, quite valuable to the observer as they not only bear witness to the vastness of the scope fantasy (and with it, myth and fairy-story) occupied in Tolkien's mind, but provide invaluable glimpses into Tolkien's fantastic designs:

*The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays*, ed. Christopher Tolkien, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1983.

*Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, ed. Humphrey Carpenter with Christopher Tolkien, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1981.

The final necessary piece in Tolkien's mythopoeic puzzle, in many ways key to the understanding of Tolkien's sub-creative process and treatment of fantasy, is the poem he wrote in answer to C. S. Lewis' remark that myths and fairy-stories are 'lies, although lies breathed through silver':

*Mythopoeia* (poem), in *Tree and Leaf*, Unwin Hyman, London, 1988 (second edition; the original 1962 edition does not feature the poem). Written in 1931 and first published in 1964.

Lastly, we turn to Tolkien's official biographer Humphrey Carpenter (also the editor of Tolkien's *Letters*) for the relevant biographical material:

Humphrey Carpenter, *J. R. R. Tolkien: A Biography*, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1977.

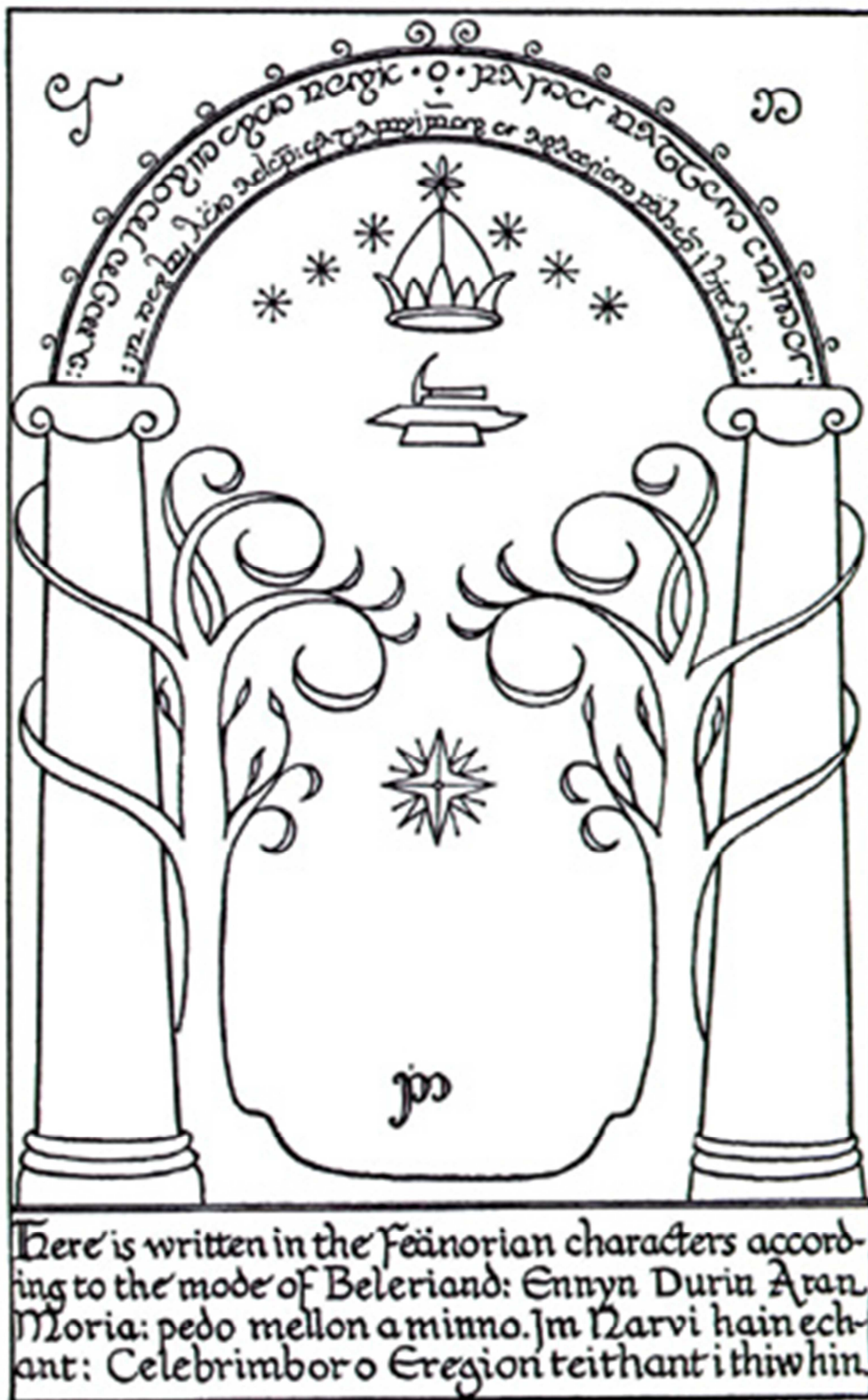


Figure 2: *The Doors of Moria* by J. R. R. Tolkien

# PART I: NOT MERELY STORIES

## Chapter 1: CREATING A WORLD

*It is written in my life-blood, such as that is,  
thick or thin; and I can no other.*<sup>31</sup>

To J. R. R. Tolkien stories seldom were *merely* stories, even if they were children's stories, and especially if they were fairy-stories. As Sam Gamgee would affirm in *The Lord of the Rings*:

I daresay there's more truth in some of them [fireside-tales and children's stories] than you reckon. Who invented the stories anyway? What of dragons today?<sup>32</sup>

Indeed, who was it that long ago invented myths, or the first stories of dragons? A question Tolkien must have asked himself a great number of times. Equally, it impels us to ask who and *why* invented the hobbits, and what is to be made of them, or the elves, *today*? Interestingly, Tolkien never felt himself to be the creator; in fact, he claimed he had rather *recognized* the stories than having simply invented them. Whether we take this literally or not, it is quite conceivable that the ancient mythmakers felt precisely the same way, in believing that they have recognized the (sacred) truth instead of *merely* inventing it. Clearly, what is implied here is that not all invention amounts to nothing but *falsehood*: fantastic invention can indeed reach beyond pure fabrication and enter the domain of *truth communication* instead. Tolkien pinpointed this thought with even greater precision in a fateful conversation with his friend C. S. Lewis when he pronounced that myths and fairy-stories are in fact *inventions about truth*.<sup>33</sup> This is what Tolkien was also doing, he was 'inventing the truth' through myths and fairy-stories,

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<sup>31</sup> *LT* 109, p. 141.

<sup>32</sup> *LotR*, I: 2.

<sup>33</sup> About the night of September 19, 1931 when the discussion took place, resulting in Tolkien's poem *Mythopoeia*, see: *Bio*, pp. 150-152 & *FS*, pp. 143-144.

and he called it *sub-creation*, a process in accord with the inner workings of *true imagination*.

Certainly, every truly artistic process rests on the creation – and application – of an individual system of symbols and language (language here representing a mode of communication, not necessarily consisting of words), and what this inevitably hints at is the existence of a certain personal *mythology* inherent in any work of art. In truth, every text is a *small cosmos* in itself and every writer the fantastic creator of a world. Yet, to bring the Myth to life, on its own, is a bold, and certainly rare, achievement of art (and equally rarely a successful one); to conjure up a Fantastic Cosmos on the vast narrative scale that J. R. R. Tolkien did – a literary phenomenon. It is hardly surprising that Tolkien's cosmogonic literary vision, crystalized by fairy-story and myth, eludes the precision of any common literary genre, and that its placement effectively remains an open question to this day – which is also perhaps one of the reasons behind such a curious critical response to Tolkien. Moreover, this is not only true of Tolkien's 'monstrous Saga' (his own expression) when taken in its entirety, since the positioning of its 'single pieces' proves an equally difficult task, at times even a more perplexing one.

When speaking in terms of the 'entirety' of Tolkien's Saga, this notion must be taken twofold. Before all, it should stand to unify the three intricately related pieces of Tolkien's great puzzle: *The Silmarillion*, *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* (as there can be no doubt these in fact amount to *one story*, that is, one unified Saga). But above all, it must envelop the full scope of the *imaginary reality* which it brings to life (which is why we have naturally assumed the term *imaginarium* to refer to this concept): not only an entire fictional world (immense as that would be in itself!) and not even only an entire narrative cosmos which holds that world and the creational drama which brings that world from God's vision into being, but a virtually incomprehensible literary detailing of life upon that world, followed through with such minute precision that it simply confounds reason – extensive records of the passing of imaginary time and its successive retelling, the imaginary world's 'factual history' from the moment before it was made across the world's envisioning and finally to its physical shaping together with the world's mythology (*i.e.* subsequently 're-told' cosmogony and legendarium),

ancient song and lore (where actual poems and songs are not only referenced but effectively ‘told’), the history of the visionary creation, ‘factual’ birth (arrival into the world) and detailed lives of several different races including Elves and Hobbits (Man equally imaginary as all the other beings!), individual stories of tragedy, adventure and romance, lengthy individual genealogies, hand-drawn maps of the fantasy regions contained in the world’s vast imaginary geography, covered by a rich tapestry of imaginary biology and supported by a system of fantastic linguistics that enclosed a number of *fully developed languages* (with the names of places, plants, animals and even individual characters often simultaneously provided in several of these languages), all carefully integrated into epic accounts of the wars of the world against the Shadow, in the effort to restore, and uphold, the Light. Certainly Tolkien was not the first to rely on artistic fantasy to *create worlds*, yet even from a brief outline it quickly becomes clear that Tolkien’s is no ‘ordinary’ fantastic world as we know them to exist in literature. If ever there was an imaginary venture that actually amounted to a *fully thriving fictional reality*, we have witnessed it in Tolkien. This is not only due to the ‘monstrous’ scope of Tolkien’s Saga, although the span and precision of its detailing are an undertaking *par excellence* in itself, but more importantly, due to the inner nature of the story. The fusion of imagination (or rather fantasy) and reality is executed to the fullest because they are continually treated as *narrative equals*: it is not only mythology that is ‘imaginary’, history is equally ‘fantastic’ and the two are counterparts to the same sequence of creational events; the Elves are no more ‘fictional’ than Men (did Tolkien ‘create’ both – or neither?); English language is just one branch of the tree of fantastic linguistics, just as ‘invented’ as all the other words.

The *living state* of Tolkien’s imagination based reality – and also one of the main reasons it defies genre categorization so compellingly – is furthered by the fluctuation of the narrative pattern which faithfully mirrors the life of the story itself: its cosmogony is told in the same high and serious tone with which man of old himself referenced the sacred; its legends are recounted in an authentically lavish and fabled manner; its history is chronicled in the antiquated air of genuine account giving; its journeys, adventures and quests are narrated in heroic structures; its romances are delivered with lyrical poignancy; its songs are written in genuine verse; its tradition, beliefs and lore are faithfully conveyed by way of ancient wisdom-telling. These do not

only exist side by side, they profoundly lean on each other and draw their existence from mutual tradition (thus, common source), which profoundly blurs the boundary between fictional narration and factual existence. For instance, the entire culture of the Elves, including the mythology of the world *as they retell it*, draws on its very own poetic tradition, one that dictates the mode of their treatment of reality and simultaneously contains actual historic evolution of its own narrative form. Not only does the Elven mythological legendarium of *The Silmarillion* nurture a profoundly poetic structure, which implies that its prosaic form essentially evolved out of its poetry,<sup>34</sup> but the poetry itself as the source of this tradition is also recorded. Thus we initially have the creational drama itself, followed by the Elven vision (effectively reconstruction) of it in the form of poetry, and out of the poetry the evolution of the legendarium, and based on the legendarium the fruition of customs which constitute Elven culture, which in turn dictates the course of their actions within the duration of time that establishes their history, and ultimately, the fabric of the story itself. This goes beyond the illusion of historicity within a work of art, and if we understand the Elves to be the embodiment of the aesthetic and artistic principles *i.e.* of fantasy itself, what we are faced with is the historic, narrative and rational evolution of the *achievement of fantasy*, or more precisely, the very process of imagination. “Therefore I say: *Eä!* Let these things *Be!*” With these words, Tolkien created a cosmos, and within it, the “World that Is.”<sup>35</sup>

### ***1.1. There and Back Again***

“In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit,” Tolkien felt compelled to write down one day, for no apparent reason. At that time Tolkien knew not who or what the hobbits were, or why they lived in holes for that matter, and it would take him years before he would venture to resolve that riddle. Yet, whether he knew it not, he was already enthralled by the story behind that one peculiar sentence. The sentence would not let the storyteller be; it was a riddle he had been entrusted with, a blessing from the enchanted

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<sup>34</sup> See: Nagy, Gergely: “The Adapted Text: The Lost Poetry of Beleriand,” pp. 21-41 in *Tolkien Studies: An Annual Scholarly Review*, Vol. 1, West Virginia University Press, 2004.

<sup>35</sup> *Sil*, p. 21.



realm, a glimpse into things far beyond the palpability of the student papers he had been grading in the hour upon which that fateful sentence struck. As Humphrey Carpenter documents in his official *J. R. R. Tolkien: A Biography*, Tolkien started *The Hobbit* without premeditation, in the midst of rating a set of student essay exams.<sup>36</sup> While Tolkien may have had no idea who the hobbits were, he knew well enough whence they came, and this was a calling he could not help answer. Sure enough, this became the first sentence to *The Hobbit*, a tale published by sheer matter of ‘fortunate circumstance’ and one that would ultimately allow for the uncovering of J. R. R. Tolkien’s imaginarium, although this would prove to be quite a lengthy and complicated process, superseding the natural life of the storyteller, and quite probably a task that will never be fully completed. Writing to W.H. Auden decades later, Tolkien recalls how it all unfolded:

All I remember about the start of *The Hobbit* is sitting correcting School Certificate papers in the everlasting weariness of that annual task forced on impecunious academics with children. On a blank leaf I scrawled: ‘In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit.’ I did not and do not know why. I did nothing about it, for a long time, and for some years I got no further than the production of Thrór’s Map. But it became *The Hobbit* in the early 1930s, and was eventually published not because of my own children’s enthusiasm (though they liked it well enough), but because I lent it to the then Rev. Mother of Cherwell Edge when she had flu, and it was seen by a former student who was at that time in the office of Allen and Unwin.<sup>37</sup>

*The Hobbit*, originally published in September of 1937 with the subtitle *There and Back Again* (by George Allen & Unwin of London), is an adventurous tale about a ‘hobbit’ Bilbo Baggins who gets rather reluctantly enlisted into a quest initiated by a group of dwarves in an effort to reclaim their lost homeland from a pilfering dragon named Smaug. On the course of the quest, Bilbo meets the creature Gollum and acquires a magical ring that would render him invisible (both of these significant events are part of the crucial Chapter V, “Riddles in the Dark”). And just like the adventuring hobbit Bilbo Baggins, whose life depended on asking the right question in a riddle-

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<sup>36</sup> *Bio*, p.175.

<sup>37</sup> *LT* 163, p. 229.

game, Tolkien emerged from the encounter with Gollum bearing a magical ring in his pocket, a trinket of unknown origin and yet to be established properties. Truly, when *The Hobbit* was first published, not even Tolkien himself realized what he had in his pocket or that this particular piece of ‘juvenile’ writing would become a small but crucial piece in the forming of a massive Saga, one that would ultimately bring to light an entire fictional reality.



Figure 3: *Thror's Map* by J. R. R. Tolkien, inner sheet to *The Hobbit*

In fact, by the time *The Hobbit* was published, Tolkien had already spent a good two-decade working on the compendium of legends we know today as *The Silmarillion*. Yet, although these tales were already well developed by 1937 (in fact, they were already written and rewritten several times over), knowledge of their existence was

mostly confined to the members of Tolkien's family and certain friends<sup>38</sup> – according to Tolkien's account<sup>39</sup> this latter category in fact included only C. S. Lewis and Elaine Griffiths.<sup>40</sup> The first 'public' mention of 'The Silmarillion' as such, occurred rather 'incidentally', in Tolkien's letter to *The Observer* of 20 February 1938, when in response to a reader's inquiry on the sources behind the *The Hobbit*, Tolkien replied:

My tale is not consciously based on any other book — save one, and that is unpublished: the 'Silmarillion', a history of the Elves, to which frequent allusion is made.<sup>41</sup>

Rather naturally, the success of *The Hobbit* urged Tolkien to consider, for the first time in two decades, the publication of his 'private' history of the Elves. His publisher Stanley Unwin (the chairman of George Allen & Unwin) was equally eager to continue the collaboration with Tolkien, although Unwin's vision of such continuance was rather markedly along the lines of publishing more 'hobbit material' – of which, of course, none existed. Nonetheless, Tolkien lunched with Unwin in November of 1937 to discuss the various possibilities for publication and accordingly sent him the manuscripts of some of the works that he did have, including the 'Silmarillion'. Yet Tolkien had been discouraged from pursuing the publication of such a complicated and lengthy manuscript that was, as Tolkien would later phrase it himself, "full of mythology, and elvishness, and all that 'heigh stile' (as Chaucer might say)."<sup>42</sup> Instead, Tolkien was urged by his publisher Stanley Unwin to produce a sequel to the more manageable *The Hobbit*, which in fact he intended to do in writing *The Lord of the Rings*.

However, as the story of *The Lord of the Rings* unfolded, Tolkien slowly came to realize what it was he had been carrying in his pocket ever since his encounter with Gollum. Whether indulging a secret vice, or answering a sacred call, Tolkien could not help but steer the story of *The Lord of the Rings* toward that same light that guided the

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<sup>38</sup> We say 'mostly' because the earliest written story "The Fall of Gondolin" (1916) was in fact read to the Exeter College Club in 1920.

<sup>39</sup> *LT* 15, p. 27.

<sup>40</sup> Elaine Griffiths of St Anne's College, Oxford, worked with Tolkien as a research student during the 1930s and had a part in the publication of *The Hobbit* (which is perhaps what also granted her access to the 'Silmarillion').

<sup>41</sup> *LT* 25, p. 39.

<sup>42</sup> *LT* 182, p. 256.

creation of 'The Silmarillion' manuscripts. The unidentified ring from the pocket of one adventuring hobbit Bilbo Baggins (and the light-hearted story of the dragon quest) had indeed proven possessive of magical properties – it eventually traversed the many steeps of *The Lord of the Rings* only to lead *there and back again*, that is, full circle back to 'The Silmarillion'! It was only then that Tolkien identified the 'ring' as the *One Ring* and realized what *The Hobbit* initially was, and simultaneously, where *The Lord of the Rings* truly belonged.

When those whose advice and opinion I sought [publishers, effectively Stanley Unwin] corrected "little hope" to "no hope," I went back to the sequel, encouraged by requests from readers for more information concerning hobbits and their adventures. But the story was drawn irresistibly towards the older world, and became an account, as it were, of its end and passing away before its beginning and middle had been told. The process had begun in the writing of "The Hobbit," in which there were already some references to the older matter: Elrond, Gondolin, the High-elves, and the orcs, as well as glimpses that had arisen unbidden of things higher or deeper or darker than its surface: Durin, Moria, Gandalf, the Necromancer, the Ring. The discovery of the significance of these glimpses and of their relation to the ancient histories revealed the Third Age and its culmination in the War of the Ring.<sup>43</sup>

And indeed, as Tolkien concludes in a letter to Stanley Unwin in 1947 (in reference to the initial draft for *The Lord of the Rings*), "*The Hobbit* was after all not as simple as it seemed."<sup>44</sup> Tolkien maintained that *The Hobbit* was but a single thread "torn rather at random out of a world in which it already existed and which has not been newly devised just to make a sequel."<sup>45</sup> Indeed, although the epic events of *The Lord of the Rings* were in fact glimpsed by that moment in the dark when Bilbo encountered Gollum and acquired a magical ring through a riddle-game, there were glimpses of things "higher or deeper or darker" still, and there was indeed a "world" to which both of these stories originally belonged, a 'legendary' narrative and linguistic ancestor and source: Tolkien's Arda.

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<sup>43</sup> *Forward to LotR.*

<sup>44</sup> *LT* 109, p. 140.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

Yet, while the central pieces of Tolkien's imaginarium published in his lifetime are the stories of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, the shorter and simpler first deeply connected to and effectively encompassed by the colossal later, in comparison to what had remained unpublished after Tolkien's death these are but the tip of the iceberg. Even the colossal saga of *The Lord of the Rings* itself is in many ways merely a thread torn "out of a world in which it already existed," although perhaps less "randomly," a single story (heroic legend and, at times, romance) placed under a magnifying glass, taken out of the legendary history of Arda, rightfully indebted to the original Creational Tale, though less directly than the ensuing mytho-legendarium of the then unpublished 'Silmarillion.' The riddle of things that could only be glimpsed passed with Tolkien's death onto his son Christopher, who then took it upon himself to continue the publication of his late father's manuscripts, beginning (though not ending) with *The Silmarillion* itself.

It becomes undeniably clear that *The Silmarillion* is the initial piece in Tolkien's imagination-puzzle, a fantastic cosmogony and legendarium of the Elven (or, in fact, Færy) race, the mytho-linguistic cradle of Tolkien's world, from whence would eventually come both *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. The conception of this great compendium of tales came hand in hand with an equipotent passion of Tolkien's, his *secret vice*: the invention of languages,<sup>46</sup> a variety of which came to be integrated into the stories from the onset, two Elven languages in particular: *Quenya* and *Sindarin*. The book opens with the creation of the first 'angelic' beings out of Divine Thought and the shaping of a world Tolkien calls *Arda* (which would ultimately hold the region of *Middle-earth* and the Blessed Land of *Valinor* beyond the western ocean). The cosmogony occurs in accordance with the vision that the Creator *Ilúvatar* reveals to the first offspring of his Thought, in preparation of the awakening of Elves and Men ('Children of Ilúvatar') upon the world. The story proceeds with the unfolding of the imagined world's history at the break of the First Age of the world, in the 'imaginary homelands' of Elves and Men, following various points of Incarnation and Fall of different creatures, beginning with the 'Initial Fall' in the story, that of the mightiest

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<sup>46</sup> The phrase "secret vice" originates from the title of Tolkien's essay *A Secret Vice*, written as a lecture in 1931, where Tolkien expounds on the notion of language-craft and the importance it held over his own life and being. Tolkien's 'invented languages' are *indissoluble* from the mythology; in fact they precede it, and in a certain sense even instigate it. This is further discussed throughout Chapter 7.

among the angelic beings – the birth of evil. Although *The Silmarillion* begins with two cosmogonic accounts that feature as individual narratives, *Ainulindalë* and *Valaquenta*, the main body of the book, or the *Quenta Silmarillion*, which Tolkien consequently referred to as the ‘Silmarillion proper’, is a collection of legends pertaining to the First Age of the world (otherwise called Elder or Eldest Days). Trailing the main legendarium are another two short narratives, *Akallabêth* and *Of the Rings of Power and the Third Age*, which deal with the events of the Second and Third Age, respectively.

Tolkien spent his entire life working on the compendium of legends that make up *The Silmarillion*, much before writing (and publishing) the other two pieces of what would become a unified great Saga. Indeed, he also worked on the legendarium much after *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* – endlessly rewriting it and adding new leaves to the tree, ultimately leaving it unfinished, to be published after his death as a book edited by his son. Yet, considering that it is through this mythic legendarium that Tolkien’s great Saga is initiated into its fairy-story life, *The Silmarillion* remains the *initial* piece of the imaginarium, regardless of its late edition. Ultimately, *The Silmarillion* opens and ends the entire Saga, as its concluding narrative *Of the Rings of Power* introduces and surmises events that occur both in *The Hobbit* and in *The Lord of the Rings* (the discovery and the destruction of the Dark Lord’s Ring). This is the reason why Verlyn Flieger, one of the most widely acclaimed Tolkien scholars, accordingly uses the term *Silmarillion* to reference the entirety of Tolkien’s Saga.

## **1.2. *The One Saga***

In a 1951 letter to Milton Waldman, a perspective publisher (from Collins Publishing) for ‘The Lord of the Rings’ and ‘The Silmarillion’ at the time,<sup>47</sup> and upon the request to provide “a brief sketch of my stuff that is connected with my imaginary world”<sup>48</sup> which turned into an all-but-brief some ten thousand-word long letter bordering on essay, Tolkien offered an invaluable account of his writings, the inspirational force behind it,

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<sup>47</sup> Tolkien was considering a new publisher, after having the entirety of the manuscript(s) initially rejected by his original publisher George Allen & Unwin.

<sup>48</sup> *LT* 131, p. 167.

the course of his own literary and philological development and the main views concerning concepts central to his work, most notably that of fairy-story and myth. This indispensable material, a genuine gift to the reader as well as decipherer, addresses with unambiguity one rather pressing point – the matter of natural connection and organic symbiosis between the two pieces in a great puzzle: *The Silmarillion* and *The Lord of the Rings*. Obviously, the understanding of this union is gravely hindered by the fact that Tolkien, although eagerly pursuing the publication of ‘The Silmarillion’ for decades, never lived to see it through. Many issues, necessary and unnecessary, arise when one is faced with the work edited by another, even when this other is a person so deeply entrenched in the subject matter, and so acutely aware of the author’s intentions, as Christopher indeed was.

As we have already stated, Tolkien initially started work on *The Lord of the Rings* as a sequel to *The Hobbit*. Yet, aside from the fact that in a chronological sense the story continued where *The Hobbit* had left off and featured some of the same characters (the hobbit Bilbo Baggins himself, the wizard Gandalf, the Elven-lord Elrond and the Necromancer who was now ‘revealed’ to in fact be the Dark Lord Sauron) the two works bore little resemblance in style or structure (and certainly also in volume). Tolkien intended *The Hobbit* as a children’s tale – although it certainly appealed to adults as well, including one of its first readers and Tolkien’s great friend C. S. Lewis. On the other hand, the crafting of *The Lord of the Rings* took Tolkien onto an entirely different plane of storytelling, one he himself had not fully expected, although had admittedly yearned for, that of a “heroic legend on the brink of fairy-tale and history.”<sup>49</sup> The manuscript went far beyond even an attempt at juvenile literature (indeed, why should fairy-stories only be fit for children?) and, as Tolkien soon came to realize, it in fact approached *The Silmarillion*, the cosmogonic mytho-legendarium he had been carefully devising since 1914 and which George Allen & Unwin had refused to publish in 1937.<sup>50</sup> Under constant pressure to come up with a sequel to *The Hobbit*, Tolkien

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<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> In many respects, the year 1937 had turned out to be crucial for Tolkien. *The Hobbit* was published on September 21, and almost immediately, in December that very same year, Tolkien had begun his work on *The Lord of the Rings*. At the same time, the manuscript of *The Silmarillion* received its first (and, sadly, not the last) rejection by the publishers. While reasons for this were many, one of the main obstacles was lack of perceived profit. This argument was later also applied to the publication of *The Lord of the Rings*, which was therefore greatly delayed. As Tolkien complains, the publisher Stanley

tried to explain to Stanley Unwin that *The Lord of the Rings* simply did not meet those criteria, as it was “not really a sequel to *The Hobbit*, but to *The Silmarillion*” and “[w]orse still: I feel that it is tied to the *Silmarillion*.”<sup>51</sup> Whether for better or worse, Tolkien came to regard these two works as *one whole*, and his dream was to have them published together. Sadly, this was not to be, and in his lifetime, Tolkien only saw the publication of the one ‘half’, *The Lord of the Rings* (and even that in the form of a tripartite disunion, which aggravated him deeply). *The Silmarillion* awaited four years after the death of its author to be finally published in 1977 (*four decades* after its first offer to the publishers in 1937) by Tolkien’s most beloved reader and critic – his son Christopher.

Of course, *The Lord of the Rings* was not a sequel to ‘The Silmarillion’ in a typical sense of the word (not any more than it was a sequel to *The Hobbit*), but it certainly was an heir to its tradition in an unbroken streamline. This was precisely the main reason behind Tolkien’s writing of such an extensive account to Waldman. It was Tolkien’s intent to demonstrate that the manuscripts were interdependent and *indivisible*, an issue which had already occupied much of his previous correspondence both with Waldman and Unwin (Unwin’s reluctance to publish them as a combined venture was the reason Tolkien was considering to transfer to Collins). Throughout the correspondence Tolkien referred to the manuscripts as one “whole Saga of the Three Jewels and the Rings of Power”<sup>52</sup> which had a “natural division into two parts (each of about 600,000 words): *The Silmarillion* and other legends; and *The Lord of the Rings*.”<sup>53</sup> Tolkien was adamant; he “was resolved to treat them as one thing, however they might formally be issued.”<sup>54</sup> As for Unwin, who was clearly dismayed by what Tolkien himself called the “monstrous Saga”<sup>55</sup> and would still not give up on the idea of a sequel to *The Hobbit* instead (since it was selling so well), Tolkien made a comment to

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Unwin simply saw “no money in it for anyone (so he said)” (*LT* 123, p. 158). Little did the publisher know that by readers’ choice *The Lord of the Rings* would turn out to be the book of the century and ultimately sell over 150 million copies!

<sup>51</sup> *LT* 124, p. 159.

<sup>52</sup> *LT* 125, 126 & 131, *passim*.

<sup>53</sup> *LT* 125, p. 161.

<sup>54</sup> *LT* 126, p. 162.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*.



Waldman: “I am very willing to turn out something simpler and shorter (and even actually ‘juvenile’) for him, soon.”<sup>56</sup>

It is not very difficult to accept that *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Silmarillion* are one natural whole, one massive and monstrous Saga, their fates tied together – but where does that leave the tale of *The Hobbit*? Although this juvenile tale was independently conceived – *at first*, the story told in *The Lord of the Rings* ultimately changed the fate for *The Hobbit* as well. Indeed, even though Tolkien would revise *The Hobbit* in 1951 in order to make the “linking” between *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* more effective (the yet unpublished *The Lord of the Rings* was fully written by that time), the ‘middle tale’ of *The Hobbit* was rather innately tied in with the two greater tales. *The Hobbit*’s natural ‘link’ to (and between) the other two works was effectively present from the beginning, though unrecognized at first even by Tolkien himself. Yet, it soon became undeniably clear to Tolkien that the middle tale of *The Hobbit* does in fact also “belong” under “the grasp of this branching acquisitive theme.”<sup>57</sup>

I did not know as I began it that it belonged. But it proved to be the discovery of the completion of the whole, its mode of descent to earth, and merging into ‘history’. As the high Legends of the beginning are supposed to look at things through Elvish minds, so the middle tale of the Hobbit takes a virtually human point of view – and the last tale blends them.<sup>58</sup>

Within the unified ‘Saga of the Three Jewels and the Rings of Power’, *The Hobbit* certainly has its own fair share, its own Middle-earth story and, equally, its own ‘tale of the Ring’. In fact, *The Hobbit* holds the crucial sequence, the discovery of the One Ruling Ring, which Tolkien himself would come to *discover* along with the wizard Gandalf (who would appear in all three works), after reading the fateful inscription upon the Ring, at that time in the possession of one entirely unsuspecting hobbit, Bilbo’s nephew Frodo Baggins.

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *LT* 131, p. 168.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

The Ring – made by the Elves in ‘The Silmarillion’ as one of several Rings of Power only to become infused by the Dark Lord’s being through trickery, found in the riddling dark by Bilbo Baggins in *The Hobbit* on his quest to slay a dragon, and ultimately destroyed through the valiant deeds of the Fellowship and the remaining free peoples of Middle-earth in *The Lord of the Rings* – thus represents a natural, though not sole, link between the three works, its ‘discovery’ a critical event for Tolkien, and for the fate of the whole Saga. Certainly, these works also diverge on various levels, but they come from the same world (each a unique leaf from the same Tree), and while their threads are painted differently, they interlace into a single mythopoeic weave. By distinguishing paths, each leads to the same core, taking the reader *there and back again*, like Ariadne’s thread that once led Theseus right to the heart of the labyrinth and back out – the labyrinth before us of course being Tolkien’s Arda. Strangely, few studies observe the works in unison (of course, criticism had two long decades to examine *The Lord of the Rings* before *The Silmarillion* would even appear in print) and even fewer observe *The Hobbit* at all. Yet, the critics’ tendency to favorize one over the other(s) seems to stem from a certain (all too natural) literary taste rather than neglect, or dismissal, of the embracing harmony that befalls these pieces. While each certainly deserves treatment in its own right, and can – at times even must – be pondered separately, only the view of a unified structure can reveal the subtle inter-fantastic weave and grant us a glance straight at the heart of Tolkien’s riddling cosmos.

Thus, we propose to approach the works in question, from the narrative stance of course, precisely as Tolkien had come to view them – as virtually uninterrupted passageways of a single account, pertaining to one long (monstrous) *Saga of the Three Jewels and the Rings of Power* (monstrous indeed, as between the three works combined there is nearly a million and a half words!). Certainly, we do not mean to imply by said approach that these works are tantamount; they are *not*, in fact, each is *sui generis* – which is precisely what makes their accord and interdependence so significant. At the same time, it must be noted that the sundering that occurred in the books’ publication consequently led to a reversal of their linear sequence, a ‘bending’ that must be set ‘straight’, with the chronological story order being: *The Silmarillion* – *The Hobbit* – *The Lord of the Rings*.

## Chapter 2: THE ROAD GOES EVER ON

*It's a dangerous business, Frodo, going out of your door... You step into the Road, and if you don't keep your feet, there is no knowing where you might be swept off to.*<sup>59</sup>

Opening *The Silmarillion* is the very source and narrative corner stone of the entire structure: the cosmogony that sets all of the pieces in motion, the Creational Tale *Ainulindalë*, thusly called in *Quenya*, the 'oldest' Elven tongue, or in translation to a more widely known language (in this case English) 'The Music of the Ainur':

There was Eru, the One, who in Arda is called Ilúvatar; and he made first the Ainur, the Holy Ones, that were the offspring of his thought, and they were with him before aught else was made. And he spoke to them, propounding to them themes of music; and they sang before him, and he was glad.

[...] Then Ilúvatar said to them: 'Of the theme that I have declared to you, I will now that ye make in harmony together a Great Music. And since I have kindled you with the Flame Imperishable, ye shall show forth your powers in adorning this theme, each with his own thoughts and devices, if he will. But I will sit and hearken, and be glad that through you great beauty has been wakened into song.'<sup>60</sup>

The first Fall in the story occurs almost instantaneously, introducing what will be an ever-present thread in the fabric of the Saga. Even as the Ainur sing before Eru, the mightiest among them, *Melkor*, begins weaving alien thoughts into the Music. Overwhelmed by the desire to wield the Flame Imperishable for his own devices, yet unable to find it, Melkor succumbs to pride and bitterness, bringing chaos into the harmony of song. Discord arises about him in the Timeless Halls and some of the other Ainur yield to his might, adjusting to his rebel tune, until a violent war of melodies breaks out before the Throne of Ilúvatar. In response, Ilúvatar declares a theme through which he announces the birth of Elves and Men (Children of Ilúvatar). The nature and making of the Children remain entirely hidden from the Ainur, as something wholly

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<sup>59</sup> *LotR*, I: 3.

<sup>60</sup> *Sil*, p. 15.

‘other’ from them, which sparks rage through the heart of Melkor. Moreover, Ilúvatar proclaims that all of the devices Melkor believes to be of ‘his own’ making are but an instrument in the grand design. Lastly, he makes known the Vision of a world – Arda, the Music incarnate. As many of the Ainur delight in the Vision, Melkor’s shame at the words of Ilúvatar distorts into unspoken hatred of Arda and especially of the yet unborn Children in whose imagining he had no part at all. As Arda is *sung into existence* out of the Vision, some of the Ainur, including Melkor, descend upon the world, incarnating therein as the Powers of Arda, the *Valar*. To the physical world, the Valar appear ‘as gods’. Yet, while they are ‘divine’, their role is not to create, rather to *shape* the world in accordance with the Divine Vision. Thus, in fact, they are the ultimate sub-creators, as their art represents the purest form of revelation. In this, they are approached by the Elves, while Men are in a sense twice removed. Art and Power, that is, the will to shape and the will to possess, thus become the two frontiers of the battlefield upon which the drama of Tolkien’s Saga will play out. Individual characters, companies and even entire races will be stretched between these poles, rising or falling in accordance with their free will. Ultimately, Melkor’s Fall is a sub-creative one, causing Elves (and naturally the Valar) to be the objects of his hatred to a far more extensive degree than Men are.

With the incarnation of the Valar upon Arda, the world begins its history. As the struggle between the creative and the destructive principle transfers onto the physical plane, its pattern becomes most explicit in the fight for the control over Light. As the reigning Valar continuously attempt to unleash Light upon the world (the three successive appearances of Light are the Two Lamps, the Two Trees, and ultimately the Sun and Moon), Melkor and his followers plague their efforts, clouding the world in darkness. Immediately, Light is established as a foundational and central symbol in Tolkien’s imaginarium. The world that the Valar originally build, long before the arrival of the Children of Ilúvatar, is symmetrical and pure, marked by everlasting light of the Two Lamps, therefore called *Arda Unmarred*. Once the Lamps are destroyed by Melkor and their Light quenched, the symmetry of the world is permanently disrupted and the fate of all Arda and those who are to inhabit it forever changed. Now the “seas arose in tumult” and the lands were “broken.”<sup>61</sup> As a devastating flame from the broken Lamps soaks the land, Arda becomes *Marred*; Death and Decay enter the equation. The Valar

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<sup>61</sup> *Sil*, p. 41.

are forced to flee into the western Land of Aman, where they build a new home, Valinor. From this moment forth, Light never again occurs in uninterrupted sequence; it becomes a cyclic instead of permanent phenomenon. The successors of the Lamps are the Two Trees, sung into existence (just as Arda itself) by one of the Valar. Unlike the Lamps whose radiance was permanent, the Trees wax to full brightness and then slowly wane again in turn, mingling their Light only for one hour each day.

When the Elves, the Firstborn, awake in Middle-earth (a northwestern region of Arda Marred) under a starlit sky, they awaken into the time of the Two Trees. Yet, the Trees are far from their sight, as they bloom in a garden in the land of Valinor in the furthest West, also known as the Blessed Realm or the Undying Lands (the new home of the Valar, which is effectively an earthly paradise). In an attempt to shield the newly arrived Children from the influence of Melkor, the Valar summon the Elves to settle alongside them in the Blessed Realm. Some of the Elves accept the summons while some refuse, and of those who accept not all succeed in making the journey (later they would all be divided into those who have seen the Light of the Trees and those who have not). Yet, not even in Valinor are the Elves entirely protected. One of the corollaries to Melkor's marring of Arda is that his spirit (his "fëa") is now woven into the very fabric of the land and, with it, into the entirety of the physical world. In consequence, all who depend on the natural world cannot escape this influence, but are subject to the spread of the Fallen One's "rebellious will" and are bound by what Tolkien later described as "Morgoth-matter,"<sup>62</sup> a germ of decay in the physical world – and, essentially, the seed of evil. To the Elves, the decay brings a gradual Waning, and to Men, it ultimately brings Death.<sup>63</sup> Men are partly in awe of the Elves, and partly envious of their immortal nature. Yet, although the Elves are commonly more impervious to the effects of rebellious will than Men, since their spirit (*fëa*) exerts more control over their physical body (*hröa*, which inevitably contains taints of Morgoth-matter), their fate also carries within it the possibility of Fall. Essentially, the Fall of the Elves (most specifically, the *Noldor*, the most gifted Elven kindred) is the central theme

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<sup>62</sup> *Morgoth-matter* or the *Morgoth Element* is a concept Tolkien expounded on late in his life, c. 1958, through a number of essays that never made it into the published *Silmarillion* but were featured in Christopher Tolkien's *HoMe X: Morgoth's Ring*, part V: *Myths Transformed*. See essays: VI, VII (ii) & (iii), VIII.

<sup>63</sup> This is the reason why, among other names, the Elves refer to Men as *Engwar*, 'The Sickly'.

of *The Silmarillion*. As Tolkien remarks, “[t]here cannot be any ‘story’ without a fall – all stories are ultimately about the fall – at least not for human minds as we know them and have them.”<sup>64</sup>

One of the consequences of the initial Fall and the ensuing fallen world (Arda Marred) is that no haven remains ultimately untouched by what may be in the broadest sense qualified as evil. This thought is aptly conveyed in Patrick Grant’s 1973 essay *Tolkien: Archetype and Word*, where Grant underlines that “the burden of the tale is that there are no havens in a world where evil is a reality.”<sup>65</sup> Accordingly, despite the Valar’s attempts at confining the Elves to the ‘safety of paradise’ in Valinor, selfishness and greed cannot be kept out. A time comes when a mighty Elven artificer by the name of Fëanor hones his craft to the point of capturing the Light of the Trees with his art, creating three radiant jewels from it, the Silmarils (*Silmarilli*, ‘radiance of pure light’, the fate of which gives the name to the book). While beauty and brightness of these Primeval Jewels are initially a joy to both Elves and the Valar, Fëanor soon falls prey to the deceit of Melkor and into possessiveness over the jewels, ultimately hiding them from sight, even of the Valar. Melkor uses the strife to launch an assault directly at the heart of Valinor, unleashing the spider Ungoliant to consume Light from the Trees and slay the saplings. As the world once again grows dim and only starlight remains, Melkor steals the Silmarils, now the last relics of the unsullied Light of the Trees. The world is again changed as the Trees are no more, yet managing to salvage two single fruits from each sullied Tree, the Valar fashion vessels to hold their radiance, thus creating the Sun and Moon. This particular segment reveals a marked difference between Tolkien’s rendering of the myth of the Sun and related accounts typically found in various legends. Within Tolkien’s Saga, “the ‘light of the Sun’ (the world under the sun) becomes terms for a fallen world, and a dislocated imperfect vision.”<sup>66</sup> Thus, the Sun is not a symbol of the divine light, rather a devolvement of it.

Coincidentally, the first Elven death occurs inside the Blessed Realm itself, as Melkor slays Fëanor’s father and terror spreads through this earthly Eden. Bereft and

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<sup>64</sup> *LT* 131, p. 170.

<sup>65</sup> Grant, Patrick: “Tolkien: Archetype and Word,” pp. 87-105 in Neil D. Isaacs & Rose A. Zimbardo, eds.: *Tolkien: New Critical Perspectives*, The University Press of Kentucky, Lexington, 1981, p. 99.

<sup>66</sup> *LT* 131, p. 170.

infuriated, Fëanor curses Melkor, calling him *Morgoth*, ‘the Dark Enemy’, and makes a blasphemous oath of vengeance against all who would dare again claim the jewels, including *even* the Valar. Fëanor and his sons lead a number of Elves into rebellion against the Valar, departing for Middle-earth in pursuit of the jewels. As Tolkien remarks in his letters, “[t]he first fruit of their fall is war in Paradise, the slaying of Elves by Elves, and this and their evil oath dogs all their later heroism, generating treacheries and undoing all victories.”<sup>67</sup> In the midst of the strife Men appear, as the Secondborn or the ‘Followers’, because as appointed by Ilúvatar they awaken upon Middle-earth after the Elves (and before the Dwarves). Gathered around the three families of their Fathers, Men ally themselves with the Elven-lords in rejection of the service of Evil and the Dark Lord.<sup>68</sup> The legendarium continues into an account of the war that the Exiled Elves in Middle-earth wage against the Dark Lord Morgoth for the recovery of the Silmarils, consistently intertwined with specific individual heroic and romantic legends (for instance, the *Tale of Beren and Lúthien the Elfmaiden*). The story culminates in the War of Wrath, the Great Battle of the united Hosts of Elves, Men, Dwarves and the Valar against the forces of Morgoth. When the enthralled peoples of Middle-earth start to lose all hope, Morgoth finally suffers a blow as one of the Silmarils is stolen from his Iron Crown by a mortal Man Beren and an Elf-maiden Lúthien. The acquisition of the Silmaril, however, does not come without sacrifice and loss. Beren’s oath to return with the Silmaril in his hand is fulfilled in the prophetic fashion of Macbeth, as he brings his own severed hand still clasping the jewel. The

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<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> Passed down amongst the Men is an account of their own Fall, which they are careful not to reveal to the Elves. An exception is a text devised by Tolkien sometime in the mid-1950s, *Athrabeth Finrod ah Andreth*, which did not become part of the edited *Silmarillion*. “The Debate of Finrod and Andreth,” is a metaphysical examination of the differences between Men and Elves and their fates, published separately in *Morgoth’s Ring* (HoMe X). In form, it is a discussion between Finrod Felagund, an Elven King, and Andreth, a mortal woman. Here, Andreth suggests that according to Ilúvatar’s original design, the role of Men was to undo the Marring and bring about *Arda Healed*. Instead, Men suffered a Fall, and were relieved of their original ‘Doom’. Andreth even goes so far as to indicate that Men were initially destined for immortality as well, but it became lost to them after their Fall, which she vehemently blames on Morgoth and his trickery. Yet, it is almost impossible to conclude from the debate whether Andreth’s account rests on lore Men truly possess of their original Doom or is merely indicative of their envy of the Elves and an insatiable lust for immortality, an obsession passed down for generations that distorts the truth in its rift. Obviously, Tolkien is deliberately ambiguous on the matter. One possible clue, however, rests with the Third theme of Ilúvatar, which does come about as an attempt to ‘correct’ the Discord of Melkor, but ultimately fails to do so. Either way, the questions that apply to Tolkien’s Mythical Man of imaginary time apply just as readily to the Real Man of modern time. Is Death truly a punishment bestowed upon human kin? Did some kind of evil cheat us out of our Immortality?

Silmaril is then taken by the mariner Eärendil the Half-Elven, one of the most important figures in the entire mythology, who places it upon his brow and sets sail into Valinor to plea with the Valar and beseech their aid on behalf of both Elves and Men. Presenting them with the jewel as a token of repentance, Eärendil begs for the pardon of the Exiles and for the Valar's assistance in overcoming Morgoth. He thus becomes the first mortal ever to set foot in the Blessed Realm, the consequence of which can be only death. However, the Valar are deeply touched by his courage and take pity on his plight. Eärendil is hallowed together with his ship Vingilot and sent to the sky, with the Silmaril still bound upon his brow.

Now when first Vingilot was set to sail in the seas of heaven, it rose unlocked for, glittering and bright; and the people of Middle-earth beheld it from afar and wondered, and they took it for a sign, and called it Gil-Estel, the Star of High Hope. And when this new star was seen at evening, Maedhros spoke to Maglor his brother, and he said: 'Surely that is a Silmaril that shines now in the West?'

And Maglor answered: 'If it be truly the Silmaril which we saw cast into the sea that rises again by the power of the Valar, then let us be glad; for its glory is seen now by many, and is yet secure from all evil.' Then the Elves looked up, and despaired no longer; but Morgoth was filled with doubt.<sup>69</sup>

In consequence, the Valar assemble a Host and move into Middle-earth, capturing and casting Melkor into the Void, forever depriving him of the potential to incarnate on Arda. The remaining two Silmarils are confined to the body of Arda as well, one lost to the depths of the sea and another to the fiery deeps beneath the earth. They thus became part to all three realms of Arda – air, water and fire. These would later be paralleled by the Three Rings of Power in possession of the Elves, corresponding to these three elements, lesser only to the One Ruling Ring.

The price of the victory, however, is dire, and triumph does not come without great loss – a motif that will be present throughout the many battles of Tolkien's Saga (as it is already present in the case of Beren and the Silmaril). The 'Silmarillion proper' (and with it the First Age) ends in catastrophe, with the passing of the Ancient World.

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<sup>69</sup> *Sil*, pp. 301-302.



The casualties are numerous, Middle-earth devastated, and the lands yet again broken while nearly an entire region is sunk beneath the waves. Destruction by water, already introduced with the Marring of Arda, is made prominent once more, eliciting a profound connection between the ‘breaking’ and ‘drowning’ of land, thus creating a crucial catalyst and physical symbol of the Fall within the mythology. As Tolkien recurrently made known, and as would become most obvious in the myth of the “Downfall of Númenor,” resurrected from Tolkien’s towering waves is the myth of Atlantis, the fate of a civilization fallen into hubris.

Fundamental to Tolkien’s imaginarium (along with the myth of Light) is the myth of the ‘Lost Straight Road’– the lost link to the fantastic world. This highly symbolic myth is innately tied in with the story of the ‘Breaking of the World’, a cataclysmic event that marks the Second Age and alters the state of the world for all the ages to come, recounted in *Akallabêth* (‘Downfall of Númenor’), the narrative that follows the *Quenta Silmarillion*. Although the tale of the Drowning of Númenor belongs most naturally to *The Silmarillion*, it was originally conceived independently, as the concluding account to Tolkien’s unfinished time-travel tale *The Lost Road*. In fact, the archetypal image at the core of *Akallabêth* was connected to a dream-vision of a monstrous Wave towering over the land that troubled Tolkien since childhood, one he referred to as his Atlantis-complex. Tolkien even once noted that of all the mythical images this was the one “most deeply seated in my imagination.”<sup>70</sup> The idea for *The Lost Road* came from an arrangement between Tolkien and C. S. Lewis to each write what they dubbed *excursionary thrillers*, Tolkien on time travel and Lewis on space travel,<sup>71</sup> with the aim of “discovering Myth.”<sup>72</sup> “L[ewis] said to me one day: ‘Tollers, there is too little of what we really like in stories. I am afraid we shall have to try and write some ourselves’.”<sup>73</sup> Tolkien appropriated the idea of time travel in his usual way, setting course for the forgotten past, and appointing the human mind as the only true time machine. The story was envisioned as that of Pre-incarnation and its thread was to be the repeated occurrence in human families of a father and son sharing names that can be etymologically broken down to mean ‘Bliss-friend’ and ‘Elf-friend’ (both prominent

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<sup>70</sup> *LT* 276, p. 387.

<sup>71</sup> This is how Lewis wrote *Out of the Silent Planet*.

<sup>72</sup> *LT* 24, p. 38.

<sup>73</sup> *LT* 294, p. 408.

in Tolkien's imaginarium). The tale begins with Edwin and Elwin of the new world who receive dream-echoes of the lives, and languages, of their forefathers – Eädwine and Ælfwine of circa A.D. 918, Audoin and Alboin of Lombardic legend, and lastly Amandil and Elendil, leaders of the loyal party in mythical Númenor. They experience memory visions that eventually take them 'back' to the mythological time of *Atalantë*, that is, *Akallabêth*.<sup>74</sup> After writing the opening two chapters, Tolkien immediately moved to the concluding part (which takes place in Númenor), never returning to the intermediary material of Lombardic or even Anglo-Saxon legendary past. Simply, as he later remarked, "it was too long a way round to what I really wanted to make, a new version of the Atlantis legend."<sup>75</sup> *The Lost Road* was consequently abandoned as such, while the tale of the Drowning (downfall) of Númenor became a crucial part of legendarium.

The events recounted in the *Akallabêth* (as the story appears in the published *Silmarillion*) transpire throughout the Second Age, following Melkor's expulsion from Arda and the War of Wrath. The Exiled Elves are pardoned and called back to the West, although never again to settle in Valinor itself but in the Isle of Eressëa, within sight of the Blessed Realm. At the same time, some Elves delay the journey and decide to linger in Middle-earth instead. Fundamentally, their position is changed in comparison to their initial setting, made to reflect their fall: those who once dwelt in paradise are now but within its reach. On the shores of Tol Eressëa, the Elves establish a city and seaport, calling it Avallónë.<sup>76</sup> For their part, Men of the Three Houses are granted to move *toward* the West and thus settle westernmost of all mortals. Guided by Eärendil's Star, Men arrive to their new homeland, the Isle of Númenor, located within sight of Tol Eressëa but not of Valinor itself. Moreover, the Valar usher a Ban forbidding the Númenóreans ever to sail further off West and approach Valinor or even Eressëa. Yet, tauntingly, those most far-sighted among Men could see Avallónë from a tall ship, and some even thought this far off vision was of Valinor itself. At the same time, Melkor's former captain Sauron rises to power, and the spread of his poison soon reaches the hearts of Men. The perversion of Men causes an ever increasing lust for immortality,

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<sup>74</sup> "Downfall" in the Elven *Quenya* and Númenórean *Adûnaic* languages, respectively.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> The tower of Avallónë was the first sight that a mariner beheld as he approached the Undying Lands.

and the sight of Avallónë beyond their reach additionally kindles resentment against the Ban, with only a small number of the Faithful remaining loyal to the will of the Valar. As the majority of Númenóreans rebel against the Valar and the Ban, the second Fall of Men inevitably occurs. The consequence of their Fall is sheer catastrophe, by means of the Valar's final *direct* intervention: the sinking of the isle of Númenor and utter "breaking of Arda." The world, which was once flat, now becomes *round*, and Valinor and Eressëa are completely hidden from worldly sight. Men may now sail West only to appear again in the East without ever reaching the Blessed Realm.

And those that sailed furthest set but a girdle about the Earth and returned weary at last to the place of their beginning; and they said:

'All roads are now bent.'<sup>77</sup>

Only the immortal lingering Elves may yet 'find course' into the True West, sailing from the Grey Havens of Middle-earth, and thus find their peace. The remaining Faithful Númenóreans led by Elendil the "Elf-friend" disperse back into Middle-earth, where they establish the kingdoms of Arnor and Gondor.

Tolkien's Avallónë, and with it the entire Lonely Isle, is clearly an extension of the earthly paradise, quite like the Isle of Avalon of Arthurian legend which its etymology visibly evokes. In *Vita Merlini* (c. 1150), Geoffrey of Monmouth clearly ascribes Edenic qualities to the "island of apples" (Avalon), describing it as a land of enchantment and beauty that produces "all things of itself."<sup>78</sup> Avalon has often been equated with the Celtic Isle of the Blessed, wherein dwell the spirits of the departed, ever blooming and beautiful, housed in radiant halls of glass. In analogy, Tolkien's Blessed Realm hosts the Halls of Mandos, wherein the spirits of Elves and Men are gathered upon death in anticipation of their doom, the immortal Elves to be eventually re-embodied should they desire so, and Men to await a fate unknown to all but Mandos and Manwë (and naturally Ilúvatar himself). The belief in a blessed western land, or group of islands, was prevalent among the Celts as well as the Greek and Latin geographers. Presumably, from the same old tradition also arose the vision of Atlantis, a

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<sup>77</sup> *Sil*, p. 339.

<sup>78</sup> Monmouth, Geoffrey of: *The Life of Merlin, Vita Merlini*, tr. John Jay Parry, Forgotten Books, London, 2008, p. 32.

vast continent in the far West, sunken beneath the waves as punishment for the hubris of its dwellers.

Thus in after days, what by the voyages of ships, what by lore and star-craft, the kings of Men knew that the world was indeed made round, and yet the Eldar were permitted still to depart and to come to the Ancient West and to Avallónë, if they would. Therefore the loremasters of Men said that a Straight Road must still be, for those that were permitted to find it. And they taught that, while the new world fell away, the old road and the path of the memory of the West still went on, as it were a mighty bridge invisible that passed through the air of breath and of flight (which were bent now as the world was bent), and traversed Ilmen which flesh unaided cannot endure, until it came to Tol Eressëa, the Lonely Isle, and maybe even beyond, to Valinor, where the Valar still dwell and watch the unfolding of the story of the world. And tales and rumours arose along the shores of the sea concerning mariners and men forlorn upon the water who, by some fate or grace or favour of the Valar, had entered in upon the Straight Way and seen the face of the world sink below them, and so had come to the lamplit quays of Avallónë, or verily to the last beaches on the margin of Aman, and there had looked upon the White Mountain, dreadful and beautiful, before they died.<sup>79</sup>

According to Jane Chance, all secondary worlds, and thus all realms of Faërie, are modeled upon heaven. “Entering paradise remains the deepest human fantasy,” Chance asserts, “because it constitutes the most important escape from death and from the stronghold of this world on life.”<sup>80</sup> Indeed, each constituent of Tolkien’s western land triad (Valinor – Eressëa – Númenor) in a certain sense echoes earthly paradise, yet to a varying degree. The purest symbol in this respect is Valinor, the Blessed Realm itself. Its most direct extension is the Isle of Eressëa, which becomes most obvious as both suffer the same fate of being removed from the physical world. Ultimately, the bent world, consequence of the downfall of Men and the shattering of their own earthly paradise, is the image of a modern world, haunted by visions of the destruction of paradise and burdened by longing for ‘home’. The world portrayed in *The Lord of the Rings* is thus already a bent one – and from the perspective of the mythical *Silmarillion*, it is in fact a ‘modern’ world. Ultimately, it is a world of Men – a world for Men. While

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<sup>79</sup> *Sil*, p. 339.

<sup>80</sup> Chance, Jane: *Tolkien’s Art: A Mythology for England*, University Press of Kentucky, 2001, p. 79.

*The Silmarillion* provides an ‘Elven perspective’, in *The Lord of the Rings* focus is shifted to Men – and to Hobbits, the little Men. The Elves become secondary, just as Men were in the Elven legends of the Elder Days; they are already dwindling and departing Middle-earth, fading before their mortal brethren. Most importantly, from the beginning of the story, the world is already a fallen one – the world under the Sun – whereas the fantastic past is already (mostly) forgotten, a matter of myth and legend.

### Chapter 3: ON THE BRINK OF TRUTH

*There is nothing you can do, other than to resist, with hope or without it.*<sup>81</sup>

Tolkien explicitly states in one of his letters that his Saga most specifically deals with three themes: Death/Mortality, Fall and the Machine (the ultimate symbol of which is certainly the Ring).

With Fall inevitably, and that motive occurs in several modes. With Mortality, especially as it affects art and the creative (or as I should say, sub-creative) desire which seems to have no biological function, and to be apart from the satisfactions of plain ordinary biological life, with which, in our world, it is indeed usually at strife. This desire is at once wedded to a passionate love of the real primary world, and hence filled with the sense of mortality, and yet unsatisfied by it. It has various opportunities of 'Fall'. It may become possessive, clinging to the things made as 'its own', the sub-creator wishes to be the Lord and God of his private creation. He will rebel against the laws of the Creator – especially against mortality.

Both of these (alone or together) will lead to the desire for Power, for making the will more quickly effective, – and so to the Machine (or Magic). By the last I intend all use of external plans or devices (apparatus) instead of development of the inherent inner powers or talents — or even the use of these talents with the corrupted motive of dominating: bulldozing the real world, or coercing other wills. The Machine is our more obvious modern form though more closely related to Magic than is usually recognised.<sup>82</sup>

Writing some years later in connection to *The Lords of the Rings* particularly, Tolkien narrows the thematic field even further to “Death, and Immortality; and the ‘escapes’: serial longevity, and hoarding memory.”<sup>83</sup> Nonetheless, it seems Tolkien’s account of his own writings is somewhat one-sided, particularly as it is rather difficult to imagine a fairy-story written ‘about Death’. While Tolkien’s Saga, *as myth*, may very well be

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<sup>81</sup> *LotR* II: 2.

<sup>82</sup> *LT* 131, p. 168.

<sup>83</sup> *LT* 211, p. 299.

primarily concerned with Fall, Mortality and the Machine, *as fairy-story*, it is above all concerned with Hope (the ultimate symbol of which is Light in its successive appearances). There is no denying that most of Tolkien's world continually hinges on despair, and that a peculiar sense of defeat is present in any victory. Even as Morgoth is defeated, his taint upon the world remains and his evil is an enduring reality. The concluding words of *Quenta Silmarillion* convey this grim image quite vividly:

Yet the lies that Melkor, the mighty and accursed, Morgoth Bauglir, the Power of Terror and of Hate, sowed in the hearts of Elves and Men are a seed that does not die and cannot be destroyed; and ever and anon it sprouts anew, and will bear dark fruit even unto the latest days.<sup>84</sup>

Indeed, as one Dark Lord falls, another one rises, in the form of Melkor's former captain Sauron. Under his influence, the Second Age will become an even darker time, bringing about the second fall of Men and the utter breaking of the world. His perversion of the will of Elves during the Third Age will lead to the crafting of the Rings of Power (including the One Ruling Ring into which he will pour his own entire being), culminating in the War of the Ring. As one dire circumstance leads into another, the Elven Queen Galadriel laments in *The Lord of the Rings*: "Through ages of the world we have fought the long defeat."<sup>85</sup> Certainly, this is especially true of the Elves, whose fate is to fade and dwindle, ultimately devoid even of death. Yet, it is also Galadriel who reminds the fellowship "hope remains while all the Company is true."<sup>86</sup>

Quite clearly, it is the vision of Hope that brings Tolkien's Saga closest to fairytale, and provides the counterbalance within the fallen world. "I do not foretell," says Galadriel, "for all foretelling is now vain: on the one hand lies darkness, and on the other only hope."<sup>87</sup> Tom Shippey, whose seminal 1982 study *The Road to Middle-earth* laid the foundations of Tolkienian source criticism, observes that while the wise characters in *The Lord of the Rings* are often near the edge of despair, they never truly succumb. While Shippey examines the relationship between hope and despair mainly in

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<sup>84</sup> *Sil*, p. 307.

<sup>85</sup> *LotR* II: 7.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

*The Lord of the Rings* (indeed, his attitude toward *The Silmarillion* is somewhat ambivalent), the conclusion he draws is certainly applicable to the entirety of the Saga:

The answer, obviously enough, is that a major goal of *The Lord of the Rings* was to dramatise that ‘theory of courage’ which Tolkien had said in his British Academy lecture was the ‘great contribution’ to humanity of the old literature of the North. The central pillar of that theory was Ragnarök – the day when gods and men would fight evil and the giants, and inevitably be defeated. Its great statement was that defeat is no refutation. The right side remains right even if it has no ultimate hope at all. In a sense this Northern mythology asks more of men, even makes more of them, than does Christianity, for it offers them no heaven, no salvation, no reward for virtue except the sombre satisfaction of having done what is right. Tolkien wanted his characters in *The Lord of the Rings* to live up to the same high standard. He was careful therefore to remove easy hope from them, even to make them conscious of long-term defeat and doom.<sup>88</sup>

Indeed, hope is not easily won in Tolkien’s world and the wise wizard Gandalf repeatedly points out that the kind of hope on which the world hinges is often “only a fool’s hope.”<sup>89</sup> Nonetheless, to the ‘Faithful’ people of Arda, this is enough. In *The Lord of the Rings*, Frodo and Sam reach a point when they feel there will be no journey home, yet they persist, thus embodying the purest of fairytale principles.

As is very well known, Tolkien fought in the First World War, including one of its fiercest bloodsheds, the Battle of the Somme River, where a million souls departed the earth, the time when the idea of *The Silmarillion* started taking shape in Tolkien’s mind. His son Christopher fought in the Second World War, coinciding with the writing of *The Lord of the Rings*. It may well be argued that Tolkien’s Saga reflects these man-on-man collisions and that the machinery of war on earth gave rise to the idea of war on Arda. Tolkien himself agreed that the Ring could be made into an allegory of our own time, but only in the sense that it encapsulated “the inevitable fate that waits for all attempts to defeat evil power by power.” However, as he continues, “that is only

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<sup>88</sup> Shippey, 2003, pp. 156-157.

<sup>89</sup> ‘Fool’s hope’ is an expression Gandalf uses on several occasions. Its most prominent appearance is before the Battle of Gondor (*LotR*, V: 4), when Pippin asks of him whether there is any hope, at least for Frodo. “There was never much hope,” Gandalf answers, “just a fool’s hope.”



because all power magical or mechanical does always so work.”<sup>90</sup> The mechanical and the creative (sub-creative) power are the two forces that continually collide within Tolkien’s imaginarium. By demonstrating the use of both, Tolkien articulates that it is not power that corrupts, but fear. Fear from losing power by those who once taste it, and fear from the scourge of power by those who are in its mercy (the twice seduced). At the same time, it is the smallest acts that achieve victory in Tolkien’s world, and the smallest of creatures; it is the slow progress of hobbits, these peculiar carriers of ‘fool’s hope’, which outmatches epic movements of armies.

While reflections on Death, Fall and the Machine place Tolkien in the company of such writers who also cried against the emptiness and despair of the modern man’s condition, which Tony Jackson formulated in *The Subject of Modernism* as “an ontology of ungroundedness.”<sup>91</sup> “Is there no guidance?” young Axel Heyst asks of his dying father, in Joseph Conrad’s 1915 novel *Victory*, (which begins with the words “There is...” and ends with “Nothing”). Drawing his last breath, his father, a “silenced destroyer of systems, of hopes, of beliefs,” merely responds with, “Look on – make no sound.”<sup>92</sup> We find the very same question echoing the words of Lily Briscoe in Virginia Woolf’s 1927 *To the Lighthouse*. “Was there no safety?” she wonders, “[n]o guide, no shelter” in life.<sup>93</sup> Woolf’s question surely also relates to the problem of the artist, Tolkien’s sub-creator, ‘doomed’ to try to bring order from chaos and shape life through art. Tolkien’s answer to these questions, however, is not a pessimistic one but an emphatic ‘yes’. There is hope, if only for such fools who still dare believe, and a guide for those who do not scornfully avert their eyes before the eucatastrophe of the fairy-story. The same Light that guided the faithful people of Arda into battle against desolation and darkness also guided Tolkien into and throughout his storytelling (sub-creative) process. This was the Light of Eärendil, the *Star of High Hope*.

It was sometime around 1913 that Tolkien first set his eyes on this peculiar Habitation, as he would come to translate Arda, upon being struck by the beauty of a single powerful word, a ‘ghostword’ not of his own making, but certainly of his own

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<sup>90</sup> *LT* 109, p. 140.

<sup>91</sup> Jackson, Tony E.: *The Subject of Modernism: Narrative Alterations in the Fiction of Eliot, Conrad, Woolf, and Joyce*, The University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 1994, p. 9.

<sup>92</sup> Conrad, Joseph: *Victory*, Dent, London, 1948, p. 174.

<sup>93</sup> Woolf, Virginia: *To the Lighthouse*, Urban Romantics, London, 2012, p. 136.

sensibility. This was the Anglo-Saxon word *éarendel* from the Old English poem *Crist* (usually attributed to Cynewulf and presumably created c. 800), found in The Exeter Book. The Advent Lyrics of the poem reveal this peculiar ghost in the garments of a proper name:

*Éala Éarendel, engla beorhtast,  
ofer middangeard monnum sended!*

(“Hail Earendel, brightest of angels,  
above Middle-earth sent unto men!”)<sup>94</sup>

The enigmatic vision lurking behind these verses struck a mighty cord with Tolkien, alerting all of his senses; it called out to him in languages both known and unknown and drew his gaze toward a realm he would look to for the remainder of his life, not ‘to Sussex, but to shores a great deal further off’. To these shores sailed Tolkien’s *Eärendel* (later *Eärendil*), the first hero of the early legends, through a 1914 poem *The Voyage of Eärendel the Evening Star*, (later rewritten some five times over and retitled into *Éala Éarendel Engla Beorhtast* or *The Last Voyage of Eärendel*). In July of 1915, when Tolkien wrote the poem *The Shores of Faëry*, it became positively evident which distant shores these exactly were (Tolkien then translated the poem into Old English, naming it *Ielfalandes Strand*, and subsequently retitled the modern English version into *The Shores of Elfland*).<sup>95</sup>

Decades later, Tolkien would ‘confess’ to these events in his unfinished fantasia *The Notion Club Papers* (written 1945 and published in *HoMe IX*) through the words of one Alwin Arundel Lowdham,<sup>96</sup> a character who like all the other characters in this work is a rather unconcealed projection of Tolkien himself:

When I came across that citation [from *Crist*] in the dictionary I felt a curious thrill, as if something had stirred in me, half wakened from sleep. There was

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<sup>94</sup> *Bio*, pp. 72-79 (*Crist I*: vv. 104-105).

<sup>95</sup> In *HoMe II*, Christopher Tolkien supplies a body of connected poems (*Éalá Éarendel Engla Beorhtast*, *The Bidding of the Minstrel*, *The Shores of Faëry*, *The Happy Mariner*, *The Town of Dreams and the City of Present Sorrow* and *The Song of Eriol*) and their different versions. These seven poems, which we refer to as the ‘Eärendel poems’ are not only deeply interconnected, but are an inherent part of the imaginarium of Arda, in fact its seed.

<sup>96</sup> *Alwin* and *Arundel* are debasements from the Anglo-Saxon names *Ælfwine* and *Éarendel* respectively, both of supreme relevance to Tolkien’s imaginarium.

something very remote and strange and beautiful behind those words, if I could grasp it, far beyond ancient English. [...] *Éarendel* seems to me a special word. It is not Anglo-Saxon; or rather, it is not *only* Anglo-Saxon, but also something else much older.<sup>97</sup>

This one special word became a symbol for the entire vision of a world much older, and a language of that world, beyond records. Like his Alwin Arundel, Tolkien too was inescapably haunted by dreamlike image- and word-visions from that world, which provided the fantastic weave of sound and sense that make up the Habitation for Tolkien's imagination. Middle-earth (a name also deriving from the lines in *Crist*) was but a part of that realm, and *Éarendel* voyaged into it, taking Tolkien along as well.

Indeed, Tolkien immediately recognized that while this strange word was “entirely coherent with the normal style of A[nglo]-S[axon]” it was at the same time “euphonic to a peculiar degree in that pleasing but not ‘delectable’ language;”<sup>98</sup> a discrepancy, or at the very least oddity, that revealed concept predating context, that is, suggested a suppressed myth of even more ancient lineage. Tolkien tracked the Anglo-Saxon *earendil*, (later *earendel*, *eorendel*) and discovered it equated in glosses with the Latin *jubar* ‘ray of light, radiance’ and with *aurora* ‘dawn, morning light’, while the *Blickling Homilies* likened it with the figure of St John the Baptist delivering the image of a divine messenger, a *herald* of hope.<sup>99</sup> Yet, it was clear to Tolkien that these were merely the luminous garments of Christianity given to a ghostly light of the past, one that had to have splintered from a much older, long forgotten, pagan source. Jacob Grimm had also struck upon this vein nearly a century earlier when he too glimpsed echoes of a Common Germanic Myth behind the various appearances of the hero *Orendel*. In his 1835 *Deutsche Mythologie*, a work quite familiar to Tolkien, Grimm points to the existence of a legend in Old Norse tradition about a giant Aurvandil (or Örvandill) whose severed toe is cast into the sky to become a star, as recorded in Snorri Sturluson's Icelandic *Prose Edda* (c. 1220). Grimm believed its natural correspondent was a medieval German poem (c. 1200), “about a king *Orendel* or *Erentel*, whom the

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<sup>97</sup> *HoMe* IX, p. 239.

<sup>98</sup> *LT* 297, p. 414.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

appendix to the Heldenbuch pronounces the first of all heroes that were ever born.”<sup>100</sup> Consequently, Grimm declared the poem to be “certainly founded on very ancient epic material.”<sup>101</sup> These, along with other residual traces, such as Horwendil/Horvendil (Latinized Horvendilus), listed as father of Amleth (source of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*) in Saxo Grammaticus’ *Gesta Danorum*, or the historical Lombardic prince Auriwandalo, point to the Proto-Germanic reconstructed compound \*auzi-wandilaz, “luminous wanderer.” It was clear to Grimm, just as it was clear to Tolkien, that this was a case of a ‘lost myth’ – a story confined to what Tom Shippey recognizes as “asterisk-reality.”<sup>102</sup> Following Grimm’s account, Tolkien concluded that the “obviously related forms in other Germanic languages” suggest *éarendel* was “in origin a proper name and not a common noun”<sup>103</sup> and that the ‘lost hero’ Éarendel must either have been a herald of hope or the Morning star. Tolkien seized on this fleeting image, and where Grimm stopped, he took a leap of faith, plunging deep into the asterisk reality. Fusing fact and fiction, myth and fairytale, Tolkien ‘rescued from oblivion’ the *truth of Eärendil*, the mythic hero with the bright Silmaril on his brow, sailing his hallowed ship over Middle-earth, to bring hope to men.

### ***3.1. Myth-woven and Elf-patterned World***

That the entire mytho-imaginarium (and with it the entirety of Tolkien’s Saga), which arises from the cosmogonic moment, rests on the shoulders of fairy-tale is obvious from the very first sentence. While the account itself is rather evocative of Biblical creation, as numerous critics have observed,<sup>104</sup> its opening in fact contains a ‘chinked’ fairytale

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<sup>100</sup> Grimm, Jacob: *Teutonic Mythology*, Vol. 1, tr. James Steven Stallybrass, Courier Dover Publications, New York, 2004, p. 374.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> Shippey, 2003, pp 19-23 & p. 26.

<sup>103</sup> *LT* 297, p. 414.

<sup>104</sup> This applies to the entire ‘Music of the Ainur’, but should we look for evidence of such likening only in the paragraphs quoted thus far, we need but relate Tolkien’s image of the Creator who is “glad” to the phrase repeating throughout *Genesis* 1: 1-31 (ESV): “God said it was good.” Both instances express the Joy of Creation. Through the Creator, who himself rejoices at his creation, the Joy is transferred onto the created universe and created beings. We find this thought also in *Isaiah*, 65: 18 (ESV): “But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating.” Tolkien’s introduction of *song* is equally redolent of Biblical reference, where it figures as a natural companion to the creational joy. Thus, in *Isaiah*, 35: 2 (ESV): “The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the chorus it

formula: [*Once upon a time*] *There was X, who was called Y, and he did Z.* Thus, although the fairy-story principle is established here *by omission* (in *The Lord of the Rings*, it is established equally peculiarly, *by inversion*: the quest is not to retrieve a magical object but to destroy it), its spell is nonetheless cast over the fabric of the story from the very beginning. Certainly, Tolkien does not seek to corrode the fairy-story by breaking the ancient formula, rather to merge it most naturally with myth (fairy-story's fantastic ancestor), present here not only in actual subject matter (the myth of creation), but also in linguistic pattern (in the high narrative style as exemplified by use of expressions like "ought else," "ye" and "hearken" which are otherwise hardly typical of fairytale). In Tolkien's mind, myth and fairy-story (and legend) were not too different; in fact, we often find them virtually *interchangeable*, as each sought to recover truth by means of imagination – and to recover imagination by means of truth. Ultimately, so did Tolkien.

In her 1993 study on fairy tales, *Picturing the Rose*, Marcia Lane offers a line of reasoning that serves to differentiate between fairytale, myth and legend. According to Lane, a "fairy tale is a story – literary or folk – that has a sense of the numinous, the feeling or sensation of the supernatural or the mysterious," and what she finds to be a crucial defining point is that such a story "happens in the past tense" and "is not tied to any specifics." If, however, "it happens 'at the beginning of the world,'" Lane observes, "then it is a myth," and if it "happens in the future," then it is "a fantasy." On the other hand, if it involves "the naming of a specific hero" then it is "a legend."<sup>105</sup> Should we leave out Lane's positioning of fantasy, since what she implies here is clearly science fiction and not fantasy as Tolkien treated it, we can observe that Tolkien's Saga amalgamates all three story-genres that Lane references, while at the same time it never *fully* abides by either definition. The Saga certainly does offer a sense of the numinous and the supernatural, and it does happen in the past, qualifying thus far for Lane's fairy tale, yet it is hardly free of specifics, including the quests of particular heroes, in which

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shall blossom abundantly and rejoice with joy and singing." Also, in *Psalms*, 96: 11-12 (ESV): "Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all that fills it; let the field exult, and everything in it. Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy." The difference is that in the Holy Scriptures song appears as a consequence (manifestation) of Creational Joy – with Tolkien, it is an active ingredient. [N. B.: All Biblical quotes, used consistently throughout this thesis, point to *The Holy Bible*, English Standard Version (ESV), Crossway, Wheaton, 2001].

<sup>105</sup> Lane, Marcia: *Picturing the Rose: A Way of Looking at Fairy Tales*, H. W. Wilson Co., New York, 1993, p. 5.

it rather approaches legend. On the other hand, it does not *only* deal with specific heroes and their quests either. As for Lane's delineation of myth, we perceive that Tolkien's Saga does not really *happen* 'at the beginning of the world,' rather it merely *begins* there. Of course, should we disarticulate the continuity of Tolkien's Saga into smaller segments, we might argue for a single designation of each. Of the creational tale *Ainulindalë* we might thus say it is in fact a myth; of the *Tale of Beren and Lúthien* we might say it is a legend; we might even, should we stretch the definition, say *The Lord of the Rings* is a fairy tale or, to use Tolkien's preferred term, fairy-story. Notwithstanding the fact that this would be a needless vivisection of the whole, it would not be entirely true either. As we have seen, Tolkien's creational tale, otherwise clearly mythical in structure (being a cosmogonic account), in fact opens with a fairy-story formula. In truth, within Tolkien's cosmos, these notions are so deeply immersed in each other's realities – and unrealities – that it becomes virtually impossible to draw a clear line of distinction between them. Moreover, we observe that Tolkien treats these notions not according to the (modern) understanding of genre, but as sacred ancient narratives. In Tolkien's world, these are seen as emanating light from the same sacred source and thus inevitably arriving at the same *story*: ultimately, the Greek *mythos* (μῦθος) and Latin *legenda* both simply mean 'story'. Indeed, the fairy-story also has a most natural place among these ancient narratives, and while the presence of fantasy is most directly accentuated within it, through a direct presence of Faërie, myth and legend are certainly not devoid of their own fantastic worlds. Essentially, Tolkien's myth is a fairytale-like narrative, and his fairy-story a mythical one. Tolkien recognized that a realm where these narratives meet, and where their fantastic worlds are artfully unified under a single "myth-woven and elf-patterned" tent,<sup>106</sup> is the field of *mythopoeia*.

*Mythopoeia* (otherwise also called *mythopoesis*, *mythopoiesis* and *mythopoetics*) is an idea with quite an ancient lineage, of perceivably (though not necessarily) differing manifestations from antiquity to modernity, existing somewhere on the brink of art and act, state and process, permeating realities and narratives from literary and philosophical to anthropological and ultimately theological. Implying the process of myth-invention (from Old Greek *mythopoeia* – μυθοποιία / *mythopoiesis* – μυθοποίησις, 'myth-making' or more literally 'story-craft'), mythopoeic thought appeared in contemporaneous

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<sup>106</sup> *MP*, v. 51.

Western discourse with Georg Grote's twelve-volume *History of Greece* (London, 1846-1856)<sup>107</sup> situating itself at the center of his anthropological theory of 'mythopoeic imagination'. It can be easily inferred that Grote used the term to refer to a pattern of thought that pertained to the 'mythopoeic age' – age when myths were not only made but when all the thinking, thus imagining, had the form of myth, that *disease of language* as Max Müller had so notoriously dubbed it.

As we might expect, Tolkien caught this 'disease' rather quickly and just as willingly, and in 1931 took a stance against all the disenchanted Max Müllers through a poem entitled *Mythopoeia*<sup>108</sup> – a lyrical companion to Tolkien's imaginarium and in many ways the crux of his poetics (or rather his *poiesis* – *ποίησις*, 'act of causing being'). Here, the (mytho)poet, representing himself as *Philomythus* ("Myth-lover" or perhaps more suitably "Myth-fellow" given that the notion of fellowship plays quite a prominent role with Tolkien), celebrates this ancient art neither as a forgotten craft of old nor as an act of mere invention, but an indispensable process of Truth recognition. Tolkien thus touches precisely on that which the ancients intended by the notion of *poiesis*: the induction of *aletheia* (*ἀλήθεια*, 'disclosure of truth'): the creation of a state of *Unverborgenheit* ('unconcealedness' or 'disclosedness') as understood by Heidegger, or an act of unveiling in Giorgio Agamben's more recent terms.<sup>109</sup> Accordingly, Philomythus exclaims:

*Blessed are the legend-makers with their rhyme  
of things not found within recorded time.*<sup>110</sup>

Thus understood, Tolkien's *mythopoeia* ('the act of bringing a story into being') is not merely an exercise in artificial myth-craft (as the theory of Alan Dundes might

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<sup>107</sup> The year 1846 was also the year that William Thoms, writing under the pseudonym of Ambrose Merton, coined the term 'folklore'.

<sup>108</sup> Tolkien was the first to use the term in a literary context. Notably, almost two decades later it would find its way into Northrop Frye's seminal interpretation of William Blake's prophetic poems (*Fearful Symmetry*, 1947).

<sup>109</sup> The difference is that according to Heidegger both Art and Technology can produce *aletheia*; with Agamben, as well as with Tolkien, this role is primarily given to Art. See: Heidegger, Martin: *Being and Time: A Translation of Sein und Zeit*, tr. Joan Stanbaugh, State University of New York, Albany, 1996, pp. 196-208 & Agamben, Giorgio: *The Man Without Content*, tr. Georgia Albert, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1999, p. 72.

<sup>110</sup> *MP*, vv. 91-92.

suggest<sup>111</sup>), but reveals a metaphysical pursuit of the splintering truth – certainly not the Absolute Truth, but those refractions of it which may be accessible to the sub-creating Man. It is from this perspective that we should interpret the different ingredients of Tolkien’s *poiesis*, its means of achievement *i.e.* truth unveiling: invention, intuition and imagination (which denote fantasy as state/process), along with their ensuing manifestations: myth, legend and fairy-story (which denote fantasy as narrative).

Tolkien stated in one of his letters that his greatest passion was for “heroic legend on the brink of fairy-tale and history”<sup>112</sup> and indeed he pursued this passion with great vigor, putting himself constantly on the brink of there and back again, alternately observing truth from both sides, this world and the other, fact and fiction. While the manifestations of Tolkien’s *poiesis* are essentially fluctuations of *one story*, they continually exist “on the brink” of one another – myth permeating the fairy-story, fairy-story permeating legend, legend permeating chronicle, and all of them permeating and existing on the brink of fantasy and truth. Certainly this does not mean to imply Tolkien believed the hobbits were ‘real’ in the factual sense of existence, or that one should interpret them as such (although some critics have tried, as Rosebury later opined<sup>113</sup>). Tolkien did not deal with such actualities; rather, he dealt with *imaginarities*, the possibilities of truth within artistic sub-creation.

### **3.2. Recovery of Imagination**

As the storyteller recounts events from the primordial Beginning, across the tumult of the first three ages of the World and successive battles against the rising Shadow, he concludes with the Elves’ departure from the world and the beginning of the ‘Dominion of Men’ (events occurring at the climax of *The Lord of the Rings*). Tolkien leaves *untold* the stories that are imaginatively to build up to the present day, which in the

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<sup>111</sup> Quoted in: Adcox John: “Can Fantasy be Myth? Mythopoeia and *The Lord of the Rings*,” in *The Newsletter of the Mythic Imagination Institute*, Sept/Oct 2003, available online at: <http://www.mythicjourneys.org/passages/septoct2003/newsletterp8.html> [Retrieved Feb 10, 2014].

<sup>112</sup> *LT* 131, p. 167.

<sup>113</sup> Rosebury, Brian: *Tolkien. A Cultural Phenomenon*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2003, p. 5.



storyteller's recounting of time roughly belongs to the *Seventh Age of the World*.<sup>114</sup> In doing so, Tolkien leaves us with an image of an enchanted world that is slowly disappearing from story-memory, 'departing' quite like the Elves and fading through the ages before the present tangible reality. Essentially, the reader is left at *the point where the story world reaches the real world* or, in fact, where reality 'interrupts' imagination. This point in fact leads into the modern day, which no longer holds room for the Elves and the 'stuff of fairy-story', just like it holds no true place for myths, although wars are still waged and battles are still fought. Of course, the difference is that in the 'real world' sides are not, as Tolkien frequently noted, so clear-cut and that the dark lords and their hosts lurk on both of them.<sup>115</sup>

Tolkien need not go out of his way to persuade us that modern world, and upon it modern man, are profoundly disenchanting. The enforced division between reason and imagination that began with the Enlightenment and blossomed into the modern era is evidence enough. In this divide we recognize a *self-fulfilling prophecy*, a tragic concept otherwise very familiar to both myth and fairy-story (a formula present from the *Myth of Oedipus* to *The Language of Birds* and Shakespeare's *Macbeth*), with the exception that in this case, the tragic hero is humanity itself. The landscape of darkness (the shadow) that captured Tolkien's attention and the battlefield that arises from it as a perfectly natural consequence – not only in the form of resistance but as a state of incessant turmoil – is surely an image of the human condition. Tolkien viewed modernity itself as a vivid mirror reflection of this condition, a point in the development of civilization that lay in the wake of the Industrial Revolution and two World Wars, deeply impacted by the mechanization of human experience that bred a fascination with artificiality. For Tolkien, this represented an inversion of the genuinely desirable creative progress. The fairy-story was his natural response, his own rebellion against the

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<sup>114</sup> In a letter of October 14, 1958, Tolkien writes: "I hope the, evidently long but undefined, gap\* in time between the Fall of Barad-dûr and our Days is sufficient for 'literary credibility', even for readers acquainted with what is known or surmised of 'pre-history'." The footnote reads: "I imagine the gap to be about 6000 years: that is we are now at the end of the Fifth Age, if the Ages were of about the same length as S[econd] A[ge] and T[hird] A[ge]. But they have, I think, quickened; and I imagine we are actually at the end of the Sixth Age, or in the Seventh." (*LT* 211, p. 298)

<sup>115</sup> In the midst of World War II Tolkien writes to his son Christopher (Christopher was stationed in South Africa): "Not that in real life things are as clear cut as in a story, and we started out with a great many Orcs on our side." (*LT* 66, p. 90) However, as he continues some weeks later: "But it does make some difference who are your captains and whether they are orc-like per se!" (*LT* 71, p. 95)

machine of materialistic progress and a fundamental inversion of what he perceived as the ‘inversionist’ tendency at the core of modernity. While his writings were often labelled escapist, what Tolkien offered was in fact a recovery of the fantastic: the *antidote* against artificiality. Indeed, Tolkien continually places us on the brink of fact and fiction, reason and imagination, not to enforce their division, as is already common in our disenchanted world, or to present either as superior to the other, but to remind us of the nearly forgotten possibility for their union. We are called neither to suspend reason nor to suspend disbelief in order to accept that fantasy is real in the factual sense of the word; rather, we are called to both reasonably *and* imaginatively examine our reality as *already* fantastic. Tolkien’s critical stance toward materialistic modernism was far from a solitary cry within the grand scale of modern art and thought. Yet, Tolkien’s bold introduction of fairy-story as form of social and, rather more radically, *spiritual criticism* distinguished him from his contemporaries in an equally radical manner – perhaps yet another factor in the correspondingly radical criticism Tolkien’s writings initially received.

Set up against the background of realism, rationality and overall maturity and seriousness which followed the ‘adult’ state of modern civilization and the ‘sensibility’ of its expression (ever so often pessimistic and fatalistic), the ancient form of fairy-story telling was already well abandoned by writers and thinkers of Tolkien’s day, neatly tucked away into the long ago, that primitive youth of civilization when man simply knew no better. “The first true storyteller is, and will continue to be, the teller of fairy tales,” says Walter Benjamin in his 1936 essay *The Storyteller*,<sup>116</sup> only a year before Tolkien would start publishing his stories. Yet, the “storyteller [...] has already become something remote from us and something that is getting even more distant,”<sup>117</sup> Benjamin opines, lamentingly proclaiming that the art of storytelling is reaching its end and receding into the archaic, fading before the rise of the novel and insurgence of information, while “the epic side of truth, wisdom, is dying out.”<sup>118</sup> He too, like

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<sup>116</sup> Benjamin, Walter: “The Storyteller,” pp. 361-378 in Dorothy J. Hale, ed.: *The Novel: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory 1900-2000*, Blackwell Publishing, Malden, 2006, pp. 373-374.

<sup>117</sup> Benjamin, *op. cit.*, p. 362.

<sup>118</sup> Benjamin, *op. cit.*, p. 364.

Tolkien, recognized this was but the latest stage of a process “going on for a long time [...] a concomitant symptom of the secular productive forces of history.”<sup>119</sup>

We find a very similar proposition in Mircea Eliade’s notion of the *terror of history*: the modern-day loss of myth and the feeling of sacred in the throes of bowing before secularism *i.e.* the renouncing of sacred mythic time in favor of profane history.<sup>120</sup> Obviously, the loss Eliade accentuates centers on myth and not on fairy-story telling, but Benjamin himself offers to bridge this gap when he states that the need for storytelling “was the need created by myth.”<sup>121</sup> To further this claim, and as if anticipating Tolkien’s strivings, Benjamin goes on to quote Ernst Bloch in saying that a “hybrid between fairy tale and legend contains figuratively mythical elements, mythical elements whose effect is certainly captivating and static, and yet not outside man.”<sup>122</sup> Clearly, Tolkien was equally affected by the loss of both, as well as by the implications this had for the modern man. As Eliade suggests, what the loss of myth inevitably brought about was the loss of the shield and the hope inherent in the higher perspective provided by the myth’s metahistorical meaning, according to which, like in the sacred pattern, for the “traditional man [...] every war rehearsed the struggle between good and evil.”<sup>123</sup> To that effect, Eliade wonders:

In our day, when historical pressure no longer allows any escape, how can man tolerate the catastrophes and horrors of history – from collective deportations and massacres to atomic bombings – if beyond them he can glimpse no sign, no transhistorical meaning; if they are only the blind play of economic, social, or political forces, or, even worse, only the result of the ‘liberties’ that a minority takes and exercises directly on the stage of universal history?<sup>124</sup>

Naturally, any man of faith already has an answer to this question, and Tolkien, being a *fidelis* himself, frequently alluded to that answer (as did Eliade). Certainly, the development of civilization had taken the world not only a step away from the ancient

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<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> Eliade, Mircea: *The Myth of the Eternal Return or, Cosmos and History*, tr. Willard R. Trask, Bollingen Series XLVI, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1954, Ch. IV: “The Terror of History,” pp. 139-162.

<sup>121</sup> Benjamin, *op. cit.*, p. 374.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>123</sup> Eliade, 1954, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

times through the passing of time, and with it a step away from the fantastic, but also a step away from the sacred and into a state of disunion that deeply troubled Tolkien. Consequently, his narrative return through time was a movement towards the reestablishment of that unity, one that he believed was thriving in the sacred art of old – myths and fairy-stories.

Yet, despite the fact that myth and fairy-story had a common source in Tolkien's mind, this was certainly not the case in the prevalent 'modern reasoning' of the day. While myth was both exalted and debased (with a tendency to be 'debunked'), the fairy-story was mainly debased. At best, it was confined to the nursery, or was restricted to the adaptations coming from Disney studios, for whose work Tolkien expressed a 'heartfelt loathing' (a piercing phrase he otherwise hardly ever used).<sup>125</sup> In a more recent study on fairy tales, Jack Zipes uses another piercing phrase, suggesting that Disney adaptations brought about a "domestication of the imagination,"<sup>126</sup> a proposition with which Tolkien would certainly agree. For Tolkien, the association of fairy-stories *specifically* to children was an "accident of our domestic history,"<sup>127</sup> and the banishment of fairy-story from the adult world a ruinous feat. Children *are* associated with them, Tolkien explains: "naturally, because children are human and fairy-stories are a natural human taste (though not necessarily a universal one)" and "unnaturally, because of erroneous sentiment about children, a sentiment that seems to increase with the decline in children."<sup>128</sup> The erroneous sentiment, however, seems to apply not only to children, but also to the other part of this equation, the fairy-story itself and, generally, fantasy. No wonder these are considered a 'tight fit' when fantasy is so frequently equated with immaturity. A "rather sizable error" Ursula Le Guin would say, punningly proposing

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<sup>125</sup> While preparing for the publication of *The Hobbit* in May 1937, Tolkien was notified by his publisher Allen and Unwin that they had also interested "one of the outstanding firms of American publishers" in the book. The American publisher (Houghton Mifflin Company of Boston, Massachusetts) was interested in including a number of illustrations and was to that effect suggesting the employment of "good American artists" (*Note to LT* 13, p. 24). Tolkien was clearly hesitant, as can be seen from his reply, addressed to Charles Furth of Allen and Unwin: "It might be advisable, rather than lose the American interest, to let the Americans do what seems good to them – as long as it was possible (I should like to add) to veto anything from or influenced by the Disney studios (for all whose works I have a heartfelt loathing)." (*LT* 13, p. 24)

<sup>126</sup> Zipes, Jack: *Happily Ever After: Fairy Tales, Children and the Culture Industry*, Routledge, New York, 1997, p. 51 (Zipes himself borrows the phrase from Rüdiger Steinlein who applied it to much of German children's literature from the beginning of the nineteenth century).

<sup>127</sup> *FS*, p. 130.

<sup>128</sup> *FS*, p. 136.

the term “maturismo” for the sort of “anxious savagery of the intellectual who thinks his adulthood has been impugned.”<sup>129</sup>

Certainly the fairy-story seemed exceedingly naïve and too childlike to be easily welcomed into the adult state of materialistic modernity, which thrived not on sanctity but rather on the negation of it. Man grew up and ‘freed’ himself from the ‘illusion’ of sanctity; he delegated the Power (of the Ring) onto himself and needed no more stories of things fantastic that simply ‘cannot be’. While fiction seemed to be steadily denouncing the purity of fantasy and declaring allegiance to skepticism and irony instead, industry was simultaneously becoming the new shrine of modern living, and thus, rather inevitably, fairy-stories came to be considered fit only for the children and the senseless. Even those who recognized the power of the fairy-story advertently or inadvertently added to its oppressing, including the psychologist Bruno Bettelheim whose interpretation of fairytales as primary didactic compasses in human development opened the gate before the understanding of fairy-stories, only to let them enter the playroom (and perhaps the dormitories of the mentally disabled). While Bettelheim asserts in his *Uses of Enchantment* that behind the fairytale “we soon discover the inner turmoils of our soul”<sup>130</sup> and even goes so far as to place the fairytale among “all great art,” he ultimately fails to see that the fairy-story could “both delight and instruct” ordinary clear-thinking adults as well.<sup>131</sup> It is hardly surprising that not only imagination but also sanctity suffered at the hands of domestication (profanation) and that consequently God too was nearly reduced to a fairy-story and an impossibility (this was recently ‘confirmed’ by Stephen Hawking, who has otherwise been dubbed the greatest mind of our time, neatly pinpointing the direction of our ‘progress’<sup>132</sup>). Admittedly, the

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<sup>129</sup> Le Guin, Ursula K.: *Cheek by Jowl: Talks & Essays on How & Why Fantasy Matters*, Aqueduct Press, Seattle, 2009, p. 21.

<sup>130</sup> Bettelheim, Bruno: *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*, Knopf, New York, 1976, p. 309.

<sup>131</sup> Bettelheim, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

<sup>132</sup> In their recently published book *The Grand Design*, Stephen Hawking and co-author Leonard Mlodinow forwarded the idea that the reason “why the Universe exists” is nothing but “spontaneous creation” and that it is therefore “not necessary to invoke God to light the blue touch paper and set the Universe going” (Hawking, Stephen & Mlodinow, Leonard: *The Grand Design*, Bantam Books, New York, 2010, p. 180). Moreover, asserting that “free will is just an illusion,” the two great minds reduced human beings to “no more than biological machines” (p. 32). Certainly, Tolkien would find such a reduction distasteful, to say the least, and one can only imagine what he would make of the headline that appeared in *The Guardian* (May 15, 2011): ‘Stephen Hawking: There is no heaven; it’s a fairy story’! Yet, at least one reviewer of Hawking’s ‘Design’ picked up on the analogy. Playing on Tolkien’s

Art of Tolkien's day kept looking into the past in search for that which was lost, excavating myths and legends and resuscitating them by various means, frantically digging for the forgotten meaning through the pandemonium of modern life, yet it kept respectively failing to restore the sense of sanctity. God was dying, and sacred ancient forms given modern garments merely reflected an artificial and unfortunate sight. Art was at a loss and cynical hopelessness was spreading through it like a disease.

A battlefield indeed it was then and quite a bold attempt to open a chasm in modernity and challenge the Machine by re-introducing the fairy-story and, through the prism of fantasy that the fairy-story strove to nurse back to health, a variety of other ancient storytelling forms – before all, myth (not a mythical theme, but myth as a self-referential literary construct). Thus, while Tolkien opted for a profoundly innovative approach to archaic narrative expression, the modernity of his range had little to do with literary strivings of the day. His embrace of myth, which certainly played a prominent role in the life of modern art (unlike the fairy-story), shared little with the kind of treatment myth had been receiving in the literary worlds of Tolkien's contemporaries, because in the treasure troves of myth and legend, quite like in the depths of the fairy-story, Tolkien recognized more than just a seed of exotic antiquity and mysterious past of mankind (a symbol of something that was lost) – he recognized sanctity; and in the world of fantasy that these narratives brought to light he glimpsed beyond the unusual and the imaginary – he saw hope.

### 3.3. *Fantastic legacy*

It is easily distinguishable that imagination as the basis of art was a sacred thing to Tolkien. His depiction of the creational drama reveals this quite unambiguously. Whereas in the *Gospel of John* the beginning is marked by the presence of the Word, “and the Word was *with* God,”<sup>133</sup> in Tolkien's cosmogony it is the Ainur who are

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famous verses that open *LotR*: “One Ring to rule them all...,” Silk wittingly named his review “One Theory to Rule Them All,” adding: “Some humbleness would be welcome here” (Silk, Joe: “One Theory to Rule Them All,” pp. 179-180 in *Science*, Vol. 330, No. 6001, Oct. 8, 2010).

<sup>133</sup> *John*, 1: 1 (ESV), emphasis mine.

“with” God in the beginning – they are the first-made, “the offspring of his thought.”<sup>134</sup> We can thus observe that in Tolkien’s account *Logos* is shifted from Word to Divine *Thought*, and consequently onto Imagination (Fantasy). Furthermore, it is Music that shapes the first communication, and it is out of the music which the first beings receive from God that arises a vision of the world which will be theirs to shape *i.e.* bring to material creation.

But when they were come into the Void, Ilúvatar said to them: ‘Behold your Music!’ And he showed to them a vision, giving to them sight where before was only hearing; and they saw a new World made visible before them, and it was globed amid the Void, and it was sustained therein, but was not of it. And as they looked and wondered this World began to unfold its history, and it seemed to them that it lived and grew.<sup>135</sup>

As the Ainur gaze at the Vision, they become enamored with the World they see therein, and with the Children of Ilúvatar whose birth they find announced in the Third Theme (conceived by Ilúvatar alone), and some of them express a desire to descend into Arda. As they incarnate into the world, they assume the form of the *Valar*, Powers of the World, thus essentially becoming Logos-incarnate. However, once they arrive, they discover that the Vision was but a foretelling, and that the world as they have seen it is yet to be achieved. In placing the Vision before Shape Tolkien tells us that Imagination was born before the Word, and ultimately, that Art existed before Reality or, more precisely, that *Art is the force that drives the shaping of Reality*. In effect, it is our thoughts that shape the world, just like it is the first thought-beings the Ainur *i.e.* Valar who are entrusted with the task of shaping Arda out of the vision/design with which they are endowed (reality out of imagination) and preparing it for the physical arrival of the Children of God (the Firstborn and the Followers, that is, Elves and Men respectively).

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<sup>134</sup> As such, the Ainur are the most direct embodiment of the Flame Imperishable, the life and light that is indivisible from Ilúvatar. Hence, whilst Melkor desperately seeks to uncover its location, “for desire grew hot within him to bring into Being things of his own,” he cannot find it, “for it is *with* Ilúvatar” (*Sil*, p. 16, emphasis mine). In the act of the Creation of Arda, Flame Imperishable is again given life-bearing role, as Ilúvatar sends it forth into the Void, “and it shall be at the heart of the World, and the World shall Be” (*Sil*, p. 21). Cf. *John*, 1: 4 (ESV): “In him was life, and the life was the light of men.”

<sup>135</sup> *Sil*, p. 18.

Unlike the Holy Incarnates, the Elves are born directly into Arda, in which they are followed by Men. According to the Aristotelian *scala naturae* ('ladder of nature'), which grew into the medievalist idea of the Great Chain of Being or the Divine Order, it is clear that the Ainur/Valar, essentially angelic, occupy the higher spiritual realm at the pinnacle of which is God (Eru/Ilúvatar). The position of Men is a unique *middle ground* (Tolkien's *Middle-earth* is a clear sign of acceptance of this pattern), as Men are continually torn apart between the spiritual and the purely physical (lower) realm, to which animals, plants and inanimate matter belong. In this equation, however, the Elves retain (if not shape) a special liminal category: they are the link between middle and higher ground, existing in spirit/fantasy and reality at the same time (or in fact halfway, on the threshold between the two poles).<sup>136</sup> We need look no further for evidence of this than the geographical positioning of the dwellings of Elves and Men during the Second Age. The Elves inhabit the island of Tol Eressëa (Lonely Isle) which is in sight of Valinor, the Blessed Realm where the Valar dwell, while Men inhabit the island of Númenor, which is in sight of Tol Eressëa but *not* of Valinor. Quite naturally are the Elves the Firstborn, as they are in a way the spiritual (immortal) predecessors, even foretellers, of the corporeal (mortal) Men, and although immortal they are doomed to fade before Men, departing into the Undying Lands (Valinor), yet not before leaving a trail of fantasy in the physical world over which Man is to have dominion. "The Children of God are thus primevally related and akin, and primevally different," Tolkien expounds.<sup>137</sup> Men and Elves are both the Children of the same One, that is, fantasy and reality are both part of one Work of Art – even if the Elves (also called the *Eldar*) are respectively 'elder', denoting fantasy as the ancestor of flesh. The Elves embody principles that are written into the world that Man inherits, and by fading from the

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<sup>136</sup> In the same liminal category that forms the bridge between matter and spirit, along with Elves, are Tolkien's race of Ents (Shepherds of Trees) and the character of Tom Bombadil. Dwarves, however, belong in the Middle with Men, quite like the Hobbits, who are essentially *little men* (not in a derogatory sense). The Maiar are incarnate beings of lesser stature than the Valar (thus, lesser Ainur), five of whom take shape in Middle-earth as the Istari (Wizards). Clearly, they too occupy the Spirit realm. The same hierarchy can be applied to the evil entities: Balrogs (demons) certainly rank higher than the Orcs, and since both serve as specific mockeries *i.e.* "counterfeits," the first of the Maiar and the latter of the Elves, this places them accordingly in separate realms. Further subdivisions are naturally in place, much like in the medievalist world-view. The Spirit realm, for instance, would exemplify an inner hierarchy of Ilúvatar – Valar – Maiar – Balrogs. Animals and beasts belong to the lower realm, at the forefront of which stand certain creatures endowed with a higher consciousness (and language): the dog Huan, Shadowfax Lord of Horses, Gwaihir Lord of the Eagles, Ungoliant the spider, *etc.*

<sup>137</sup> *LT* 131, p. 169.



world, they essentially return into their primal imaginary form. What they leave behind however is the memory of the *alliance* between spirit and matter, imagination and form, the ennoblement of the mind through the force of fantasy (sacred imagination).

The wedding of the two, fantasy and mortality, which is a vital leitmotif in the Saga – much as the idea of their alliance – from the initial legendarium of *The Silmarillion* to the culmination of *The Lord of the Rings*, is surely Tolkien's rendering of the alchemical *hieros gamos*, sanctified mystical union, symbolizing that without fantasy to immortalize human existence by being *the link to the sacred source*, man, burdened by his own mortality and the machine of living, is far more susceptible to inner decay (fall). Only three unions between Human and Elf ever transpire in Tolkien's imaginarium, making it both a significant and a rare occurrence. It is interesting to note that in each of these instances fantasy (Elf-kin) is represented by the feminine principle<sup>138</sup> (clearly a fact that escaped some of those critics who accused Tolkien of being 'sexist' and 'chauvinistic'<sup>139</sup>). The offspring of these mystical unions are the *Peredhil*, the Half-Elven, breathing testimonials to the life of fantasy inside the being. Certainly, this pattern can distinctly be traced throughout various mythological traditions. In Greek legend, the hero Achilles is begotten by a mortal man Peleus and the sea-nymph Thetis. In the Norse *Saga of King Hrólfr Kraki* (which is closely related to *Beowulf*), the Danish princess Skuld is born to King Helgi (named Halga in *Beowulf*) of a nameless elven mother. In South-Slavic folklore, Child Grujica is the offspring of Old Man Novak and a Danubian *vila*.<sup>140</sup>

What all of these stories allow, like Tolkien's legend of the *Peredhil*, is the possibility for a trace, if even an almost imperceptible one, of contemporary man's 'supernatural ancestry' (although, according to Tolkien, fantasy is rather a state of the

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<sup>138</sup> This is no more accidental than the fact there are *three* such occurrences. In all three instances, an Elf-maiden marries a man of mortal descent: in *The Silmarillion* it is the Elf-maidens Lúthien and Idril who are to wed Beren and Tuor respectively, in *The Lord of the Rings* it is the Elf-maiden Arwen that weds Aragorn.

<sup>139</sup> Curry devotes a special segment to such 'offenders' in his essay on Tolkien criticism (Curry, *op. cit.*, pp. 85-86). Successfully dismantling such claims, he goes on to conclude, "we should also be glad that academic and literary feminists have largely ignored Tolkien (presumably as beyond the pale)" (p. 85). Yet, he cannot help but recall the "dysfunctional psychoanalysis" of Brenda Partridge (p. 127), and indulge in listing several of her conclusions, such as phallic appearance of swords and other "such silliness" (p. 86).

<sup>140</sup> *Vila* is a nymph-like (elven-like) creature of great beauty and magical abilities mostly connected with nature. *Vilas*, like nymphs, are all female.

*truly* natural than *supernatural*<sup>141</sup>). It is in accordance with this notion that *The Lord of the Rings* ends with the restoration of a King of ancient Númenórean lineage to the throne of Gondor – the long awaited assumption of a benevolent ruler who is to heal and renew Middle-earth in the aftermath of the war against the Shadow and to usher in a time of the ‘Dominion of Men’. This is Aragorn, whom the Elves call *Estel* (‘Hope’ in *Sindarin* Elven), and who is himself, although mortal, possessive of a distant Elven ancestry (being a descendant of Eärendil, son of Idril and Tuor). As if Tolkien wanted to heighten this aspect even further, Aragorn will wed Arwen, an Elf-maiden of high birth. Although she will thereupon *choose* mortality and be granted the Doom of Death (not as a curse but as a *gift*), to pass on to their children as well, the royal line upon which rests the fate of men will through this union receive a powerful infusion of the fantastic principle. Clearly, Tolkien hoped that, thusly enhanced, the fantastic principle would survive the long untold ages. Ultimately, this is what Tolkien was most actively searching for throughout his lifetime of storytelling – a way to reconnect the modern disenchanting man to the fantastic enchantment that once made up the very fabric of reality. He was searching for the *lost road*.

*Westra lage wegas rehtas, nu isti sa wraithas*, ‘a straight road lay westward, now it is bent.’<sup>142</sup>

### **3.4. *Religious Allegory?***

The myth of the Lost Road most directly represents the intersection of Tolkien’s religious and worldly views – those melding orientations that Benjamin respectively dubs the eschatological and the naturalistic.<sup>143</sup> Obviously, the common denominator in this equation is myth, the carrier of both the theological and the naturalistic pattern. It must not be forgotten, however, that the frontier of both of these poles within Tolkien’s myth is the fairytale. The fairytale nature of Tolkien’s myth thus becomes its

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<sup>141</sup> *FS*, p. 110. Teasingly, Tolkien allows for the qualification of supernatural only “if *super* is taken merely as a superlative prefix.”

<sup>142</sup> *HoMe* VI, p. 43.

<sup>143</sup> Benjamin, *op. cit.*, p. 370.

jurisprudence, effectively barring it from a complete plunge into either direction. As Lane reminds the reader, fairytales are “sometimes spiritual, but never religious.”<sup>144</sup> Indeed, Tolkien’s search for the lost road (and the lost tales) is a specific search for the Sacred, but only in the sense that it is a search for the forgotten path to the Sacred, *via* Fantasy: the lost *i.e.* bent road, the consequence of a ‘bent world’. It is quite along these lines that Tolkien’s ‘Faërie-myth’, although touching on implicit religious truths, never fully becomes a religious account.

Theologically (if the term is not too grandiose) I imagine the picture to be less dissonant from what some (including myself) believe to be the truth. But since I have deliberately written a tale, which is built on or out of certain ‘religious’ ideas, but is *not* an allegory of them (or anything else), and does not mention them overtly, still less preach them, I will not now depart from that mode, and venture on theological disquisition for which I am not fitted.<sup>145</sup>

However, certain tendencies in Tolkien criticism divulge an eager propensity toward steering the Saga into the direction of Christian allegory. While such a trend has been more recently fostered by critics like Joseph Pearce and Brad Birzer, the idea itself is not a new one. Surprisingly, one of the first proponents of such a reading of Tolkien is none other than Humphrey Carpenter, Tolkien’s biographer, who argued in his 1985 study on children’s literature *Secret Gardens* that Tolkien “created an alternative religion.”<sup>146</sup> While Carpenter does not include Tolkien in his ‘secret garden’ of children’s literature (rightfully so, since Tolkien’s garden is not *just* for children), he cannot help but use the book as a platform from which to propose his own interpretation of Tolkien’s work (one he explicitly denied himself in Tolkien’s biography published not a decade earlier). Furthering his claim, Carpenter goes on to assert that Tolkien made “conscious efforts at religion-building,” the evidence for which he finds in the “Christ-like character of Frodo Baggins” and the claim that Tolkien’s “avowed purpose” was the creation of a mythology for England.<sup>147</sup> In a single stroke, Carpenter thus promoted what would become two of the most deeply entrenched yet equally

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<sup>144</sup> Lane, *op. cit.*, p 5.

<sup>145</sup> *LT* 211, p. 299.

<sup>146</sup> Carpenter, Humphrey: *Secret Gardens: A Study of the Golden Age of Children’s Literature*, Faber & Faber, London, 2012, p. 211.

<sup>147</sup> Carpenter, *op. cit.*, p. 212.

misleading notions in the field of Tolkien interpretation: ‘religious/Christian allegory’ and ‘mythology for England’.

Yet, both claims seem to owe their origin rather to the image of Tolkien the man than Tolkien the storyteller. It is no secret that the gaping hole in the mythological system of England left Tolkien since his early days yearning to reconnect to that source, the forgotten fantastic truth of old, even fantasizing in his young adulthood about how these ‘lost tales’ could be recreated. It is an even lesser secret that Tolkien was a devout Roman Catholic who profoundly revered the Truth of the Gospels. As a storyteller, however, Tolkien possessed a deep aversion toward allegorical renderings, especially those that befell his own Saga, which he expressed repeatedly.<sup>148</sup> Certainly, he could not have seen his tale as a Christian allegory since that which he sought to bring to life was not the Christian thought that was *already given*, but a pre-Christian mythic legendarium that was not! Tolkien himself vividly explains the urge underlying his storytelling process in a letter written to Milton Waldman in 1951:

I was from early days grieved by the poverty of my own beloved country: it had no stories of its own (bound up with its tongue and soil), not of the quality that I sought, and found (as an ingredient) in legends of other lands. [...] Of course there was and is all the Arthurian world, but powerful as it is, it [...] does not replace what I felt to be missing. For one thing its ‘faerie’ is too lavish, and fantastical, incoherent and repetitive. For another and more important thing: it is involved in, and explicitly contains the Christian religion. For reasons which I will not elaborate, that seems to me fatal.<sup>149</sup>

Naturally, the fatality of the presence of Christian religion within Arthurian legend and the reason why it does not replace that which Tolkien felt to be “missing” lies in the fact that it denies Arthur’s world all pre-Christian authenticity. These legends simply cannot

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<sup>148</sup> For instance, writing to his publisher Stanley Unwin whose son Rayner had just read *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien warns: “[D]o not let Rayner suspect ‘Allegory’. There is a ‘moral’, I suppose, in any tale worth telling. But that is not the same thing. [...] Of course, Allegory and Story converge, meeting somewhere in Truth. So that the only perfectly consistent allegory is real life; and the only fully intelligible story is an allegory. And one finds, even in imperfect human ‘literature’, that the better and more consistent an allegory is the more easily can it be read ‘just as a story’; and the better and more closely woven a story is the more easily can those so minded find allegory in it. But the two start out from opposite ends.” (*LT* 109, p. 140)

<sup>149</sup> *LT* 131, p. 167.

be taken as *stories of old*. They explicitly owe their life to the storytellers of the *new era* and thus have nothing to do with the primeval belief that could have been transferred only by way of myth – the oldest form of storytelling and thus the oldest form of art (that fellowship of word and image, followed by music).

Clearly, it was not the Christian thought that Tolkien ventured to ‘recreate’ – since it needed no recreation; it was *already there* and *already told* (and it most certainly needed no allegory for those who, like Tolkien, *already* considered it *true*). Instead, Tolkien’s pursuit revolved around that “missing” piece of belief that naturally included, and as we shall see, even directly depended on the Divine, but the divine as it ‘could have been known’ long before man knew Christ: in the unrecorded supposed legendary time when fairy-creatures were not a thing of legend but ‘living realities’ existing in the ‘actual’ time of the fairy-world, when *they were the storytellers*, their time, before they ‘faded’ into story and legend, and in the time *even before* – before the birth of any storytellers (fairy or human), before the world itself, at the very beginning of all things, when the divine simply *was* – and when the divine created *all*. Expounding in the Waldman letter on his storytelling *i.e.* sub-creative urge, that passion which he found had no biological function yet spoke from the depths of the being, Tolkien humbly puts into words (even lastly claiming his entire endeavor to be “absurd”) the vision that led him into the quest for the once upon a time:

[A] passion of mine *ab initio* was for myth (not allegory!) and for fairy-story, and above all for heroic legend on the brink of fairy-tale and history [...] Do not laugh! But once upon a time (my crest has long since fallen) I had a mind to make a body of more or less connected legend, ranging from the large and cosmogonic, to the level of romantic fairy-story – the larger founded on the lesser in contact with the earth, the lesser drawing splendour from the vast backcloths – which I could dedicate simply to: to England; to my country. [...] I would draw some of the great tales in fullness, and leave many only placed in the scheme, and sketched. The cycles should be linked to a majestic whole [...] Of course, such an overweening purpose did not develop all at once. The mere stories were the thing. They arose in my mind as ‘given’ things, and as they came, separately, so too the links grew [...]

yet always I had the sense of recording what was already ‘there’, somewhere: not of ‘inventing’.<sup>150</sup>

We can duly note that what Tolkien had set out to do, he accomplished, however absurd it may or may not seem. Although, sadly, he did not live to see this “majestic whole” fully brought to life, it stands before us ‘now’ – ranging from its cosmogonic myth and its legendarium of chronologies, heroic epics and romances of *The Silmarillion*, across its small-scale adventure of *The Hobbit* and ultimately to its large-scale epic quest of *The Lord of the Rings* – existing “on the brink” or rather *on the bridge* between fairy-tale and history, fantasy and reality.

However, the storyteller leaves us with another deeply intriguing notion: that he had not merely ‘invented’ this entire world, but had recognized it as something that was *already there* – it was there but it had *never* been ‘recorded’! Such a confession brings to mind the verses from *Mythopoeia* and Tolkien’s evocation of the legend-makers and their rhymes that summon “things not found within recorded time.”<sup>151</sup> It is understood that these “things” are not to be written off as entirely non-existing, and while they may be unknown (or lost) to the existing records of time they are not concealed from time altogether (or from the wandering mind). Quite naturally, the mythopoeic formula became Tolkien’s modus of unveiling and re-discovering these “things”, his own rendering of the ancient *poiesis* – that which brings the story to life by means of producing *aletheia*. The notion of ‘invention’ thus receives a new reading with Tolkien. While on the level of discussing artistic creation invention is certainly a valid and logical choice of word, Tolkienian logic takes a leap toward assumptions of a slightly different kind. Just as Tolkien’s creation was in fact an act of *sub-creation* (a mirroring of the ultimate Work of Art in accordance with the creational pattern), so Tolkien’s invention came closer to an embodiment of *fantastic recognition*. Invention in this sense is not aimed at the discovery or creation of ‘new’ but can rather be interpreted as an inspirational pursuit of an ‘old’ and universal Truth, one whose secrets were hidden in the forgotten past of mankind, now accessible only by intuition or, rather, Imagination. Fantasy, thus, enables not only invention in the classical sense, but also represents, on a

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<sup>150</sup> *LT* 131, pp. 167-8.

<sup>151</sup> *MP*, v. 92.

rather more metaphysical note, the key to accessing visions that go deeper than what the conscious mind can ‘actually’ remember. The imaginative discovery of these memories, as Lane suggests, is a spiritual, rather than religious process.

What was it that Tolkien imagined (discovered)? A rash, and incomplete, answer would be that he imagined elves, or hobbits, or other ‘stuff of story’. However, alongside Faërie dwellers, Tolkien also imagined men, grass, and trees. He imagined good, and evil – and a ring. He imagined words and names. He imagined histories, legends and myths, love and loss, romance and tragedy. He imagined a divine Creator. Indeed, Tolkien imagined many things. Tolkien even imagined, or rather more precisely re-imagined, Time. Consequently, he also re-imagined Reality. Certainly, in the case of Tolkien, such a qualification fits more naturally than the claim that he re-invented the past and thus re-constructed English mythology. Though these are not *entirely* wrong, at least in some facets, they are incomplete to the point of being misleading. The play on time that transpires in Tolkien’s world discloses a fusion of ancient and modern, the creation of a passageway for the kindling sparks of ancient formulae to ‘splinter’ into our present reality unhindered, not as dead relics but as living emanations of light “illuminating Now and dark Hath-been,”<sup>152</sup> past and present alike, “with light of suns as yet by no man seen.”<sup>153</sup> Ultimately, these emanations reveal a presence that would become essential to Tolkien’s work: the symbol of Light that persists within the darkness, and in spite of it, even if diminished to the point of being barely recognizable (as in the case of Gollum); the light that cherishes old and sacred memories – old and sacred truths. It was Verlyn Flieger in her momentous 1982 study *Splintered Light* who first drew attention to the importance of this metaphor in Tolkien’s work and its connection to the search for origins. The origin for Tolkien is clearly the Divine, the “single White” that is “splintered”<sup>154</sup> through “Man, Sub-creator, the refracted light”<sup>155</sup> into “many hues.”<sup>156</sup> As Man refracts the sacred light, he refracts the sacred truth, or at

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<sup>152</sup> *MP*, v. 105.

<sup>153</sup> *MP*, v. 106.

<sup>154</sup> *MP*, v. 62.

<sup>155</sup> *MP*, v. 61.

<sup>156</sup> *MP*, v. 63.

the very least carries the potential for truth unveiling in opting for the sub-creative principle, rather than opting to walk with the “progressive apes.”<sup>157</sup>

*The heart of Man is not compound of lies,  
but draws some wisdom from the only Wise,  
and still recalls Him...*<sup>158</sup>

Stories that Tolkien ‘discovered’ were the stories that were yet to be told, certain insights that were yet to be shared, and ultimately, certain truths that were yet to be revealed. Clearly, they could not be revealed by any other existing means save Imagination because they belong to something that was *lost*, although the universality of their foundations resurfaces throughout human existence (told and forgotten). They should not be reduced to the mere retelling or the allegorizing of the Christian pattern (or sacred truth), which is already *known* and *told* (and thus quite sufficient to any fidelis). These stories essentially seek to evoke a pattern that they have *in common* with Christian belief, the universal sacred pattern, which draws from the Great Untold. Tolkien’s fairy-story is a fresh perspective on truth, which by no means negates any existing sacred truth, naturally, especially not Christian, nor does it claim to rise above it or even imply it insufficient; the fairy-story is a companion to belief, a fellow passenger, the yet unexplored vision field and the yet untold *possibility*. This is what allowed Tolkien, despite the implicit presence of certain religious ideas, to “say that all this is ‘mythical’, and not any kind of new religion or vision.”<sup>159</sup> Obviously, the difference between the implications that arise from these possibilities is rather profound, and must not be overlooked.

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<sup>157</sup> *MP*, v. 119.

<sup>158</sup> *MP*, vv. 53-55.

<sup>159</sup> *LT* 211, p. 298.



## PART II: ONCE UPON A MYTH

### Chapter 4: A QUESTION OF TIME

*History often resembles 'Myth', because they are both ultimately of the same stuff.*<sup>160</sup>

In many respects, J. R. R. Tolkien was an ancient mythmaker born into a modern world. He was a man highly driven by passion for philology, literature and history, and these defined him early on as a lover (and knower) of antiquity, its stories and languages. Remembering his college days at Oxford where he attended Tolkien's lectures in Old English, author John Mackintosh Stewart evokes the image of Tolkien the storyteller: "He could turn a lecture room into a mead hall in which he was the bard and we were the feasting listening guests."<sup>161</sup> However, the 'real past' was not enough for Tolkien – although it was, admittedly, a step in the right direction. In his 1972 *Master of Middle-Earth*, first book-length study on Tolkien (and one that mapped out the ground for serious critical approach to Tolkien's work), Paul Kocher examines the cosmology of Tolkien's world, asking himself whether it is our world at an earlier time or one that exists in a fantastic 'Elsewhere'.<sup>162</sup> Notably, Kocher addressed this issue several years prior to the publication of *The Silmarillion*, and it is remarkable how much he extrapolated based only on the cosmological hints present in *The Lord of the Rings*. Kocher opts for the first possibility, and he is certainly right. Tolkien's world is not globed amidst an Elsewhere<sup>163</sup> but an *Elsewhen*: the fantastic/mythical past of humankind, lost to memory.

Certainly, the riddle of the past was but a part of a much bigger equation, yet it proved powerful enough to initiate the building of a world from vision and the shaping of an entire fantastic world. In turn, the created world would provide the stage for

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<sup>160</sup> *FS*, p. 117.

<sup>161</sup> *Bio*, p. 138. Tolkien's introductory lecture at the beginning of the academic school year would usually start with him exclaiming "Hwæt!," which the newly arrived students would often mistakenly understand to mean 'Silence!', while it was in fact the opening of *Beowulf*, which he would then go on to recite.

<sup>162</sup> Kocher, Paul H.: *Master of Middle-Earth: The Fiction of J. R. R. Tolkien*, Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1972, p. 13.

<sup>163</sup> Although it can be argued that as a Secondary World, it is in fact also an Elsewhere.

Tolkien's philosophical and theological questions on the relation between fantasy and reality, art and creation, man and God. Simultaneously, it allowed Tolkien to examine circumstances causing the human state of Fall and the nature of evil, especially in terms of lust for power and lust for immortality, while searching for the antidote against the shadow, inner and outer. Essentially, Tolkien invoked sacred patterns of old in pursuit of a 'point in memory' distant enough to blur the boundary between fantasy and history, yet universal enough to resonate with truth within the essence of the being. Thus, rather than creating a parallel fictional reality, Tolkien effectively conjured and placed before us a vision of *fantastic memories*. Benjamin notes that the *chronicler* is preserved "in the storyteller," albeit "in changed form."<sup>164</sup> Tolkien seems to have gladly welcomed both roles, as well as the 'change' that transpires within. The memories Tolkien chronicled indeed touch on Real Time (and 'real past'), only to mingle with Mythical Time, *en route* to the Beyond, and into the Time of Story (Other Time). In approaching the Other Time, Tolkien touches on that which Borges in *The False Problem of Ugolino* identifies as the 'ambiguous' *time of art* and parallels to that of hope or of oblivion<sup>165</sup> – incidentally, both vital notions to Tolkien's work.

I have, I suppose, constructed an imaginary *time*, but kept my feet on my own mother-earth for *place*. I prefer that to the contemporary mode of seeking remote globes in 'space'. However curious, they are alien, and not lovable with the love of blood-kin. *Middle-earth* is (by the way & if such a note is necessary) not my own invention. It is a modernization or alteration (N[ew] E[nglish] Dictionary) 'a perversion') of an old word for the inhabited world of Men, the *oikoumenē*: middle because thought of vaguely as set amidst the encircling Seas and (in the northern-imagination) between ice of the North and the fire of the South. O.English *middan-geard*, mediaeval E. *middenerd*, *middle-erd*. Many reviewers seem to assume that Middle-earth is another planet!<sup>166</sup>

It is our task to examine whether the time of Tolkien's world, and thus the Other Time of Art, can also be the Time of Myth, that is, whether Tolkien's Elsewhen can truly be *mythical*.

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<sup>164</sup> Benjamin, *op. cit.*, p. 370.

<sup>165</sup> Borges, Jorge Luis: *Selected Non-Fictions*, Eliot Weinberger ed., tr. Eliot Weinberger, Esther Allan & Suzanne Jill Levine, Viking, New York, 1999, p. 279.

<sup>166</sup> *LT* 211, p. 299.

As we have seen, Tolkien's Saga effectively surpasses myth in the "majestic whole" of its imaginarium, but it *begins* with *myth*, and as we will show, it is precisely through the Saga's myth that Tolkien's world establishes a *pattern* from which it will draw throughout its unraveling, in all its told and yet untold stories. Following the path of Tolkien's myth (in its two successive appearances – the cosmogonic myth of the creation of the world and the ensuing mythic legendarium of the world's unraveling) certainly requires examination of the 'real' myth, without the understanding of which there can be no understanding of mythopoeia. The 'real' myth in itself, however, can be viewed neither outside of its connection to history nor outside of its connection to story – the first dictated by the understanding of time, and the latter by the understanding of truth in its relation to art and belief. It is thus the 'mythic position' regarding time, and Tolkien's mythopoetic rendering of it, that will be our entry point into the discovery of why Tolkien chose precisely myth to place at the gate of the reader's mind, as the guardian of the imagination and wielder of the *secret fire*.

The relationship between myth and time, or to put it in a more extensive context, the presence of myth within time, and the presence of time within myth, their 'intrusion' into one another (never a violent one, yet quite potent in all its might) and their cohesion, is a fairly intricate line. As the pillars of time support and uphold the pervasiveness of myth, allowing it to expand and persist from the *beginning* to *us* (our standpoint here understandably being not only temporal but also spatial, much in the same way it is coincidentally philosophical and physical), so does the delicate, virtually invisible mythic apparatus with the turning of its miniscule wheels conduct the understanding of time *eo ipso* (or at the very least it did so for the ancient man), and on the levels of a cosmogonic myth such as is 'told' by Tolkien (rather than 'created' or 'imagined', although all of these terms are more than applicable, once their meaning is more profoundly understood, as reaching beyond artificial craft which constrains imagination within non-gratifying boundaries of falsehood and reduces its claim on truth – however 'partial' it may be), touches on our understanding of the beginning, thus *origin* (the beginning of the world, of space-and-time, the beginning of thought, word and man), furthering it from the point of a mere return into what is perceived as *past*.

Under Tolkien's storytelling guidance, we are, rather than going backwards in time, making a direct leap *into* the beginning. Quite naturally so, since the story level takes us beyond 'historical' or 'objective' past, although it places itself "on the brink of fairytale and history," especially so with regards to the *beginning* – which, broadly speaking, in terms of myth, itself exists somewhere on the brink of temporal and extemporal plane, inner voice and time. By introducing the readers into the time continuum of the story world, most notably the *time of creation*, Tolkien puts us at the very moment of the *creation of time*. In fact, Tolkien reveals three different stages of time: existence before the creation of the world that transpires amidst the great "Timeless Halls," the creation of the world that marks the beginning of Time itself, and the awakening of Elves and Men upon the world that marks the beginning of History (the fantastic Past). Thus, Tolkien's cosmogonic moment does not belong to the notion of 'duration' that moves linearly within time – it simply *exists* within the limitless stream Tolkien referred to as the "endlessness of the World of Story."<sup>167</sup> The entrance into this world, Tolkien says, is possessive of a "mythical effect", because it opens "a door on Other Time, and if we pass through, though only for a moment, we stand outside our own Time, outside Time itself, maybe."<sup>168</sup> Respective of this endless World, which exists in Other Time from which Tolkien brought us the world, and time, of his Saga, and in accordance with its pattern, the world (and time) Ilúvatar creates at the beginning simply *is*:

‘Therefore I say: *Eä!* Let these things Be! And I will send forth into the Void the Flame Imperishable, and it shall be at the heart of the World, and the World shall Be; and those of you that will may go down into it.’ And suddenly the Ainur saw afar off a light, as it were a cloud with a living heart of flame; and they knew that this was no vision only, but that Ilúvatar had made a new thing: *Eä*, the World that Is.<sup>169</sup>

Naturally, we cannot (and do not) equate Tolkien's mythopoetic cosmogony to an Aboriginal creational myth for instance, if nothing else then for three reasons. For one, Tolkien's is a one-man myth; it does not represent collective belief (although a

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<sup>167</sup> *FS*, p. 161.

<sup>168</sup> *FS*, p. 129.

<sup>169</sup> *Sil*, p. 21.

surprisingly large number of people *decided to believe* Tolkien's story, for reasons we shall inspect later on). Secondly, Tolkien had the benefit of hindsight in his rendering of mythic past, given that he knowingly, deliberately, and in a sense *re-constructively* (for lack of a better word) believed his history into existence by effort of imagination (thus, belief of another nature than the 'belief in fact' i.e. reason). Lastly, because fairy-story, or any story, although founded on a certain kind of belief, does not and cannot represent, claim or rise to that highest form of belief: *faith*, without which creational myths would have no value to the ancient Man who told them and would be *only* stories. In other words, stories do entail one kind of belief (which Tolkien referred to as Secondary Belief), which they should not in all its validity be denied, but they can never be a *Credo*. Not to say that the traditional man did not himself search for the sacred pattern beyond his own time, also in a way deliberately placing himself into the beginning 'as if' it were a contemporary moment, thus effectively 'traversing' time and creating, or rather calling upon, that sacred *timeless* moment,<sup>170</sup> a reconstructive undertaking implied by Eliade's notion of the *eternal return*.

In imitating the exemplary acts of a god or of a mythic hero, or simply by recounting their adventures, the man of an archaic society detaches himself from *profane time* and *magically re-enters the Great Time*, the sacred time.<sup>171</sup>

Indeed, Tolkien's cosmogony calls for a similar break from the profane understanding of time and calls for a *magical* entrance into the Time of Story (the Other Time), just as its 'existence' (being that *is*) does not occupy 'the real world' subject to the terror of 'objective history', which Tolkien referred to as the Primary Plane of existence, but another, the Secondary Plane,<sup>172</sup> that which belongs to man's artistic creation *i.e.* sub-creation, where man glimpses the eternal/sacred truth by mirroring the work of the Creator, which for Tolkien was the essence of mythopoeia/mythopoetics. It is 'poetic' or 'story-like' not in a usually fictional sense, because fiction (in modern day terms at least) essentially implies a *lie*, a fabrication; rather, its *poesis* is art – man's

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<sup>170</sup> This *moment* in its state of eternal and constant duration is not detached from time altogether, in a sense it is quite the opposite, it is temporally omnipresent: thus, instead of *time-less* we should rather say *time-full*.

<sup>171</sup> Eliade, Mircea: *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries: the Encounter between Contemporary Faiths and Archaic Realities*, tr. Philip Mairet, Harper Torchbooks, New York, 1967, p. 23, emphasis mine.

<sup>172</sup> This is what enables us to consider it as an *Elsewhere* as well.

sub-creational art that mirrors and calls upon that ultimate work of art, the Art/Act of Creation – in search of its Truth. And it is precisely the truth all myths search for in their own act of re-creation and divination of the eternal pattern (whether they find it or not and to which extent, and whether art finds it or not and to which extent, is an entirely different field, one we will not yet enter into) but, which is of greater relevance in struggling with the notion of time, myths also do not refer to a historical past *per se*, for they too transcend Primary reality and delve into the sacred (the Great Time), that which we ‘now’ see as mythic time or mythic past.

Certainly it is with deceptive ease that we might conclude that ontological myths *simply* refer to the past, or similarly, that eschatological myths *simply* refer to the future, that their temporality is thus tangible or even predictable i.e. straightforwardly ‘placed’ inside a ‘chronology’. In the case of eschatological myths, the ultimate goal in terms of future outcome stretches only one arm across the field of the historical fate of civilization, while its other arm reaches beyond the palpability of fact and into a far less tangible field of the Absolute, transcending the temporal course entirely. Creational myths for themselves, rather unequivocally directed towards the *original*, the very act (moment) of creation, take us into Ur-Zeit, the before-time *i.e.* sacred time, and though it may seem that the temporality of this image is explicit, given that it is directly connected to what is understood as a ‘physical moment’ of the creation of the world *i.e.* physical beginning (in its many variations of the theme, according to various visions of it), what must be considered is the fact that the image they communicate does not refer only to a moment (act) *in* time, but the moment (act) of the *creation of time* – the time when time began. Eliade refers to this point as the time when the Sacred appeared and established reality,<sup>173</sup> that is, a beginning of things when the Sacred established *all* valid patterns, including the temporal pattern itself.

Similarly, in Tolkien’s creational myth, Eru/Ilúvatar (thus, the Sacred) appears and establishes reality. More to the point, in the propounding of musical themes he establishes the proper *course* – as the Ainur sing before him he is “glad” *i.e.* supportive of the fact that through them “great beauty has been wakened into song.” Yet, once discord arises due to the rebellious musical theme of Melkor (the mightiest of the

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<sup>173</sup> Eliade, Mircea: *Myth and Reality*, tr. Willard R. Trask, Harper & Row, New York, 1963, p. 6.

Ainur) and disrupts the *harmony* of the music Ilúvatar had propounded, he becomes enraged:

In the midst of this strife, whereat the halls of Ilúvatar shook and a tremor ran out into the silences yet unmoved, Ilúvatar arose a third time, and his face was terrible to behold. Then he raised up both his hands, and in one chord, deeper than the Abyss, higher than the Firmament, piercing as the light of the eye of Ilúvatar, the Music ceased.<sup>174</sup>

#### **4.1. Sacred Pattern**

The appearance of the sacred (Eru/Ilúvatar), and the propositioning of the ‘proper course’ of things, establishes *the pattern of Tolkien’s world: accord and discord*, that is, that which is in accordance with the sacred, and that which is not. As Tolkien himself (as a storyteller or sub-creator) acted in accordance with the pattern of the World of Story (since he believed, as a man, that the World of Story itself mirrored *i.e.* followed the pattern of the ultimate Creator, God) so does his story – his world – follow the pattern set forth by the story-God Ilúvatar. This pattern will be most evidently present in the events closest to its establishing, such as is naturally the very creation of Arda (Earth), brought into physical existence out of Ilúvatar’s mind as the habitation of Elves and Men (thus, the Children of Ilúvatar), a world born out of the Great Music of the Ainur which Ilúvatar accordingly calls their “minstrely,”<sup>175</sup> and the utterly differing perceptions the rebellious Melkor and the other Ainur have of Arda itself and the Children who are to inhabit it. Whilst Melkor “desired rather to subdue to his will both Elves and Men, envying the gifts with which Ilúvatar promised to endow them; and he wished himself to have subject and servants, and to be called Lord, and to be a master over other wills,”<sup>176</sup> acting in utter discord with the will of Ilúvatar, wishing himself to be the Creator, the other Ainur faithfully follow the pattern Ilúvatar had set forth “and their hearts rejoiced in light, and their eyes beholding many colours were filled with

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<sup>174</sup> *Sil*, p. 17.

<sup>175</sup> *Sil*, p. 18.

<sup>176</sup> *Sil*, p.19.

*gladness.*”<sup>177</sup> They do not grieve that they had no part in the making of the Children of Ilúvatar who were “conceived by him alone.”<sup>178</sup> What is more, precisely because of this “when they beheld them, the more did they love them, being things other than themselves, strange and free, wherein they saw the mind of Ilúvatar reflected anew, and learned yet a little more of his wisdom, which otherwise had been hidden even from the Ainur.”<sup>179</sup>

This pattern will continue throughout the Saga in less *obvious* form, transferred onto the world of Elves, Men and other races (Dwarves, Hobbits, Orcs, Ents, *etc.*) not all of whom will even be directly aware of Ilúvatar’s presence. The Elves will recount the creation (indeed, their knowledge of it is only partial) and of all the races they will have the most direct contact with those Ainur who decide to inhabit Arda themselves<sup>180</sup> and take part in its physical shaping.<sup>181</sup> Yet, by the time the story reaches the Third Age, the Valar will have withdrawn themselves from the dealings of Elves and Men (Ilúvatar himself never descends upon Arda), their land of Valinor will have been hidden from sight and the main stage transferred to Middle-earth. Thus, the recounting of the Elder days would chiefly rest upon Elven-lore and their songs (as a memory of things past). Some of the Hobbits will learn of it from the Elves and Sam Gamgee will thus sing a song to *Elbereth Gilthoniel* (Varda of the Stars, a Vala whom the Elves hold in highest regard). However, the Ringbearer Frodo who inherits the Ring from his uncle Bilbo and becomes (even reluctantly) entrusted with the task of taking it to the fires of Mount Doom does not do so with Ilúvatar’s name on his lips. Even so, it is clear that Frodo’s path is in full accord with the sacred because he opts for the preservation of the God-given order of things *i.e.* fights for the preservation of the sacred, and though less obviously, *inherently* carries out the sacred pattern. Much like there is an inbuilt sense of morality in all human beings of the real world (an inner weighing between accord and discord), regardless of which God they believe in, and even whether they believe in

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<sup>177</sup> *Ibid*, emphasis mine.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>180</sup> Not all of the Ainur will descend upon Arda and incarnate as the Valar; some will chose to stay “with Ilúvatar beyond the confines of the World” (*Sil*, p. 21).

<sup>181</sup> Expectedly, Melkor will be amongst the first of of the Ainur to inhabit Arda: “and he meddled in all that was done, turning it if he might to his own desires and purposes” (*Sil*, p. 22).



God *per se* or not (a man can carry out Christian values, thus pattern, without actually believing in Christ).

The importance of the sacred pattern within *any* mythology (or any other methodos – path – of belief) cannot be overstated, because it is precisely the sacred pattern that all myths strive to re-establish and any recreation of these is also thus considered sacred – hence the sanctity of ritual. Indeed, according to Barbara Sproul, “ritual is the other half of the mythic statement;”<sup>182</sup> it is the conductor which enables a transmission of that which exists in mythic reality (and consequently, mythic/sacred time) into everyday reality (and consequently, contemporary time). Thus, as Sproul concludes, “myths speak only of the absolute reality, rituals ground it in the relative.”<sup>183</sup> One quite intriguing example of the ‘displacement’ of mythic time from the measurable time calculus (thus, also of mythic *absolute* reality from the everyday *relative* reality), which may prove a significant signpost on the path of understanding the riddle of mythic temporality, is the belief of Australian Aborigines (Eliade devoted a lot of *time* to the study of this phenomenon and in E. M. Meletinsky’s *Poetics of Myth* it is given equally great relevance<sup>184</sup>) according to which the world was made in a specific time continuum the natives call *Dreamtime* or even more directly, simply *Dreaming*. Yet, this time period is not a category that belongs to the past but simultaneously refers to past, present and future, *i.e.* it is marked by perpetual duration, and as the Aborigines believe, the world is therefore *continually being made* in the *Dreaming*. With Tolkien, we find a notion very similar to this one in the idea that the Ainur are *still* shaping the world – physical creation is therefore not a finite process,<sup>185</sup> and accordingly, the very *moment* of the beginning cannot be considered a temporally fixed point either:

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<sup>182</sup> Sproul, Barbara, C.: *Primal Myths: Creating the World*, Harper & Row, San Francisco, 1979, p. 26.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>184</sup> See: Eliade, Mircea: *Australian Religions*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1973 & Meletinsky, Eleazar M.: *The Poetics of Myth*, tr. Guy Lanoue & Alexandre Sadetsky, Routledge, New York & London, 2000, pp. 160 *ff.*

<sup>185</sup> Ainur themselves are not to be mistaken for creators as such. They *shape* the world, or literally build it, in a way sub-creating it physically, but the *true* Creation belongs to Ilúvatar alone. Just as the harmony they ‘create’ is derived from the themes they are *given* by Ilúvatar, it is not essentially of their own making. It is in accordance with this that Ilúvatar tells them: “each of you shall find contained herein, amid the design that I set before you, all those things which it *may seem* that he himself devised or added” (*Sil*, p. 18, emphasis mine).

[Earth *i.e.* Arda, thus the tangible World] might seem a little thing to those [...] who consider only the immeasurable vastness of the World, *which still the Ainur are shaping*, and not the minute precision to which they shape all things therein.<sup>186</sup>

As for the Aboriginal *Dreaming*, the natives believe that this field is accessible to man in a twofold manner: by means of natural occurrence of dream-visions, and by means of ritual-induced visions which arise from the re-creations of the sacred pattern. Drams thus, like rituals, function as conductors into a ‘higher reality’, a *magical* gateway into the *Dreaming*. Tolkien himself was not very fond of the *use* of dreams as artistic means of opening the gates to Other Time and to Faërie (World of Story), because in a literary context (naturally this cannot apply to the Aborigines since their dream *story* is not a literary but a literal one) dreams are often misused to explain away marvels. Such use (or rather misuse) in effect “cheats deliberately the primal desire at the heart of Faërie: the realisation, independent of the conceiving mind, of imagined wonder.”<sup>187</sup> The power of Faërie, according to Tolkien, resides in the power of making effective (by means of will!) the visions of Fantasy,<sup>188</sup> and in its dealing with these “marvels” the World of Story does not tolerate any frame or machinery, such as dream, which “would suggest figment or illusion.”<sup>189</sup> In the ‘real world’ dreams may bring us closer to wonder and thus spur belief, but in the ‘story world’ dreams have the opposite effect – they ‘explain away’ and thus enforce disbelief, and the “moment disbelief arises, the spell is broken; the magic, or rather art, has failed.”<sup>190</sup>

In other words, although the dream-field of vision is in some respects quite akin to the field of artistic vision, art is more *willful* in its striving and thus effectively more akin to ritual (the visions of which are also will-induced) than to dream (the visions of which are a natural consequence of the sleeping mind, we might even say sleeping and thus bypassed reason). Art willfully uses imagination and fantasy to make that magical leap from the everyday into the timeless (time-full or end-less), from the relative into the absolute. Myth and Art always went hand in hand; art was the *means* that brought

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<sup>186</sup> *Sil*, p. 19, emphasis mine.

<sup>187</sup> *FS*, p. 116.

<sup>188</sup> *FS*, p. 122.

<sup>189</sup> *FS*, p. 117.

<sup>190</sup> *FS*, p. 132.

the myth into the world and without it, we would certainly not even know of many myths today. Moreover, *true art* itself seeks to recognize the sacred/absolute pattern in all its beauty and might. Can we not in all honesty say that in essence *true art is ritual*, imagination its tool for conducting, that magical lifeline which connects man to the absolute, the dreamlike medium which enables a transmission directly from the source? Myths were, and still are, *told as* stories, because it was art that gave them shape, and all art tells stories (be it by means of image, sound or letter – which is just another image in itself). World of Story also strives toward that magical field of the absolute, and precisely for that reason it is endless, and with the application of the proper tools the possibilities for the resurrection of its pattern are also endless. Tolkien’s world is but one possibility. We may like or dislike it, believe or disbelieve it (one does not necessarily imply the other), but it magically ‘exists’, available to be discovered and re-discovered in all its beauty.

#### **4.2. *Active Imagination***

Certainly not only Tolkien readers but all human beings (more or less reluctantly and more or less knowingly) are the likely inhabitants of the World of Story, as our imagination driven unconscious minds are intricately connected to the source (since mind cannot help but *imagine* just as much as it cannot help dream). At the same time, myths, like stories – *as* stories<sup>191</sup> – are the lifeline that keeps us connected to it (whether or not any individual chooses to grasp this lifeline and apply the mental faculty of imagining in order to enter the Beyond is ultimately a matter of free will). This notion is quite along the lines of the “almighty deposit of ancestral experience accumulated over millions of years” which Sigmund Freud’s renegade disciple Carl Gustav Jung identified as the “collective unconscious.”<sup>192</sup>

Although it may seem *prima facie* that Tolkien and Jung had little in common, it is precisely their understanding of myth, truth and imagination, and naturally the correlation of these, that had them drinking from the same source. What we can take

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<sup>191</sup> Although never *only* stories!

<sup>192</sup> Jung, Carl & Jaffé, Aniela: *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, Vintage, Chicago, 1989, p. 105.

from Jung, as helpful to our quest, is effectively another modern day ‘use’ of myth (hence revival – not an artificial one by means of hospital tubes, but an *active* one, which he resorted to in his late years and incorporated into his personal *truth*, communicated through his biography). Of specific interest is certainly a process Jung expressed as *active imagination*. Jung postulated on this concept early on in life, and it quickly found its way into the psychoanalytical approaches of the day, as an instrument of self-realization. Yet, it was not until the recent publication of Jung’s ‘secret writings,’ *The Red Book*, (pub. 2009), that the truly esoteric side of the notion was exposed, providing not just theory but an actual record of the journey – a journey Tolkien also took, taking the reader along – into imagination itself.

In the years preceding his death, Jung took part in the writing of his own biography, as certain misgivings concerning his biographer had him write several chapters himself. Some of the thoughts there expressed – including revisions of his earlier understandings of myth – prove an invaluable insight into the *inner* workings of the mythic apparatus, which are remarkably akin to those of Tolkien. Refuting some of his own earlier conclusions, Jung now described myths as *bridges* between our conscious thoughts and another “imperishable world”<sup>193</sup> that lay outside us (as opposed to simply being a bridge between the conscious and unconscious mind as he had deemed before<sup>194</sup>). According to Jung, such a world transcends the usual scientifically rendered laws of time and space – similarly, Tolkien notes that one of the primordial human desires expressed both in myths and in fairy-stories is to survey the *depths* of Time and Space. This imperishable world of Jung’s thought is an equivalent to Tolkien’s endless World of Story, and according to both (worlds, and authors), it is precisely ‘stories’ (*i.e.* myths) one can bring back from this world as the only ‘living’ records of the mind’s (or the soul’s) journey there and back again.

My life is the story of the self-realisation of the unconscious [...] Everything in the unconscious seeks outward manifestations and the personality too desires to evolve

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<sup>193</sup> Jung, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>194</sup> Essentially, Jung’s general ‘equation’ (conscious → myth → unconscious) came to be reformulated as conscious → myth *as* unconscious → imperishable world (*Cf.* Tolkien’s ‘Imperishable Flame’ at the heart of the World). The first two categories include the human mind, *i.e.* the subjective individual, while the third component, outside of the human, represents the objective “wholeness of spirit” (Jung, *op. cit.*, p. 311 & *passim*).

out of its unconscious state and to experience itself as a whole [...] what we are to our inward vision, and what man appears to be *sub specie aeternitatis*, can only be expressed by way of myth. Myth is more individual and expresses life more precisely than does science. Science works with concepts of averages which are far too general to do justice to the subjective variety of an individual life. Thus it is that I have now undertaken, in my 83rd year to tell my personal myth. I can only make direct statements, only “tell stories”. Whether or not the stories are “true” is not the problem. The only question is whether what I tell is my fable, my truth.<sup>195</sup>

These convictions are deeply resonant with those of Tolkien. What *may seem* as a specific ‘disdain of science’ that Tolkien fostered in connection to the process of explicating the deepest truth of our Being and the reason he (like Jung) opted for the *form* of myth, expression “by way of myth” (and by way of story)<sup>196</sup>, an undertaking misconstrued by some of his more malevolent critics<sup>197</sup> as a certain detachment from the *real world*, an abandonment of reason in favor of imagination (presumably the same might be said of Jung), can only be considered<sup>198</sup> a mere misunderstanding of the preferred (and actually quite logical) *methodos* of a scientist and storyteller who, as he says, “was an undergraduate before thought and experience revealed to me that these were not divergent interests – opposite poles of science and romance – but integrally related.”<sup>199</sup>

The truth of the matter is the very opposite – we perceive in Tolkien a deep presence of awareness, an awareness that encompassed the realization that the truth of (the) being is not to be put into the confining manmade scientific correlation *de jour*, but must be viewed precisely as Jung puts it, *sub specie aeternitatis*, the endless time continuum that defies gravity but continually pulsates through the living body of myth.

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<sup>195</sup> Jung, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>196</sup> Myth is not to be mistaken for *a* story. Rather, it is *The Story*.

<sup>197</sup> Most notably these were Edmund Wilson, Raymond Williams and Fred Inglis. See: Curry, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

<sup>198</sup> In view of the ‘disdain of Tolkien’ that certain critics clearly fostered.

<sup>199</sup> *LT* 131, p. 167.

### 4.3. *Science, Reason, Progress*

Certainly, it is of great relevance rightly to establish that Tolkien's attitude does not negate science *per se* as much as it merely retracts from *certain* scientific approaches. This especially includes modernist/materialistic 'readings' of science that were prevalent in the day, "forced on students after schools because of the desire to climb on to the great band-waggon of Science (or at least onto a little trailer in tow) and so capture a little of the prestige *and* money which 'The Sovereignities and Powers and the rulers of this world' shower upon the Sacred Cow (as one writer, a scientist, has named it) and its acolytes".<sup>200</sup> As Tolkien exclaims in his poem *Mythopoeia*:

*I will not walk with your progressive apes,  
erect and sapient. Before them gapes  
the dark abyss to which their progress tends  
if by God's mercy progress ever ends,  
and does not ceaselessly revolve the same  
unfruitful course with changing of a name.  
I will not tread your dusty path and flat,  
denoting this and that by this and that,  
your world immutable wherein no part  
the little maker has with maker's art.*<sup>201</sup>

The "little maker" *i.e.* man, humble in relation to his own maker (God), whose art he is not only a 'product' *of* – but a successor and extension *to* (mirror), uses art to create not outside of the "maker's art" but within it, thus becoming what Tolkien entitles the sub-creator. This idea of man's sub-mission to the Creator forms the very intersection of the *via positiva* and the *via negativa* in relation to the sacred/divine, traversed not only by Science but also Art, and effectively by Men in all their dealings and designs. Should the 'sub' aspect be understood as *sustainment within* (as opposed to 'inferiority to'), an ultimately creative path can be taken, with the full affirmation of divine 'superiority' without the feeling of thus being 'lessened' (hence, *via positiva*).

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<sup>200</sup> *LT* 290, p. 401.

<sup>201</sup> *MP*, vv. 119-128.

On the other hand, the view which merely connotes this aspect as *subordination* consequently breeds *refusal* towards the sensation of being subdued and lessened (hence, *via negativa*), and thus tends to move *away* from the divine, in terms of artificial (as opposed to genuinely artistic) creativity and progress.

This ‘separation’ of paths is vividly revealed by Tolkien precisely in Ilúvatar’s propounding of music themes to the angelic-like Ainur which we have already noted in reference to the sacred pattern (accord *vs.* discord). In turn, this provides us with yet another perspective on the application of the given pattern, as a specific separation of paths, speaking to the universality of the image. As some Ainur delight in Ilúvatar’s music, and with its acceptance themselves become the Powers of the World, they are essentially taking the *via positiva*, and their shaping of the world is therefore genuinely creative (although they are *not* the Creators, merely the ‘shapers’ *i.e.* the sub-Creators, a role they fully relish in). Yet, as the ‘mightiest’ among them refuses to do so in the desire to become the Creator himself, he opts for discord and moves away from the divine, and from all that which is in accordance with the divine – and thus the *separation* is formed (we might also say, evil is born). Inevitably, this embodies the Fall.

But as the [Ilúvatar’s] theme progressed, it came into the heart of Melkor to interweave matters of his own imagining that *were not in accord with the theme of Ilúvatar*, for he sought therein to increase the power and glory of the part assigned to himself. To Melkor among the Ainur had been given the greatest gifts of power and knowledge, and he had a share in all the gifts of his brethren. He had gone often alone into the void places seeking the Imperishable Flame; for desire grew hot within him *to bring into Being things of his own*, and it seemed to him that Ilúvatar took no thought for the Void, and he was impatient of its emptiness. Yet he found not the Fire, for it is with Ilúvatar. But being alone he had begun to conceive thoughts of his own *unlike those of his brethren*.<sup>202</sup>

Quite expectedly is Melkor/Morgoth to become the First Dark Lord and the ‘mentor’ of the Second, Sauron, *i.e.* Lord of the Rings – central evils to *The Silmarillion* and *The Lord of the Rings* respectively (Sauron will also be true to this course and will

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<sup>202</sup> *Sil*, p. 16, emphasis mine.

not settle for being a disciple, offered repentance after the confining of Melkor into the Void he will merely feign it before the Valar, while simultaneously plotting his own rise to power). Moreover, the *progress* of Melkor's musical theme, which is essentially a mere *refusal* of the theme Ilúvatar propounds (clearly thus, the *via negativa*), is not genuinely creative, in the sense that it cannot genuinely create anything *new*. It is a mere repetition, albeit quite *loud* ("loud, and vain, and endlessly repeated"<sup>203</sup>), of that which was already sustained within the divine theme. The inability to essentially create anything new is not however connected to him alone (or to any other follower of the negative path) but to all. There is no creating anything new, merely the shaping of the Music, which was already given *i.e.* Created by God. The separation of paths thus merely reflects either the acceptance of such a fate, where 'creativity' is but recognition and furthering of the harmony (thus the elusive inspiration) and acceptance of the role of the conductor *as* medium, the transmitter of melody. Destruction is its refusal, in the desire to be the Grand Conductor of Music *as* the wielder of the Rod of Creation (which is inevitably futile, and while it may breed anger upon realization that one cannot ever be the Creator, that still does not produce anything new). Some artists have long ago recognized that there is nothing new under the Sun. Admittedly some were more grieved by this than others.

And thou, Melkor, shalt see that no theme may be played that hath not its uttermost source in me, nor can any alter the music in my despite. For he that attempteth this shall prove but mine instrument in the devising of things more wonderful, which he himself hath not imagined.<sup>204</sup>

Science and Art, these opposite yet integrally related poles, being representative expressions of the opposite yet integrally related poles of the human mind, may start from differing positions but both inevitably reach the same intersection. As the materialistic Progress of Tolkien's day (which has continued progressing into ours) refused to sub-ordinate itself, and tried to snatch the Rod ("Yet he found not the Fire"<sup>205</sup>), it opted for the *via negativa* – in this sense we could view these intersections as the *via sub-creativa* (or that which 'creates' *with-in* "maker's art" thus transmitting

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<sup>203</sup> *Sil*, p. 17.

<sup>204</sup> *Sil*, pp. 17-18.

<sup>205</sup> *Sil*, p. 16.



and furthering it) and the *via super-creativa* (that which creates *with-out* it, in the “loud and vain” effort to *rise above* it (thus super-), consequently not genuinely being creative or art-*full*, but in its *superficiality* becomes artificial *i.e.* Mechanical). Himself refusing to walk with these “progressive apes” Tolkien aligned himself instead with “those who have for all their imperfections never finally bowed heart and will to the world or the evil spirit (in *modern but not universal* terms: mechanism, ‘scientific’ materialism. Socialism in *either* of its factions now at war).”<sup>206</sup>

It must be understood that Tolkien – who often referred to himself primarily as a scientist, naturally, since he was a philologist – was no *antagonist* of science; quite the contrary, natural science held full value in his imaginarium, present in its manifold *positive* aspects through a variety of characters and notions. He was merely the kind of scientist (and the same kind of storyteller) who opted for the *via positiva/sub-creativa* in terms of scientific (and artistic) *methodos* and this path he wandered along celebrating the footsteps (and the Music), and it is this path he guided the reader through as well.

Two instances in particular reveal this claim with delightful clarity, both taken from his letters. In describing the character of Tom Bombadil, often considered the most enigmatic character of *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien pronounces him “a particular embodying of pure (real) natural science: the spirit that desires knowledge of other things, their history and nature, *because they are ‘other’* and wholly independent of the enquiring mind, a spirit coeval with the rational mind, and entirely unconcerned with ‘doing’ anything with the knowledge: Zoology and Botany not Cattle-breeding or Agriculture.”<sup>207</sup> Now, a malevolent critic such as was for instance Fred Inglis, or his own ‘mentor’ Raymond Williams (both of whose ‘readings of Tolkien’ Patrick Curry ventured against so successfully in his own tackle with the *via negativa* of Tolkien criticism)<sup>208</sup> might derive from this that in his disregard of “real life”<sup>209</sup> Tolkien also

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<sup>206</sup> *LT* 96, p. 125, emphasis mine.

<sup>207</sup> *LT* 153, p. 208.

<sup>208</sup> Curry, *op. cit.*, pp. 87-93 (on Williams) & pp. 98-99 (on Inglis).

<sup>209</sup> Using the words of Inglis himself, Curry aptly demonstrates (without much necessary comment) what critics of Inglis’ ilk effectively had in mind under this much favored notion of ‘reality’ from which they felt Tolkien had so notoriously deviated. Thus, Inglis: “‘Real life’ is a purely rhetorical gesture here, of course, signifying ‘what us left-Leavisite Grown-Ups have, in our wisdom, decided is real’” (Curry, *op. cit.*, p. 98)!

had a ‘disdain’ of cattle-breeding and agriculture, but critical abuse aside, even more to this point is Tolkien’s rendering of the Elves:

The Elves represent, as it were, the artistic, aesthetic, and purely scientific aspects of the Humane nature raised to a higher level than is actually seen in Men. That is: they have a devoted love of the physical world, and a desire to observe and understand it for its own sake and as ‘other’ – sc. as a reality derived from God in the same degree as themselves – not as a material for use or as a power-platform.<sup>210</sup>

Ironically then perhaps, Elves are more “Humane” than actual humans, quite like the enigmatic character of Tom Bombadil, not because in their ignorance they have no desire for knowledge, but because in their knowledge they have a desire for love and understanding of “the other” (it seems Tolkien anticipated some of the postmodern strivings in the embrace of this concept) *within* divine creation where they exist and ‘create’ side by side with the *other* – nature and beings (in doing so they further the sacred pattern as they themselves are loved by the Ainur for being ‘other’). Their desires are not utilitarian (for not all desires are *evil*) but devotional; they do not seek knowledge in order to gain power (for not all knowledge is *evil*) but to uphold God-given unity of the world. Thus, for the notion regarding Tolkien’s abandonment of reason, nothing could be further away from the truth. There is nothing more reasonable than calling for Humanity (even if one does so through the voice of an Elf) and nothing more real than the preservation of Life.

We shall thus conclude this digression on science and reason with another flicker of light Tolkien provided in a footnote to the Waldman letter (we will find that many of Tolkien’s truths were expressed in footnotes, these small footsteps on a great journey):

Light is such a primeval symbol in the nature of the Universe, that it can hardly be analysed. The Light of Valinor (derived from light before any fall) is the light of an undivorced from reason, that sees things both scientifically (or philosophically) and imaginatively (or subcreatively) and says that they are good – as beautiful.<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> *LT* 181, p. 254.

<sup>211</sup> *LT* 131, footnote on p. 170.

#### 4.4. *Search for the Absolute*

We have implicitly set before us the question whether understanding of myth belongs to time (*i.e.* to which extent is myth conditioned by time), and *vice versa*, whether understanding of time in fact belongs to myth. Simultaneously, we have revealed one point of union between myth and fairy-story (the story as is presented to us through Tolkien's Saga), that is, we have seen that both the World of Story and Myth in its original form (specifically creational myth) transcend every-day, thus historic, duration and create (or rather sub-create) the gate into Other Time. In comparison to the habitually linear perspective on time, both mythic-time and story-time belong to a field of otherness. In the case of myth, this is most directly the Sacred Time, due to the presence of faith, but Story Time is not entirely devoid of its own Sacred (and is thus also possessive of a specific sort of sanctity, as we are to discover). Yet, we are not fully out of the dark of historical progress as it is precisely the notion of historic duration that interferes with the understanding of mythic time, and, we shall be bold enough to say, even time in general. Myth and history themselves seem to be standing on completely "opposing poles", with history representing linear temporal evolution (what is in linguistic terms denoted by means of a diachronic structure) and myth the endless temporal continuum of the state of becoming (synchronic structure). Raman Selden notes that history is situated along a linear axis, "as it traces the transience of generations and institutions," whereas myth may be considered "the ultimate synchronic structure because it is supposed to represent an eternal pattern."<sup>212</sup>

Thus, we must attempt to reconcile the broken bond between mythic time as 'other' and 'human' time, or more specifically, the unwarranted perception of its broken state. Without such an attempt, there is no hope of understanding the essence of the World of Story either, which is far less *fanciful* than is usually interpreted in modern day, for one part, though not solely, owing to the 'modernization' of the notions that make up 'reality', naturally including (if not begotten by) the shifting perception of time. One process that contributed to this state of affairs is the rendering of mythic time as an *extemporal* or *atemporal* concept. What is usually implied by this interpretation however, although insufficiently accentuated, is that mythic time is in fact an *ahistorical*

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<sup>212</sup> Selden, Raman. *Linguistic Literary Theories*, Harcourt and Brace, New York, 1990, p. 119.

concept withdrawn merely from the actual historic ‘duration’ and ‘placement’ inside of the course of events we consider reality. This subtle difference is of course highly relevant, because without it, not only is myth expelled from time (and thus the world!) altogether, but the entire notion of time is reduced to its historical duration. We must keep in mind however that time was not always perceived as such – as linear history – and that this outlook is in fact a fairly ‘modern’ one, we might even say ‘industrialized’ (mechanical?), subject to the ideas that were brought on by the flourishing of the industrial age, not only through its calendars and clocks that neatly categorized time (artificial?), but its overall deterministic attitudes, *progressing* into that even more modernized capitalistic dictum that time is money (superficial?).

What these undercurrents to the human mind essentially initiated was a quantitative view of time, virtually sacrificing the qualitative perspective in full (one might argue that the traditional man’s perspective was not purely qualitative either, but it certainly came closer to it, or at the very least, searched for it). This difference between quality and quantity in reference to time was artfully expounded on by Henri Bergson in his 1889 dissertation *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, a defense of free will in response to the philosophy of Immanuel Kant (and his assertion that free will was only possible outside of time and space). Deeming that the confusion regarding the notion of free will (originating in the polemics between the determinists and their opponents) rested itself on a “previous confusion of duration with extensity, of succession with simultaneity, of quality with quantity,”<sup>213</sup> Bergson posited a theory of duration, not only of *time* but of *consciousness*, introducing the idea of “pure duration” which countered the quantitative approach to time and the dissection of human experience into a series of solitary bits and fragments. Bergson contends, “pure duration is wholly qualitative” and “cannot be measured unless symbolically represented in space”.<sup>214</sup>

Thus, Bergson’s pure duration is a certain *perpetuum mobile* that does not denote immobility; on the contrary, it represents a perpetual state of mobility, which may slow down to the point where it *seems* immobile, but never actually reaches a halt. This

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<sup>213</sup> Bergson, Henri: *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, tr. F. L. Pogson, Macmillan, New York, 1910, p. xxiv.

<sup>214</sup> Bergson, 1910, p. 104.

means that pure duration does not designate a timeless state but the very opposite, precisely that which we have (admittedly, rather awkwardly) dubbed time-full: that which does not move linearly but simply is, the sacred moment of eternal and constant duration; that which Tolkien (with more skill) deemed an endless stream that belongs to the World of Story; and precisely that *Dreamtime* which in the belief of the Aborigines simultaneously refers to past, present and future, *i.e.* the state of perpetual duration in which the world is continually being made. All of these have nothing to do with the quantity of time for they do not belong to the relative (remember Sproul's explanation) but to the absolute.

It is precisely the notions of the absolute and the relative that Bergson himself continued to develop, most notably through his 1903 essay *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, which introduces several intriguing concepts relevant to our quest, in reference to the view of duration and perhaps quite unexpectedly – imagination. The essay is (more expectedly) yet another rebuttal of Kant, specifically his assertion made in the *Critique of Pure Reason* that due to the limits of reason man can never fully grasp the absolute *i.e.* that we can only know the world as it *appears* to us, and never as it *is* in itself. (If understanding of myth as the search for the absolute depended merely on man's limited reason as proposed by Kant, it would most certainly be doomed to fail.) However, Bergson argues that the fallacy of this reasoning was in the attempt to apply the process of practical analysis to the knowledge of the absolute, since analysis (in itself) implies moving *round* the object of knowledge, thus stopping at the relative (since it ultimately depends on the point of view and symbols which are used to express it), whereas the quest for the knowledge of the absolute, and of any object we try to understand *in itself*, requires that we *enter into it* *i.e.* observe it from *within* (inside its Duration). Entrance into the World of Story similarly calls for temporary abandonment of practical logical reasoning (the matter-of-fact approach) and adoption of the 'logic of the story' instead (if we wanted we could call it the matter-of-story approach).

This process of entering *into* duration yet again calls to mind Eliade's idea of the eternal return and the traditional man's entrance *into* the beginning as if it were a contemporary moment, the calling upon of the sacred *i.e.* absolute origin through the re-application of the sacred pattern, quite like Tolkien's storytelling leap *into* the beginning

which has nothing to do with “recorded time”<sup>215</sup> yet nevertheless establishes a pattern which can be traced to the World of Story. Moreover, when Bergson exclaims that the state, taken in itself, is a “perpetual becoming,”<sup>216</sup> we cannot help but relate this notion to the Aboriginal idea of the continual making of the world in the *Dreaming* or Tolkien’s Arda which the Ainur are still shaping. Moreover, Bergson proposes that in order to attain knowledge of the absolute one must renounce the devices of the practical mind and revert to the means of attaining knowledge through **intuition**. His ‘equation’ can thus be summarized as *relative via analysis equals absolute via intuition*. Analytical reasoning, Bergson argues, pertains to the scientific scope of practical knowledge, the validity of which cannot and should not be denied in itself, yet he feels that its pursuit of “practically useful results”<sup>217</sup> is inevitably doomed to fail in the attempt to “reconstruct the living reality with stiff and ready-made concepts.”<sup>218</sup> Certainly, this is evocative of both Tolkien and Jung, and their inclination to dispense with analytical vivisection and scientific averages. Seeing how the pursuit of the practical and the useful was actually representative of the *natural* inclination of the human mind, Bergson therefore proclaims it necessary to transcend this confinement “by an effort of **imagination**,”<sup>219</sup> since, as he posits, “to philosophize is to invert the habitual direction of the work of thought.”<sup>220</sup> This must not be reduced to that attempt which Tolkien looked not so kindly upon in reference to the World of Story, “the willing suspension of disbelief,” rather the *willing induction of imagination*.

According to Bergson, to attain the absolute meant rejecting “all translations in order to possess the original”<sup>221</sup> and he identifies this quest as the main goal of *true* empiricism and, accordingly, *true metaphysics*, the methodos of which can never be analysis but intuition – the process of insertion into the *duration* of things (mobility vs. immobility) by means of imagination. This, Bergson claims, implies “a laborious, and even painful, effort to remount the natural slope of the work of thought, in order to

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<sup>215</sup> *MP*, v. 92.

<sup>216</sup> Bergson, Henri: *Introduction to Metaphysics*, tr. T. E. Hulme, Hackett Publishing, London, 1912, p. 44.

<sup>217</sup> Bergson, 1912, p. 82.

<sup>218</sup> Bergson, 1912, p. 68.

<sup>219</sup> Bergson, 1912, p. 3, emphasis mine.

<sup>220</sup> Bergson, 1912, p. 71.

<sup>221</sup> Bergson, 1912, p. 7.

place oneself directly, by a kind of intellectual expansion, within the thing studied: in short, a passage from reality to concepts and no longer from concepts to reality.”<sup>222</sup> A laborious effort so many of Tolkien’s critics sadly never accomplished.

Admittedly, Bergson does not apply either of his theories (duration and intuition/imagination) to myth, and naturally even less so to the possibility of a literary cosmogony such as is that of Tolkien, his quest is above all philosophical, yet the opportunities his insights provide are unmistakably of great value. If myth (or *belief* in general) is seen as a quest for the absolute *i.e.* for the sacred as the absolute, and essentially it *is* precisely this, then the time to which myth refers can be understood as a temporal emanation of the sacred/absolute, characterized by ‘pure’ duration, or as Donald Sutherland perhaps more comprehensively calls it “the absolute past.”<sup>223</sup> Understood as such, myth in itself should be viewed as an intuitive attempt at grasping the world and the sacred/absolute which defines it, and the role imagination plays in this process moves from an arbitrary flight of fancy into valid means of attaining knowledge. Thus, it becomes increasingly evident that the methodos of understanding both Myth and the World of Story must not be clouded by quantity and praxis but illuminated by intuition and imagination.

By introducing the reader directly into duration, into the imaginary beginning of time, and thus opening the gates of Other Time, we are effectively presented with an imaginary absolute and Tolkien’s entire cosmogony will directly depend on this one moment of creation. It will set into time, and into motion, the entire imaginarium of story; it will claim this point as the source and the World of Story will thus grant its pattern, to which all the characters of the Saga will belong, whether they uphold or oppose it in their dealings, and like in the case of Eliade’s metahistorical meaning inherent in the sacred pattern of myth, every war within Tolkien’s Saga and every *inner battle* of its characters will mirror the sacred pattern and rehearse the struggle between good and evil (accord and discord).

Specifically in the establishing of this imaginary sacred pattern, Tolkien’s Saga comes closest to actual myth, because it makes a similar, albeit artistic, claim to the

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<sup>222</sup> Bergson, 1912, p. 47.

<sup>223</sup> Sutherland, Donald: “Time on our Hands,” in *Yale French Studies*, No. 10, 1952, p. 7.

absolute. At the same time, its imagination-based method of achieving it does not deviate that much from that of myth, in the sense that myths too required both their tellers and their listeners to apply that same mental faculty in order to grasp something 'greater' – which most certainly does not mean to imply that myths are merely imaginary constructions (it would be easiest to simply claim all myths to be imaginative fabrications and assign Tolkien's Saga to the list of nonsense, depriving one of belief and other of worth, but this is simply not true), but stands to show that mythical reasoning tends towards knowing things in themselves, thus knowing the absolute in itself, a process as metaphysical as it is metahistorical. Within Tolkien's fantastical world, the entire process becomes *metamythical*.



## Chapter 5: A QUESTION OF TRUTH

*I think that fairy story has its own mode of reflecting 'truth', different from allegory, or (sustained) satire, or 'realism', and in some ways more powerful.*<sup>224</sup>

With some of the questions we have raised in the previous Chapter (hopefully, the answers we have received as well), we have already touched on the implicit, at times also explicit, presence of truth within myth (or again, rather the correlation of the two), on the one hand in portraying the purpose of myth as an attempt to know the absolute and thus in the seeing of myth as a specific quest for the truth (of God and the world), and on the other, which we have insofar only glimpsed yet which arises from the first, in recognizing that myth, as that manner of belief which amounts to faith, rests on the foundation of truth (even if the given belief is presumably erroneous that nonetheless implies the necessity for that which is believed in, and felt, to be considered true).

Naturally, there can be no discussing the validity of mythopoetic structure if its cornerstone – myth – is not understood as valid in itself. This does not imply that we are to force validity upon it merely for the defense of mythopoetic ‘reasoning’ and to suit our own purposes (sadly, defenses often amount to this) but it does entail that we attempt to recognize what it is about myth that once had the great C. S. Lewis exclaim that all *myths are lies* (before he came to consider *Christianity as a true myth*) and consequently drove his friend Tolkien to champion for myth so ardently and *in verse*,<sup>225</sup> through a poem that can easily be considered the manifest of mythopoesis and simultaneously a declaration of fellowship with myth (we shall refrain from calling it a defense), perhaps even the *summata* of Tolkien’s poetics. The poem *Mythopoeia* is the myth-making seed that will live and grow throughout the entire Saga, which as we have already noted does not consist solely of myth, but like in the case of mythopoeics itself, claims myth as its cornerstone. We say that the poem can ‘perhaps’ be taken as the sublimation of Tolkien’s poetics only because his essay *On Fairy-Stories* comes equally close to the core of things and because fairy-story itself (naturally, as understood by the

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<sup>224</sup> *LT* 181, p. 252.

<sup>225</sup> See: *Bio*, pp. 150-152.

storyteller himself, not analogous with *fairy-tale*) can envelop the full scope of Tolkien's world with more ease (not more truth).

Myth, as the initiator of the pattern within Tolkien's Saga, primarily belongs to the cosmogony of the beginning, and it lives in its most unadulterated form in the tales *Ainulindalë* (The Music of the Ainur) and *Valaquenta* (Of the Valar), both directly dealing with the sacred, given from the perspective of the sacred. On the other hand, *Quenta Silmarillion* (The History of the Silmarils), in its dealing with the 'world' created 'by' the sacred, thus given from the perspective of the 'world' (that is, from the perspective of the beings who inhabit the world: at this point chiefly Elves) or, as Tolkien puts it, "the world as we perceive it, but of course transfigured in still a half-mythical mode: that is it deals with rational incarnate creatures of more or less comparable stature with our own,"<sup>226</sup> takes one step further into the ages and is more akin to a mythic and phantasmagoric legendarium than *pure* myth (from our 'modern' perspective, legends are indeed one step closer to us than mythic cosmogonies). This becomes even more apparent in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, which in their own right give life to the epic – the heroic quest/adventure (in the case of *The Lord of the Rings* also epic romance). This is precisely why Tolkien claims *The Hobbit* (which occupies the middle place in the story sequence) to be the Saga's "mode of descent to earth, and merging into 'history'"<sup>227</sup> – because at this point the story makes the leap from the mythic (cosmogony and legend) into that which is 'closest' to us, the epic adventure and the fairy-story which approaches the fairy-tale (in terms of literary development the fairy-tale is certainly the 'youngest' form of storytelling, preceded by the heroic epic), focusing in *The Hobbit* on the adventure of a single hero and in *The Lord of the Rings* on the adventure of a fellowship of heroes. In addition, as implied by Tolkien's remark, at this point the story moves from the perspective of Elves to the perspective of Men (and Hobbits, who are essentially little men – which is not to be taken derogatory). In this sense, the life of myth within the story indeed becomes more *earthly*, and myth, instead of *being* the reality itself starts being *treated by* reality – the shift from the sacred to the world – and we can recognize that it receives much the same treatment it has in our day: some recount the myth while others forget or never even

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<sup>226</sup> *LT* 131, p. 169.

<sup>227</sup> *LT* 131, p. 168.

learn of it (as mentioned, the Hobbits have no knowledge of the Elder days, and we can assume that the disfigured Orcs for instance simply bear no more recollection of it, quite like the creature Gollum), some relish its beauty while others remain unaffected by it (like in the case of Sam who ‘discovers’ the beauty of the Elder days through Elven songs, unlike for instance Grima Wormtongue, the counselor of the crazed Steward of Gondor whom we never find bothering with such notions), some believe it while others neglect or simply dismiss it (during the Second Age Sauron manages to persuade the Númenoreans that none of what the Valar have revealed to them is true, which leads some of them into rebellion and causes their downfall – while Sauron himself naturally does believe it, in fact even *knows* it to be true, yet in his ambition he merely pays no heed to it), and lastly but most pervasively, *its pattern is there*, inherently present in all beings – yet some are aware of it while others are not.

Following the life of myth, we have thus reached what is perhaps the most difficult task in our quest, and what is perhaps the most difficult quest in life: the question of truth. Deeply entangled within this question are matters of belief and matters of art, thus matters of story and storytelling. How are we to accept myth as a fairy-story (or even only as a story, or even only as art) without denying it the truth inherent in belief? How are we to accept myth as a religious and moral belief directed towards the absolute without recognizing it as a story as well? For Tolkien, both the myth and the fairy-story were undeniably art, yet they simultaneously expressed belief and were thus possessive of the truth. To make matters in a way more complicated, Tolkien *believed* the Christian *myth* to be the *greatest Fairy-story* of them all.<sup>228</sup> If these considerations were to come from the pen of another we would easily classify them either as a lack of religious belief and utter dismissal of its truth (reduction to some idle imaginary nonsense), or at the very best, an allegorical interpretation of it. Yet coming from Tolkien, who – as is very well known – expressed these considerations from the perspective of the highest belief belonging to a man of faith, and who – as is equally well known – by no means ventured to reduce Christianity (or myth) to an allegory (if we can ‘accuse’ Tolkien of ever having a ‘disdain’ of anything, it would have to be the use of allegory as a measure of truth reductionism), this attitude must neither be understood as an attempt to reduce Christianity and myth (*as myth*) to what is *only* a

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<sup>228</sup> See: *LT* 89, pp. 115-116 & *FS*, pp. 155-156.

story, nor an effort to negate the Truth inherent in faith, quite the contrary, it serves to accentuate and strengthen the bond between religion and story (also, belief and story), religion and truth and ultimately – truth and art. If we are to come to an understanding over that bond which embraces all of these notions, we must observe the life of myth within the complex field of religion and belief, before we can understand it as story that is not *only* a story and thus traverse with it into the field of art and Faërie.

### 5.1. *True Story*

We can observe that various mythological systems essentially make record of (we might even say verify) man's communication with the world around him (the other): an interaction that forms the basis for the interpretation of reality. From this perspective, myths can be seen as records about the world, or more broadly (paradoxically, at the same time more precisely), records about life. They are representations, narratives of the answers man received to his questions about himself and the other, the world *outside* the being. It is man's *inner* being however that poses these questions and also 'receives' and 'perceives' the answers – ultimately it is the inner being that *narrates* them, precisely the reason Jung deemed myths to be the only possible expressions of our inner lives. As religious structures, or early structures of belief *i.e.* the *faith of old*, they are the answers to questions about God (used here universally and not meant to imply *only* the God of Christianity; in this sense, the notion of God fundamentally coincides with the Sacred and the Divine and naturally the Absolute). At the same time, they entail the very understanding of said answers, received as part of the communication with the world, much in the same way belief systems (still) present in our day are founded on respective answers about (the faithful would also say – *by*) God. Any one belief is really one *answer* and faith requires the believer to *feel* that answer (as both intuitive and logical endeavor). Admittedly this answer had various forms throughout man's existence and was (and still is) understood differently by different peoples throughout different times and places. We can trace this *fluctuation* (rather than evolution) in terms of man's understanding (imagining) of the *appearance* of God both from the perspective of shape – according to which His form was taken to be that of nature itself,

of spirit, animal and eventually human – and from the perspective of extent – according to which it was understood either as plurality or singularity of being. The matter of these seemingly opposing perspectives, most obviously the latter (monotheistic *vs.* polytheistic *i.e.* unimorphic *vs.* polymorphic), but equally the first (if we were to reduce it to a single binary it would essentially come down to anthropomorphic/anthropocentric *vs.* ‘the other’) calls that we yet again bring Henri Bergson to the table and his understanding of these ‘antinomies’ which once had Immanuel Kant declare them ‘evidence’ of human impotence at understanding the absolute in terms of both God and the world (the fact that human mind ended caught up in ‘one’ or ‘the other’ was according to his reasoning a logical paradox and thus proof of the inability of ever attaining the absolute). Bergson’s main claim – again – is that the problem was in the very application of logical *i.e.* analytical *i.e.* practical reasoning to something that surpasses that scope. His answer – again – is intuition:

There is hardly any concrete reality which cannot be observed from two opposing standpoints, which cannot consequently be subsumed under two antagonistic concepts. Hence a thesis and an antithesis which we endeavor in vain to reconcile logically, for the very simple reason that it is impossible, with concepts and observations taken from outside points of view, to make a thing. But from the object, seized by intuition, we pass easily in many cases to the two contrary concepts; and as in that way thesis and antithesis can be seen to spring from reality, we grasp at the same time how it is that the two are opposed and how they are reconciled.<sup>229</sup>

Or, to move matters from the point of interpretation and assume the perspective of faith, which is also intuitive in essence: God (the Absolute) spoke to man (answered man’s questions) in varying forms throughout the world (including both time and place), always placing a little more of Himself into the answer (adding to the *possibility* of absolute truth in a relative world), and in this sense Christianity and Islam are the most recent answers. (In terms of Christianity, once man was able to comprehend the meaning of the Great Sacrifice, God spoke through the Miracle of Resurrection – He answered through the Savior.) Thus even if myth is understood as an early/ancient form of the answer, its question does not belong to the past at all, it is a question *continually*

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<sup>229</sup> Bergson, 1912, p. 39.

*being asked*, regardless of the potentially differing (fluctuating) form. Religion and myth answer the same *endless* question, and this is what brings Christianity and myth together, what they have *in common*. This is why Tolkien speaks of the *Christian myth* with so much ease, because he recognizes this fusion within the same endless stream, the field belonging to the Absolute and thus qualified by pure duration. His attitude is that mythology and religion should not be separated as they have been so frequently, “through a labyrinth of error,” since mythology indeed glimpses “something higher” and that is precisely “Divinity [...] in fact, religion.”<sup>230</sup>

Ultimately, whether we are dealing with cosmogonic myths *i.e.* accounts of the Creation of the world, or the consequent actions of God/gods and adventures of heroes (men or demigods as mirror images of God/gods) celebrated for their divine qualities (whether heroes are actual descendants of God/gods, and thus directly of divine character, or merely display those virtues that were celebrated and upheld as characteristic of the divine, again either by being actual divine attributes or merely traits qualified as ‘good’ and ‘desirable’ through and by the divine power as that which is in accordance with the divine), all myths essentially entail records (answers) about God. Eschatological myths, which carry the vision of the end of days, are no exception. In other words, myths either refer to the *Source* directly: by recounting the first appearance of God and thus the point of origin as the act of establishing reality and of the sacred pattern, or indirectly: by referring to that which is derived from the Source, that is by dealing with the application of the sacred pattern within the world and the images of its reflection within the beings that reside in it – naturally, especially beings such as demigods or heroes possessive of divine qualities since these are most obvious representations of the pattern (as the pattern is diluted so the interest wanes, since the purpose of myth is to revive the pattern *i.e.* bring man closer to the Source). Visions of the end of days are renditions of the Return to the Source, so they effectively ‘return’ to the first category of direct dealing with the Sacred/Source. The same cycle *lasts* through the Christian faith: from the Creation to the Apocalypse, from the Source and back into it (the journey there and back again). What separates them, however, is the obvious presence of fantasy in mythology (admittedly least so in creational myths), not only, for instance, the very existence of demigods, but the encompassing of all those fantastical

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<sup>230</sup> *FS*, p. 124.

elements and creatures that belong to one kind of belief and one kind of marvel but do not amount to the reality of faith or miracle. At the same time, fantasy is precisely what brings fairy-story and mythopoeics close to mythology (also that which disables Tolkien's Saga to be a Christian allegory even if it intended to be one).

Within Tolkien's world we find a plethora of forms and answers that were once present in ancient man's myths, some more fantastical than others, yet reflected through a unifying pattern which is both derived from the Source and returning into it (the closest to the Truth any Art can perhaps reach), as is often *glimpsed* in the visions of the 'end of days' which are present in the Saga *from the beginning*:

Never since have the Ainur made any music like to this music, though it has been said that a greater still shall be made before Ilùvatar by the choirs of the Ainur and the Children of Ilùvatar after the end of days. Then the themes of Ilùvatar shall be played aright, and take Being in the moment of their utterance, for all shall then understand fully his intent in their part, and each shall know the comprehension of each, and Ilùvatar shall give to their thoughts the secret fire, being well pleased.<sup>231</sup>

Eru's intentions are thus never made *fully* explicit, and no being has *complete* grasp over them, and to those who stand *in accord with the sacred pattern* this is the origin of love for all other things, for each 'other' representation/mirror/embodiment of His thought carries with it one part of the message, one part of the answer.

*At bidding of a Will, to which we bend  
(and must), but only dimly apprehend,  
great processes march on, as Time unrolls  
from dark beginnings to uncertain goals;  
and as on page o'er-written without clue,  
with script and limning packed of various hue,  
an endless multitude of forms appear,  
some grim, some frail, some beautiful, some queer,  
each alien, except as kin from one  
remote Origo, gnat, man, stone, and sun.  
God made the petreous rocks, the arboreal trees,*

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<sup>231</sup> *Sil*, p. 16.

*tellurian earth, and stellar stars, and these  
homuncular men, who walk upon the ground  
with nerves that tingle touched by light and sound.  
The movements of the sea, the wind in boughs,  
green grass, the large slow oddity of cows,  
thunder and lightning, birds that wheel and cry,  
slime crawling up from mud to live and die,  
these each are duly registered and print  
the brain's contortions with a separate dint.*<sup>232</sup>

The fusion of possible answers (and those so far considered impossible – they were there but have not been yet been recorded) to the one question continually being asked, and the encompassing of their manifold possibilities is made very apparent by Tolkien's *acceptance* of universal elements of old, the most prominent being the motif of the Fall, yet expressed (recorded) as something *new*. Multiple possibilities of the theme of the fall will reappear throughout the Saga, deriving from the cosmogonic fall of Melkor, the first fall *i.e.* moment of the separation and the first step towards discord – rebellion against God. As we have suggested, this is the moment of the establishing of the pattern of accord *vs.* discord, or the first division of paths toward and away from God (*via positiva* and *via negativa*). Fall is a natural consequence of the rebellious path of discord (*via negativa*) which will be confirmed through the repetition (mirroring) of the cosmogonic Fall by all subsequent 'discords' in the story, collective and individual (collective: fall of Elves in Valinor, fall of Númenóreans; individual: fall of Boromir who tries to take the Ring from Frodo, fall of the Wizard Saruman who allies with Sauron, naturally the fall of Sauron himself *etc.*).

In the cosmogony there is a fall: a fall of Angels we should say. Though quite different in form, of course, to that of Christian myth. These tales are 'new', they are not directly derived from other myths and legends, but they must inevitably contain a large measure of ancient wide-spread motives or elements. After all, I believe that legends and myths are largely made of 'truth', and indeed present aspects of it that can only be received in this mode; and long ago certain truths and modes of this kind were discovered and must always reappear. There cannot be any

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<sup>232</sup> *MP*, vv. 9-28.



‘story’ without a fall – all stories are ultimately about the fall – at least not for human minds as we know them and have them.<sup>233</sup>

Yet, though it may be that the most obvious parallel can be drawn between the Fall of the Ainur and the Christian Fall of Angels, Tolkien rather speaks of the universality of this principle within the human mind, because the division between accord and discord belongs precisely to those ‘inevitable elements’ of truths recognized long ago. Their reappearance is thus also inevitable – because the pattern itself is inevitable – and the possibilities of their expression are manifold. Similarly, the parallel between the Ainur themselves and the Angels of Christianity is one possibility but Tolkien provides us with another one as well, bringing Christian belief and pre-Christian myth into fusion, yet again – *implicitly*. Indeed, the Ainur can be understood as angelic beings, but *as the Valar*, they are more akin to the gods of the pagan pantheons. As the Valar they appear in incarnate form and their mode of transition (descent to Earth) is further accentuated by their earthly names, which are in fact those given to them by the Elves who reside in Valinor (Elves in Middle-Earth will yet again call them by different names, and Men will also have their own renditions of them). The name of the God Ilúvatar is also the earthly form of his *name* Eru, which simply means “the One” or “He that stands alone”. Tolkien further clarifies the nature of the implication of the Ainur in his own attempt to make the matter earthly and thus more accessible, verifying this fusion of possibilities:

The cycles begin with a cosmogonical myth: the *Music of the Ainur*. God and the Valar (or powers: Englished as gods) are revealed. These latter are as we should say angelic powers, whose function is to exercise delegated authority in their spheres (of rule and government, *not* creation, making or re-making). They are ‘divine’, that is, were originally ‘outside’ and existed ‘before’ the making of the world. Their power and wisdom is derived from their Knowledge of the cosmogonical drama, which they perceived first as a drama (that is as in a fashion we perceive a story composed by some-one else), and later as a ‘reality’. On the side of mere narrative device, this is, of course, meant to provide beings of the same order of beauty, power, and majesty as the ‘gods’ of higher mythology, which

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<sup>233</sup> *LT* 131, pp. 169-170.

can yet be accepted – well, shall we say baldly, by a mind that believes in the Blessed Trinity.<sup>234</sup>

Thus, the Valar, as the Powers of the World, *appear* as gods (although they are not the same as God) and in this sense the Elves can be seen as demigods, since they are “rational incarnate creatures of more or less comparable stature with our own,”<sup>235</sup> with the chief difference that they are *immortal* (although like most mythic demigods they too can be ‘slain’ under specific circumstances).

The Istari are another version of demigods, even more so than the Elves, and it is precisely in concurrence with this that the Men of Middle-earth call them *Wizards*. The Wizards are essentially of the Maiar, primordial beings of the same order though lesser degree than the Valar. Thus, the difference between Valar and Maiar can correspond to the distinction between either Archangels and Angels or higher and lesser deities of the pagan pantheons (although we must once again underline that all such analogies must be taken *only* as representatives of the *pattern* – the carrier of the universal and inevitable elements – and not as the representatives of these beings/concepts themselves). Yet, the Istari have a unique and rather specific role, unlike that of the other Maiar whose fate is to dwell in Valinor alongside the Valar, concealed from worldly sight. Instead, they are sent by the Valar from the far West and into Middle-earth to guide and counsel its dwellers after the Shadow of Sauron had descended onto it during the Third Age. Thus they incarnate into the World in the moment of dire need and as such are not only a reflection of the demigod pattern but rather function as ‘messengers of the gods’ – similarly they most specifically reflect the pattern of ‘guardian Angels’ which is most evident in Gandalf.

Their name, as related to Wise, is an Englishing of their Elvish name, and is used throughout as utterly distinct from Sorcerer or Magician. It appears finally that they were as one might say the near equivalent in the mode of these tales of Angels, guardian Angels. Their powers are directed primarily to the encouragement of the enemies of evil, to cause them to use their own wits and valour, to unite and endure. They appear always as old men and sages, and though (sent by the powers

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<sup>234</sup> *LT* 131, p. 169.

<sup>235</sup> *LT* 131, p. 177.

of the True West) in the world they suffer themselves, their age and grey hairs increase only slowly. Gandalf whose function is especially to watch human affairs (Men and Hobbits) goes on through all the tales.<sup>236</sup>

The Istari arrive across the Sea and only the Elven lord Círdan of the Grey Havens (where they land) is alerted of their presence, which he reveals only to the other two High Elven-lords, Elrond and Galadriel (these three Elven lords are specifically the wielders of the only three Rings of Power which remain in the hands of Elves, lesser only to the One Ring). Four Istari arrive at that point, *appearing* thus incarnating “in the likeness of men, old and vigorous,”<sup>237</sup> revealing their true names to none, not even to the Elves. Out of these four, two have a direct role in the Saga, and these two are initially known only by the names the Elves give them (much like in the case of the naming, or should we say re-naming of the Valar upon their original incarnation). The two Istari become known in the Elven-tongue as Mithrandir and Curunír, and Men later give them their own names, Gandalf and Saruman respectively, calling them Wizards. They are introduced in the last tale of *The Silmarillion* which opens the Third Age (the point of their arrival, thus incarnation), yet their actions are mainly tied to *The Hobbit* (specifically Gandalf’s) and *The Lord of the Rings* (where both have a prominent role). Curunír/Saruman, the mightiest of the four, will take presidency over the order and the White Council and thus become known as Saruman the White, or simply the White Wizard, while Mithrandir/Gandalf, the most vigilant of the four, will become known as Gandalf the Grey. The Enemy Sauron who is himself a Maia and another wielder of ‘magic’ is also counted among the Istari, thus being the fifth Wizard, qualified as Sauron the Black. Yet, in the course of events, Curunír/Saruman will forsake his quest and ally himself with the Enemy (yet again bringing about the theme of the Fall) which will lead to his ‘expulsion’ from the order (Gandalf will eventually take over and become the White Wizard instead). In the already mentioned demigod fashion, the Istari are immortal, yet they too can be slain in battle like the Elves but – also like the Elves and unlike Men – upon death they return to the Undying Lands of the West that are otherwise concealed from worldly sight, existing “only in the memory of the earth.”<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>236</sup> *LT* 131, footnote on p. 176.

<sup>237</sup> *Sil*, p. 361.

<sup>238</sup> *LT* 131, p. 175.

The theme of confining the Old World to memory, and more importantly, even *beyond* memory, resurfaces through the Saga incessantly: the withdrawal of the ‘gods’, the ‘breaking’ of Arda, the ‘departure’ and the ‘fading’ of the Elves before Men, the disappearance of ‘magic’ wielded by the Elves (and the Istari), the lack of knowledge about God and the days of the Creation – an image also evoked by Gandalf in *The Lord of the Rings* when upon revealing his *true* name and origin, he reminds us yet again that living in the New World inevitably entails that the Old World had passed from (most) memory: “Olórin I was in my youth in the West that is forgotten.”<sup>239</sup> Yet, this also implies that the lost piece of belief Tolkien had sought may be lost from memory but not from the world. It exists in the sacred pattern – not *only* the pattern of a story but also the pattern of living reality – and whichever course any individual chooses to embody/mirror, the pattern itself is indestructible and indivisible from the inner being (thus universal and inevitable). Thus, the answer to the question that the myth poses, expressed as belief, and told as story, lies in the recognition of the pattern.

Tolkien’s mythic cosmogony and the continuation of its pattern imaginatively declare that God can be understood as all forms at once, each form being one part of the divine thought – and as all answers at once, each answer being one part of the divine message. Eru’s thoughts incarnate into the world both as Man and ‘the other’ while incarnating simultaneously both as the Elves and ‘the other’ or the Ainur and ‘the other’ thus stretching to all ‘other’ perspectives as well (Dwarves, Hobbits, Orcs *etc.*). While the Ainur can perhaps most *apparently* represent Spirit, the entire World is but a form of Eru’s thought, Nature being but another of its expressions, perhaps most *apparently* embodied through the Tree-creatures the Ents – the walking and Living Trees also called the Shepherds of Trees and thus Shepherds of Nature. Being the Source, Eru mirrored himself into *all* there is, and while He is *the One* the mirror images are multiple. This is precisely why the Story carries within it *implicitly* (which is neither to mean allegorically nor to be taken literally) the Truth of the ancient answers and the Truth of the Christian answer. Naturally, this necessarily *also* implies Error (of either, and of both, and of *all*) not only because any interpretation is subject to or even possessive of error (anyway, faith requires more than mere interpretation), but precisely because God *intentionally never revealed all* to begin with (and also what Tolkien

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<sup>239</sup> *LotR IV: 5.*

means when he says myths are ‘largely’ made of truth). This perspective perhaps sheds some more light on Jung’s resolution to only ‘tell stories’ and his assertion that in this regard the “only question is whether what I tell is my fable, my truth.”<sup>240</sup> Indeed, whether the Truth is ultimately found or not, within the scope of any story, is not the question, not only because the very quest for the Truth has value in itself (although this is quite relevant) but because the final answer, the *Ultimate Truth* is not yet to be fully attained in either planes of existence (Tolkien’s Primary and the Secondary World), simply because “the Creator had not revealed all.”<sup>241</sup> Certainly, the quest for the Truth should not be abandoned even if the only truth available is not ‘the whole’ but a single (subjective, even when collective) portion, a glimpse of Truth and a fraction of the Light – because these ‘mirror’ glimpses are all we have.

*In Paradise perchance the eye may stray  
from gazing upon everlasting Day  
to see the day illumined, and renew  
from mirrored truth the likeness of the True.*<sup>242</sup>

In other words, the quest for the Absolute does not depend on the possession of the Absolute Truth, but on the pursuit of those glimpses of Light that are attainable to the human eye through the mirror image of likeness. More specifically, and this is why Tolkien championed for myth (and faith) so ardently, the presence of said error – and partiality – does not imply it to be either false or inadequate, it simply *proves* the world to be the ‘mirror image’ of the Creator and a ‘reflection’ of His sacred pattern in the Life of Creation.

*The heart of Man is not compound of lies,  
but draws some wisdom from the only Wise,  
and still recalls him. Though now long estranged,  
Man is not wholly lost nor wholly changed.*<sup>243</sup>

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<sup>240</sup> Jung, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>241</sup> *LT* 131, p. 169.

<sup>242</sup> *MP*, vv. 131-134.

<sup>243</sup> *MP*, vv. 53-56.

## 5.2. *The Making of Belief*

Another thing to consider in the great equation laid before us is that while all of these various answers about God, re-told by the inner being of man, can indeed be seen – that is they *appear* – as stories/records/narratives/messages in their form, they are the living reality in their essence (encompassing both truth and error, or at the very least the possibility of both). This is precisely what Tolkien meant when he said myths were *alive* and should not be dissected, and this is precisely what we implied when we suggested that myths were not *only* stories. An intriguingly similar point was made by Bronislaw Malinowski, who expounded on the *living body* of myth:

Myth as it exists in a savage community, that is, in its living primitive form, is not merely a story, but a reality lived. It is not of the nature of fiction, such as we read to-day in a novel, but it is a living reality, believed to have once happened in primeval times, and continuing ever since to influence the world and human destinies. This myth is to the savage what, to a fully believing Christian, is the Biblical story of Creation, of the Fall, of the Redemption by Christ's Sacrifice on the Cross. As our sacred story lives in our ritual, in our morality, as it governs our faith and controls our conduct, even so does his myth for the savage. [...] Studied alive, myth, as we shall see, is not symbolic, but a direct expression of its subject-matter; it is not an explanation in satisfaction of a scientific interest, but a narrative resurrection of a primeval reality, told in satisfaction of deep religious wants, moral cravings, social submissions, assertions, even practical requirements. Myth fulfils in primitive culture an indispensable function: It expresses, enhances, and codifies belief; it safeguards and enforces morality; it vouches for the efficiency of ritual and contains practical rules for the guidance of man. Myth is thus a vital ingredient of human civilization; it is not an idle tale, but a hard-worked active force; it is not an intellectual explanation or an artistic imagery, but a pragmatic charter of primitive faith and moral wisdom.<sup>244</sup>

Malinowski's effort to accentuate that myths were more than *mere* stories is of course with the intention of asserting they were not just mere fabrications of the primitive man,

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<sup>244</sup> Malinowski, Bronislaw: *Myth in Primitive Psychology*, tr. Peter J. Bowman, Kegan Paul, London, 1926, p. 23.

“idle” tales, or allegories, as they are so often seen. As we can note from this quote, he simultaneously refers to Christianity as “our sacred story”, one that also suffered at the hands of various symbolic interpretations, which served to bring it down to the level of allegory, inadvertently depriving it of its “living reality” and simultaneously Truth.

As we have already stated, Tolkien believed Christianity to be the greatest Fairy-Story of all, and perhaps now we can say with more ease – not because he did *not believe* or did not think it *true*, quite the contrary, because he *did believe* both in the power of Christ and in the power of Story (another carrier/mirror of the sacred pattern). What is more, Tolkien believed in the power of man to be *redeemed* in the act of storytelling, by creating in the image of his own Creator, glimpsing and recreating the Truth, in what he called the Secondary Plane (*i.e.* sub-Creation, pertaining to the World of Story). Quite in the same way ancient man achieved his unity with the divine in the process of telling myths, those “narrative resurrections of primeval reality”, mirroring the sacred and eternal truths it enfolded. Alternatively, in Tolkien’s terms, both the Primary Plane (the natural world as we know it) and the Secondary Plane (the artistic imaginary) refract divine Light, each in its own right. Both are in a way *true* (even if neither can claim Absolute Truth), and neither is allegory. Writing to his son Christopher after attending Sunday sermon where he was deeply moved by a story about the healing of a little boy, Tolkien delves deeper into what he had only shortly before identified as *Eucatastrophe*, a deep joyous sensation inherent in the act of *true* storytelling, a function necessary for the validation of any fairy-story. Tolkien also dealt with the notion of eucatastrophe in the essay *On Fairy-Stories* (which he wrote shortly before the writing of this letter), frequently alluding to it in the account to Christopher.

But at the story of the little boy (which is a fully attested *fact* of course) with its apparent sad ending and then its sudden unhopedor happy ending, I was deeply moved and had that peculiar emotion we all have – though not often. [...] For it I coined the word 'eucatastrophe': the sudden happy turn in a story which pierces you with a joy that brings tears (which I argued it is the highest function of fairy-stories to produce). And I was there led to the view that it produces its peculiar effect because it is a sudden glimpse of Truth, your whole nature chained in material cause and effect, the chain of death, feels a sudden relief as if a major limb out of joint had suddenly snapped back. [...] I concluded by saying that the Resurrection

was the greatest 'eucatastrophe' possible in the greatest Fairy Story – and produces that essential emotion: Christian joy which produces tears because it is qualitatively so like sorrow, because it comes from those places where Joy and Sorrow are at one, reconciled, as selfishness and altruism are lost in Love. Of course I do not mean that the Gospels tell what is *only* a fairy-story; but I do mean very strongly that they do tell a fairy-story: the greatest. Man the story-teller would have to be redeemed in a manner consonant with his nature: by a moving story. *But* since the author of it is the supreme Artist and the Author of Reality, this one was also made to Be, to be true on the Primary Plane. So that in the Primary Miracle (the Resurrection) and the lesser Christian miracles too though less, you have not only that sudden glimpse of the truth behind the apparent Anankê [constraint] of our world, but a glimpse that is actually a ray of light through the very chinks of the universe about us.<sup>245</sup>

And through these chinks the Storyteller weaves his own Saga, letting in a ray of light “though [*even*] less” for he does not fear creating something ‘lesser’ but delights in his role of “the *little* maker” who creates “with maker’s art”, storytelling glimpses of the sacred truth through a narrow strait and approaching the Sacred.

Tolkien’s literary Saga, imaginary as it is, subjectively singular in the sense that it reveals one man’s answer as opposed to a collectively accepted one (*collective* belief is what enables us to talk about mythological *systems* in the first place), does not pretend to lay claim to the absolute truth, nor rise itself beyond – or even equate itself to – the belief present in myth, and certainly not the faith present in religion, it remains an (imaginary/intuitive) expression of an inner answer (*recognized* from the depths of the self, our very own mirror) which does not lay claim to the Light, but knowingly serves as the conductor of one of its rays. It is a story, a fairy-story, but if ever there was an “artistic imagery” that was not “merely a story” but a Story that searched for the Truth based on belief, it was Tolkien’s. Naturally, it is not the same faith with which Tolkien *believed* in Christ and the Elves, but it is the same faith with which he believed in God and God’s principles (pattern), and any being’s duty (including all those beings of man’s imaginary sub-creation since *even these* in their own turn represent fractions of the same divine truth, because they represent the creative) to uphold this principle and

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<sup>245</sup> *LT* 89, p. 116.



fight for its preservation. It is with fair certainty that we can venture to say that Tolkien did not *believe in the truth of the Elves* as much as he *believed in the truth of the Story itself*, the possibility to revive a principle and a pattern – not only because of the inherent possibility to redeem himself in the process “in a manner *consonant* with” man’s nature (man the mirror image of the Sacred, and thus, man’s nature the mirror image of that which is *in accord* with the divine principle) but because of the irresistible urge and passion (of no apparent biological function) to tell a tale of this consonance and harmony refracting not only the Light but also the Joy of belief and the Hope it brings, proposing not *only* myth and mythopoetics as such, but the path of sacred musical harmony ‘alive’ not *only* in myths and stories but in reality as well, calling for the recognition of both possibilities which arise at the intersection, both faces of Art, and both faces of Man’s inner being – where the possibility of the Fall continually lurks.

Man’s choice at this intersection inevitably qualifies own his entire existence (and in turn affects reality, the sum of individual existences, represented *i.e.* achieved in the material world). In mythical terms, as implied by Eliade’s metahistorical meaning of myth, that also decides with which side a man (or group, fellowship, race) will align himself in the battle of light and darkness *i.e.* good and evil (creativity and destruction). In Tolkien’s story-terms, a multitude (unity) of individual beings – the nine members of the Fellowship (including in a manner of speaking Bilbo, although his *Hobbit* adventure seems rather neutral, and although he is in effect a predecessor of the Fellowship and not an actual member), the faithful among the Elves, most notably Galadriel and Elrond since they are present in all the stories (but also all other Elves who fought for the perseverance of faith from the Kinslaying at Valinor and onward) the faithful among the Men (ranging from the uncorrupted Númenoreans to Faramir or the Rohirrim), the four Istari (including Saruman before his Fall), the Dwarves, the Ents and naturally the Valar themselves – all fight for the preservation of the God-given order of things (of which the Valar and Gandalf are most direct messengers and protectors, each in their own scope of the story), its system of values (those Eru deemed *good* and *beautiful* in the beginning) and *continual refraction* of the Divine Light. The White tree of Gondor is the latest successor of Light in the Saga, an extension of both **the Tree symbol** and **the Light symbol**, which can be traced through the Story, naturally back to the One – both as universal as they are inevitable. Each repetition of this symbol goes hand in hand

with Eliade's notion of eternal return, for in the idea of re-capturing the Light of God in the light of the trees and the Silmarilli we essentially see a re-creation of sacred time, addressing the origin, source of the Light. On the other hand, the dark forces, led by Melkor and later Sauron and followed by their minions *i.e.* all those corrupted by their evil will (from Orcs to Elves), fight for the destruction of Light under the delusion they can 'create' something better themselves. Naturally, amongst the dark forces there are those who are purely interested in domination and mastery over other wills and these are effectively the Dark Lords themselves, perhaps including Saruman the White Wizard (essentially, he is somewhere on the brink). There is another group, however, the minions: those simply deluded by the first *i.e.* 'bent wills' that never gain any power at all but are merely the puppets of the Lords. Sauron, who is most directly qualified as 'evil', is so mostly in the sense that he is blindly seduced by his own 'ill will', which he uses to in turn seduce the Elves. The Elves are not evil *per se* but their misguided actions inevitably make way for the precipitation of evil, thus effectively merely being the marionettes of 'evil/ill will'. Within the scope of this other group are all those who *fall* for the evil Lords' seductive plots and lies or, as Tolkien calls them in *Mythopoeia*, "the twice-seduced":

*Blessed are the legend-makers with their rhyme  
of things not found within recorded time.  
It is not they that have forgot the Night,  
or bid us flee to organized delight,  
in lotus-isles of economic bliss  
forswearing souls to gain a Circe-kiss  
(and counterfeit at that, machine-produced,  
bogus seduction of the twice-seduced).<sup>246</sup>*

Another important thing to consider is that neither Melkor nor Sauron were 'born evil'. They *chose* the way of the fall (a process that did not happen all at once). Melkor, like Sauron next to him, "feigned, even to himself at first,"<sup>247</sup> that his motives were pure and concerned with the preservation of the world. They each had a chance at redemption at specific points and even felt ashamed of their actions, yet this shame

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<sup>246</sup> *MP*, vv. 91-98.

<sup>247</sup> *Sil*, p. 19.

merely bred contempt and secret anger that consequently led to a *refusal of forgiveness*.<sup>248</sup> This refusal is thus not only a refusal of God but also a refusal of Joy (thus, fall into contempt) and a refusal of Hope (thus, fall into anger and hate). The process at work is equivalent to a fall into the pandemonium of life that breeds the anxieties and neuroses of (modern) living. Thus, whether *we* (as human beings) take the *via positiva* or the *via negativa* – whether we humble ourselves before something greater, the world vision *given to all* beings as something we have *in common*, thus allowing ourselves to recognize it in all its Created beauty and part-take in its Art ‘as the sub-Creators’ free from the desire to own it or claim it for ourselves, or whether we *fall* prey to vanity and our own ill will or worse yet bend to the ill will of another – that ultimately defines Reality.

*Salvation changes not, nor yet destroys,  
garden nor gardener, children nor their toys.  
Evil it will not see, for evil lies  
not in God’s picture but in crooked eyes,  
not in the source but in malicious choice,  
and not in sound but in the tuneless voice.*<sup>249</sup>

### **5.3. *Spoiling the Sport***

Before we set foot into the field of art and its own relation to reality, another glimpse over myth and belief needs to be cast, and one more notion to be addressed: the long process (it did not happen all at once) of rationalizing, allegorizing, euhemerizing and (what is perhaps the favored term of modern day) debunking myths, perpetrated by an equally long line of those who feigned (even to themselves at first) that *purging* the myth of those absurdities such as belief was an effort most beneficial to the world. Our recorded history (which must also certainly imply error in its own partiality) suggests that this process began sometime during the fourth century BC with the Greek Euhemerus (hence, euhemerism), who ‘rebelled’ against Zeus claiming him to be an

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<sup>248</sup> See: *Sil*, p. 343.

<sup>249</sup> *MP*, vv. 137-142.

overly glorified king.<sup>250</sup> The work was continued shortly thereafter by another Greek, Palaephatus,<sup>251</sup> who rebelled not against the gods (this is very important to note) but only against the *fantastical elements*. Palaephatus proclaimed anyone who dared believe in the nonsense of the like of centaurs either *childish* or simply *a fool* (his purgatory retelling of myths was followed up by commentary that either begins or at some points mentions the word ‘absurd’ almost without exception). The mission to leave a more plausible historical account ‘worthy of belief’ commanded by Euhemerus’ bold dictum that myths were ‘history in disguise’<sup>252</sup> amounted to an indeed very prevalent assertion that myths were nothing but the *distorted* accounts of *real* events. It is precisely all such claims that Tolkien renounces in *Mythopoeia*, which is addressed from “Philomythus [Myth-friend or, rather, Myth-fellow] to Misomythus [Myth-enemy]” or otherwise (bearing in mind C. S. Lewis’ remark that instigated the writing of the poem): “To one who said that myths were lies and therefore worthless, even though ‘breathed through silver’.”

Not only is the list of ancients who continued to interpret things in euhemeristic fashion too exhaustive to be mentioned, but the allegorists made their contributions early on as well; some of the allegorists actually attempted to *defend* the myth construing it as allegory *i.e.* did not approach the myth malevolently *per se* (one can in fact approach it benevolently as well, as one Myth-friend once did) yet they inadvertently canceled out an entire dimension of myth, and without the intention of drawing comparison in anything other than the *pattern* – the same unfortunate defense was applied to Christianity, and also to the world of Tolkien (and they both had their share of malevolent and benevolent approaches as well). A voice heard fairly recently through the pen of one Richard Joyce (*The Myth of Morality*, 2003), upon rightly

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<sup>250</sup> He applies the same logic to Uranus and Kronos, *etc.* In his utopian novel *Hiera Anagraphe* (Sacred History), Euhemerus describes his travel to the island Panchaia in the Indian Ocean, where he chanced upon an inscribed stele in the temple of Zeus Triphylius – proof the Olympian gods were deified kings. Over the years, Euhemerus became a symbol of myth-demystification and even atheism, which seems highly excessive, especially the latter. There is no real evidence Euhemerus was an atheist or that he willfully intended to offend the gods. For a recently published authoritative monograph on Euhemerus, see: Winiarczyk, Marek: *The ‘Sacred History’ of Euhemerus of Messene*, De Gruyter, Walter Inc., New York, 2013.

<sup>251</sup> Palaephatus, *De incredibilis: On Unbelievable Tales*, tr. J. Stern, Bolchazy-Carducci, Wauconda, 1996.

<sup>252</sup> Cited in: Spence, Lewis: *An introduction to mythology*, Moffat Yard and Co., New York, 1921, p. 42. See also: Sicilus, Diodorus (Diodorus of Sicily): *The Library of History*, book VI, tr. C. H. Oldfather, Vol. 3, Cambridge 1970.

establishing that allegorical interpretation is in fact merely the slow death of myth, proposes yet another manner of ingenious defense:

I venture to suggest that the best defense against the euhemerist is to declare that the myth has nothing to do with truth, and, derivatively, nothing to do with belief. The adherents of the myth should just declare the mythoclast a spoilsport who is missing the point. But if they want to be ingenuous in this defense, then they had better get clear among themselves that they are not believing it. And this, of course, reveals a weakness at the heart of fictionalism, which we have already encountered. [...] Fictionalism is predicated on the assumption that encouraging a habit of false belief has inevitable deleterious consequences. Its fragility is that a fiction that is presented as being of central practical weight, as something demanding allegiance, is likely to be read by the careless as something demanding belief.

In such a circumstance the euhemerist can be seen as playing an important role, for he warns his audience that the narratives are not true, and admonishes anyone who has fallen into the easy (and therefore tempting) habit of belief. [...] [David] Hume, another great debunker, was resigned to the fact that whatever he might say about miracles, however sound his arguments, “the deluded multitude” would continue to believe in them. [...] Hume’s intended audience is primarily the philosopher who makes no effort to quell erroneous reasoning, for little can be done about the fact that “the gazing populace receive greedily, without examination, whatever soothes superstition, and promotes wonder.” The euhemerist writes for the same audience: for those philosophers who are defending the myth as true – for they, at least, ought to know better.<sup>253</sup>

Joyce’s reference to spoilsports is derived from Joseph Campbell’s remark that the purpose of the fearsome guardian figures that flank the entrances to holy places is to keep out the “spoilsport” and the “positivist,” those “advocates of Aristotelian logic for whom *A* can never be *B*.” According to Campbell, these “heavy thinkers are to remain without,” for they defile the very purpose of entering a sanctuary, where one is to be overtaken by “the other mind,” and “spell-bound” into a state “wherein *A* is *B*.”<sup>254</sup> “Small wonder,” says Tolkien, “that spell means both a story told, and a formula of

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<sup>253</sup> Joyce, Richard: *Myth of Morality*, Cambridge University Press, London, 2003, pp. 240-241.

<sup>254</sup> Campbell, Joseph: *The Mythic Dimension: Selected Essays 1959-1987*, ed. Antony Van Couvering, New World Library, Novato, 2008, p. 34.

power over living men.”<sup>255</sup> Yet, one cannot help but feel that some ‘defenders’ of myth caused more damage and spoiled more sports than the positivists. Ultimately, even Campbell himself reduced myth to “make-believe.”<sup>256</sup> To that effect, we must ask – where is allegiance without belief and what is it that we ought to “know better,” as Joyce suggests? If allegory brings about the death of myth, then ‘knowing better’ brings about the death of imagination. One should not be so eager to refuse carelessly that which promotes wonder, but should rather *wonder* what is it we stand to lose in the process. Indeed, the price for ‘knowing better’ is dire and Tolkien was well aware of this. If we were to follow that desolate path of forsaking imagination the inner being would wither, deprived of the nourishment it requires – not biologically, but mentally and spiritually. That does not mean one needs to forsake logic, quite the contrary! Let us recall Tolkien’s footnote in which he speaks of “the light of an undivorced from reason, that sees things both scientifically (or philosophically) and imaginatively (or subcreatively) and says that they are good – as beautiful.”<sup>257</sup> Precisely this perspective is Tolkien’s storytelling gift to the world, the deliverance (sub-Creation) of a story: *not a story to believe in literally but a story to believe in imaginatively*, which is something good and beautiful to believe in.

There is no telling what Palaephatus would make of a Tolkien reader, that special kind of fool who accepts not only the absurdities of myth but, worse still, the absurdities of an openly imaginary world filled with these undesirable childish elements along with its imaginary body of myth and legend. After all, Palaephatus may very well be right, since even Tolkien himself told us all of this was *absurd!* Thus, the only answer, when defenses seem to fail so poorly:

*I would with the beleaguered fools be told,  
that keep an inner fastness where their gold...*<sup>258</sup>

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<sup>255</sup> *FS*, p. 128.

<sup>256</sup> Campbell, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

<sup>257</sup> *LT* 131, footnote on p. 170.

<sup>258</sup> *MP*, vv. 113-114.

## Chapter 6: THE GIFT OF FANTASY

*A man is both a seed and in some degree also  
a gardener, for good or ill.*<sup>259</sup>

We have seen where and how the myth fits into Tolkien's Saga and have recognized it as the seed and the carrier of the story pattern, which we have also qualified as the sacred pattern. We have embraced such a qualification most naturally because it belongs most directly to that which is sacred within the field of the story itself, that is to the God of the story – fantasy 'source' of a fantasy world (Eru). The tapestry of the Saga reveals this union of myth and fantasy equally naturally, because a field within Faërie (the "Perilous Realm" of Fairy-story) clearly is the story's homeland and Fantasy its Source. This is perceptible to the reader without any additional knowledge of Tolkien's poetics.

Yet, for some of the critics this union seems to have remained rather unattainable and it is hardly surprising that very few actually deal with the Saga in its entirety. Not only unable to neatly place the entire Saga within a usual interpretative frame, but unable to place even its separated parts within a usual frame, for the purposes of 'understanding' *The Lord of the Rings* an entire new genre was invented: *epic fantasy* (other completely incomparable pieces of literary art were later added to this 'genre' presumably to fill in the Void which must have seemed rather empty and unattended). Thus, we have witnessed the birth of a new literary genre, which purported to bring into contact fantasy and history but rather represented the fantasizing of history. Yet, let us look again at Tolkien's Saga, which does indeed owe its origin (source) to a union of fairy-story and myth – the myth as it grew through the Saga, changing with the ages, growing out of the suit of cosmogonic legendarium and into the epic. We will indeed find ourselves upon that bridge (brink) "between fairy-tale and history," with the *representative of history actually being the myth*, not because myths are nothing more than distortions of history, but because ennobled by the prism of fantasy history regains some of its old beauty (its pre-industrial shine), and is no longer only viewed as that drab quantitative sequencing of events, nor just a record of the long ago, but is 'offered' as an *account* of the fluctuations of the answers about the world (itself being one of the

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<sup>259</sup> *LT* 183, p. 258.

fluctuations). If there is presence of any evolution within it, it is the evolution – indeed the *duration* – of the (mythic – sacred – great) pattern, and an account of man’s dealings affected by the pattern (actions of those who acted in accordance with it and sought to preserve the harmony, or actions of those who sought to revert it – a history of conquests and resistance within the duration of the pattern). Essentially, history is an account of the human journey, which began long, long ago when myth *was* history, the history of the creation of the path. As for fantasy, it was not just added to history and its myth, legend and epic – fantasy was *already there*, contained within; history already revealed fantasy and ‘brought’ it along into the present day. ‘Epic fantasy’ is thus an unfortunate, perhaps even a disturbing term, because it denies this union which was already there, and pushes it toward an artificial bond instead, bearing an echo of a man-made monstrosity – unlike the graceful Pegasus or even the fearsome but formidable Cerberus, but rather like a laboratory bred atrocity doomed by its ‘creators’ to live a short disabling life.

The same unfortunate course (the claim that Tolkien was ‘artificially’ fantasizing history) led to the view that *The Silmarillion* is in fact an ‘artificial mythology’. In claiming so, another monster was created and let loose upon the world. The mythology of *The Silmarillion* opened the gates on a flashflood of debate of whether ‘this’ myth was actually ‘that’, and launched an *epic* ‘search for the sources’ behind the Saga (the ‘recognition’ of Christianity was but another current in the massive deluge). Naturally, the flashflood eventually reached *The Lord of the Rings* as well: Aragorn’s sword Anduril thus became Excalibur in disguise, Frodo became Christ (!), the Ring itself an echo of the *Nibelungenlied* (there was further disagreement however whether Tolkien copied Richard Wagner on this or whether they simply both ‘drew’ for the same Austrian source!). Other sources have been ‘identified’: Icelandic *Elder Edda* and *Völuspá*, Norse *Volsunga Saga*, Finnish *Kalevala*, Anglo-Saxon poetry (naturally, *Beowulf* was the first in line for the role), some stories from Slavic mythology, some other stories from Greek mythology, but also George MacDonald and G.K. Chesterton – and more. (Tolkien’s life was also dragged into this process and casual remarks made by Humphrey Carpenter in Tolkien’s biography were taken as ‘revelatory’, for instance a passing comment that Tolkien had once stepped on a spider when he was a very young boy instantaneously ‘explained away’ the presence of Shelob in the story, the



Giant spider who traps the two Hobbits on their way to Mordor.) What these excavators seem to have forgotten, or perhaps never even considered relevant, was Philomythus' own mythopoeic alignment (and warning):

*I will not treat your dusty path and flat,  
denoting this and that by this and that*<sup>260</sup>

Should the words of the Myth-fellow prove insufficient, there is Tolkien's essay *On Fairy-Stories* and the Chapter quite unambiguously entitled "Origins" where Tolkien (rather as Faërie-fellow) discusses precisely this kind of 'excavatory' approach to the sources:

Such studies are, however, scientific (at least in intent); they are the pursuit of folklorists and anthropologists: that is of people using the stories not as they were meant to be used, but as a quarry from which to dig evidence, or information, about matters in which they are interested. A perfectly legitimate procedure in itself – but ignorance and forgetfulness of the nature of the story (as a thing told in its entirety) has often led such inquirers into strange judgements. To investigators of this sort recurring similarities [...] seem specifically important. [...] They are inclined to say that any two stories that are built round the same folklore motive, or are made up of a generally similar combination of such motives, are 'the same stories'. We read that Beowulf 'is only a version of Dat Erdmänneken', that 'The Black Bull of Norrway is Beauty and the Beast' or 'is the same story as Eros and Psyche'; that the Norse Mastermaid (or the Gaelic Battle of the Birds and its many congeners and variants) is 'the same story as the Greek tale of Jason and Medea'.

Statements of that kind may express (in undue abbreviation) some element of truth; but they are not true in a fairy-story sense, they are not true in art or literature. It is precisely the colouring, the atmosphere, the unclassifiable individual details of a story, and above all the general purport that informs with life the undissected bones of the plot, that really count.<sup>261</sup>

These words were uttered by the story-teller as if foreshadowing the great avalanche of excavatory practices and the denotations 'of this and that by this and that'

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<sup>260</sup> *MP*, vv. 125-126.

<sup>261</sup> *FS*, pp. 119-120.

which were about to strike his own fairy-story decades later. Yet, they remained unheeded as the excavators went on digging, even as they profusely quoted from other passages of this very essay. Thus, in recognizing ‘fantasy as the source’ (along with *its* own myth and along with the sacred pattern) we have come as close as need be to the bones, abstaining from any excavations of the ‘story sources’ – that type of story fabric bulldozing in search for the explications of single threads en route to their mythic sources – which Tolkien himself very well knew to be not only virtually untraceable but also beside the point, both due to the fact that the stories behind the ‘real myths’ (thus not the pattern of their creation but certainly their content and form) got ‘boiled in the soup’ of Story. (Perhaps a childhood spider did in fact fall into the soup as well, but we shall leave the creature be.) Fantasy, on the other hand, must be a matter of our interest, because fantasy *is* the boiling.

Tolkien was very specific about the difference between imagination and fantasy; he viewed imagination simply as the capacity of the human mind to *form images*, while in his mind, fantasy took these images a step further, representing not only the mental capacity to envision but also the capacity to *grasp these visions*.<sup>262</sup> This was the wording (for it is effectively a matter of wording, or as he says in *Mythopoeia*, “trees are not ‘trees’ until so named and seen”<sup>263</sup>) which he *intentionally* discerned for both, dissatisfied with the implication of fancy (and fallacy) that the very term ‘imagination’ entailed. Little did he know that *in translation to the modern tongue* ‘fantasy’ would be at greater odds with truth than ‘imagination’. If imagination still has some weight beyond idle fancy (perhaps due to its fellowship with inspiration which *some* still consider sacred), fantasy has been deeply debased and demeaned. Thus the ‘translation’ of ‘epic fantasy’ into today’s terms mostly stands for ‘idle ravings of a lunatic’ while Tolkien the Myth-and-Faërie-fellow is reduced “to the category of people who do things with model railways in their garden sheds” (this in the words of no other than Tolkien’s own biographer).<sup>264</sup> It seems that the little gardener has once again been underestimated; it may have seemed to a visionless mind that the only thing going on was an idle game of make-believe, yet in his garden shed the storyteller had been secretly doing

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<sup>262</sup> *FS*, p. 139 *ff.*

<sup>263</sup> *MP*, v. 29.

<sup>264</sup> Carpenter made the extraordinary remark on BBC “Bookshelf,” 22.11.1991; cited in: Curry, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

something wondrous, he was boiling a Story in an invisible Cauldron, weaving luminous threads (perhaps from afar or out from the dark these did seem like some peculiar railways), attentively planting the delicate seeds of enchantment into the Garden of the World, hoping not to bring them to life but to bring them *to light*, the light of the vision he wanted and needed to share (more real than one would easily imagine). The reader who ‘really’ entered the shed and ‘saw’ this *fantasy-woven light* beheld a miraculous vision of an entirely new reality unfolding before his eyes; he was shown a glimpse of the nature of the world (not only of the imaginary world but, through it, also of the *real* world) and a secret of the nature of the mind (as real as mind can ever be in its own right); and he came out of ‘the shed’ endowed not only with the beauty of the vision he had seen but with the secret knowledge of just how such visions are achieved – the storyteller’s *gardening* gift to the world. Equally, the importance Tolkien attributes to gardens and gardening is immense, as can be seen throughout his Saga. Not only is the garden in Valinor a rather unconcealed projection of the Garden of Eden, but being home to the two Trees it is a most direct source of Light to the entire Earth. One of Melkor’s direst pains at the prosperity of Arda and the Valar’s role in its shaping is the fact that “the Earth was becoming as a *garden for their delight*.”<sup>265</sup> Creative power inherent in the act of shaping is clearly given Edenic quality, resounding with joy and bountifulness, while it becomes equally evident that the Valar, both literally and figuratively, are the very gardeners of Arda. As the world grows dim through the ages, and the Unsullied Light but a faint memory, the purity of the garden stands as a reminder, a haven in the fallen world. We find its splintered light reflected in the Shire as potently as in Rivendell and Lórien, in the hobbit-gardener Samwise Gamgee as virtuously as in the Elven queen Galadriel. Most importantly, its purity is more than an *aide-mémoire*, or even beacon, it is a mighty gift with a potential to heal and renew that which is barren and laid waste. As the Fellowship prepares to leave Lórien, Galadriel presents Sam with but a handful of earth from her garden, to use once he returns to his war-wrecked home. It will not “defend you against any peril,” she says, yet “such blessing as Galadriel has still to bestow is upon it.” It is the blessing of replenishment and rebirth, an unbroken thread of remembrance, legacy of the past. “Then you may remember Galadriel, and catch a glimpse far off of Lórien, that you

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<sup>265</sup> *Sil*, p. 21, emphasis mine.

have seen only in our winter. For our spring and our summer are gone by, and they will never be seen on earth again save in memory.”<sup>266</sup>

Let us now return to the ‘boiling’ and the alchemy of its process. In the little gardener’s great Cauldron of Story, the ‘inhabitants of Myth’ encountered and mingled with some of the ‘inhabitants of Faërie’. In result, the story-maker (the cook) ‘recognized’ and revealed them as the Ainur, Elves, Dwarves, Hobbits, Orcs, Ents, and other ‘trespassing’ Men (Tolkien essentially considered men trespassers into Faërie.<sup>267</sup> He believed “ourselves, mortal men” to belong rightfully to Faërie only “when enchanted.”<sup>268</sup> Small wonder men came into his story “secondly,” even if “inevitably”<sup>269</sup>). We say these are but *some* inhabitants, because Tolkien recognized other residents there as well, and because in Faërie also dwell those who have been recognized by other storytellers, and – as we must presume – there are dwellers who are only yet to be recognized! Yet, as Tolkien reminds us, the Perilous Realm is not only made up of ‘fantastic creatures’. Therein we can also find “the seas, the sun, the moon, the sky; and the earth, and all things that are in it: tree and bird, water and stone, wine and bread.”<sup>270</sup> All of these things are usually taken for granted inside fantasy, because they came to be considered ‘not fantastical enough’. They are in a certain sense ‘too real’ and too accessible, disenchanting by the mundane – although a fresh perspective on these will reveal them as equally (if not more) ‘fantastical’ and ‘magical’.

Fantasy indeed gives these things a fresh perspective: by revealing them in their beauty *against a background of marvel*, by putting a spell on them, re-enchanting them and bringing them out of the soup as transformed. A ‘simple’ horse can come out as a ‘real’ animal of ‘real’ color and ‘real’ size equipped in ‘real’ gear and ridden by a ‘real’ man, but shoulder to shoulder with a Dwarf and an Elf, onto an epic battlefield against the Lord of Darkness! Or it can come out as the mighty Lord of all Horses, the ennobled horse, larger in stature and ‘pure light’ in color, light-footed and ‘unnaturally’ fast, ridden bareback by a Wizard who is in fact not a man but an angelic being made of the

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<sup>266</sup> *LotR* II: 8.

<sup>267</sup> *FS*, p. 109.

<sup>268</sup> *FS*, p. 113.

<sup>269</sup> *LT* 131, p. 169.

<sup>270</sup> *FS*, p. 113.

thought of God! In each instance, we will look at both the horse and the rider with a new feeling of marvel and awe. Horse is ennobled and man is ennobled. The feeling of riding is ennobled. The unity of the horse and the rider is ennobled. The horse is no longer just a means to an end, a vehicle that transports the rider around. The love of 'other' and a new sense of the communication between the two are offered. The utilitarian attitude towards *that which serves* is replaced by the love for the living being – a friend – who helps and relieves. These *are* very real things indeed. They may very well be 'the stuff of story' but it is the kind of 'stuff' that directs who we are and how we treat reality. There is nothing allegorical about it. By providing the enchantment of a new perspective, fairy-stories remind us of these things, of their beauty and importance, of their virtue and honor. Fairy-stories teach without preaching.

This is the same kind of teaching and enchantment of the everyday that was granted to men who would listen to the accounts and legends about centaurs. Whether the ancient story-listeners felt they would not 'really' meet a centaur in the woods in front of their home or whether they expected – or even hoped – perhaps to meet them some day is a question beyond superfluous. Those who 'really' heard the story did in fact already meet them, because they willingly ate the enchanted soup, they knowingly drank from the peculiar waters fetched from the deeps of the World of Story. One Palaephatus called them childish and fools, although this is indeed a small price to pay for the meeting with a centaur! Yet, modern day Palaephatuses are more cunning in their scorn, they have not only scolded the 'believers of such nonsense' and mocked their beliefs, they have attempted (and partly succeeded!) to disenchant the very process of enchantment, by reducing the meaning and importance of fantasy (both the *word* and the *idea*) to the level of gullibility, stupidity and even madness. They have effectively attacked Fantasy itself and gradually (yet almost imperceptibly) fantasy came to be identified with illusion, delusion, hallucination, mental illness or hypnosis. At best, fantasy became the equivalent of a sort of idle daydream (playing with your toys in the garden shed out back); at worst, a severe form of mental disorder and detachment from reality. The first case is precisely why Tolkien disliked any connection of fantasy to dreaming (although Dreams also suffered at the hands of the disenchanters). For instance, Tolkien never considered Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* a true fairy-story because it used the machinery of dream as the gate into the Wonder-World of

Story. This is somewhat unfair to the dream however, because if the sun and the horse can be in a fairy-story, why should dream be considered ‘too real’? The equation of fantasy and dream on the other hand is a horse of an entirely different color indeed. Given their lack of control over the mind and lack of mental willfulness, neither dream nor delirium, and most certainly not mental illness, could, ever be of the same nature as fantasy, which calls upon envisioning by means of will. The excruciating episodes of a schizophrenic patient are not only unlikely to bring about a meeting with a centaur, elf or dragon (and even if they did it would be far from a fairy-story setting but rather agony) but they are also far from either conscious or deliberate. There is nothing deliberate about dreaming either, unless we include the fact that one will deliberately go to sleep (although some insomniacs might disagree with that as well). Admittedly, some hallucinations can be willfully induced, but not from the mind alone, not without the external aid of some form of opiate, whereas fantasy is a self-sufficient process.

With regard to myth, fantasy is what myth and fairy-story have in common *up to a point*, that is, there is some overlap, mostly between fantastical creatures of lower mythology (the mythological legendarium) and fantastical beings of Faërie. Still, the deities of higher mythology cannot and should not be reduced to fantastical creatures – even Palaephatus knew that. This is the point where mythical field overlaps with another field, the field of religion, which does not involve the type of belief fantasy entails, but requires faith. Essentially, in dealing with the Sacred as the Source (of origin and of return), creational and eschatological myths invoke the very same. In a sense, Tolkien borrowed from both fields, using the legendary and the fantastical components of myth to weave the spell of the story, and creational, thus, sacred pattern of myth (in its glimpsing of faith) to ennoble the fantasy. The pattern of accord *vs.* discord itself is not a fantastical one *at all*; no more fantastical are the themes brought about by the pattern’s implementation into the story: Fall, Mortality and Machine (Artificiality). The questions that these themes entail *fully* refer to the ‘real’ world; fantasy is indeed their background (sometimes as the thesis and sometimes as the antithesis) but they are directed at *Man* (surely the Elves have far less reason to deal with Mortality).

As the pattern reveals the intersection of paths, which in turn reveals man’s nature and ultimately decides man’s reality (essentially whether one *falls from* or *rises to*

grace), it shows that this pattern *today* ought to be considered sacred since it stands at the very heart of both the inner life of the being and outer life of the world. Undoubtedly, Life is Sacred by *all* accounts. Yet, this glimpsing of faith, which in turn the Saga itself only glimpses (implies) through its pattern, does indeed become further illuminated by Tolkien's attitude toward the power of story. As is made abundantly clear in his essays, letters and even the poem *Mythopoeia*, Tolkien's position does involve faith, even doubtlessly rests on it – but this is never made *explicit* in the Saga itself.

Thus, when a widely acclaimed Tolkien critic Joseph Pearce (a benevolent critic at that) claims that an agnostic or atheist can never fully grasp the significance of the Saga<sup>271</sup> he is as blasphemous as he is gravely mistaken. Tolkien's Saga is not a story woven only for Christians, nor even only for the believers in God. Its implied glimpse of the sacred truth is Tolkien's storytelling gift *to all*. The difference (outer and inner battle) between good and evil, light and darkness, virtue and vanity, benevolence and malevolence, compassion and tyranny, fairness and greed: these are not *only* matters of religion and are certainly not only confined to Christianity (are we that arrogant, that selfish?). Rather, these are the two faces of man's *inner religion*: man's nature and conviction, and consequently his deeds. Surely agnostics also know the difference between light and dark? Even in view of the mythic sacred pattern as glimpse of faith, this is by no means refuted, but in fact strengthened. The presence of mythic form merely underlines Tolkien's intent to search for universal elements of truths recognized so long ago, a search he furthered to the depths of time and space of the world of story, precisely because he ventured out of 'all confinements' including the confinement of reality itself. Tolkien did not write specifically for the believers in Christ, he wrote for the 'believers in fantasy', for all and any willing to be enchanted. Tolkien-defender Pearce thus sounds frighteningly like Gollum. We can almost hear him saying, 'Tolkien is our precious and only we can wield him!'

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<sup>271</sup> Pearce, Joseph: "Why Tolkien Says *The Lord of the Rings* Is Catholic," National Catholic Register, January 12-19, 2003, <http://www.catholiceducation.org/en/culture/literature/why-tolkien-says.html> [Retrieved Aug 4, 2013].

Leaving the defenders aside, should we look at the other critical flank, we will perceive that most of those who ventured against Tolkien<sup>272</sup> suffered (and some still suffer) from what can best be described by that which Tolkien himself (again, as if in anticipation) rendered a case of childlessness.<sup>273</sup> Here is not just a matter of whether one has an appetite for fairy-stories or not (or even the infamous ‘appetite for marvels’); naturally, some people do and some people do not, and not having an appetite for fairy-stories does not make one a Sauron. Rather, it is representative of the bitterness and misanthropy with which these attacks are launched (like the avalanche of spleen precipitated by Germaine Greer’s notorious comment that having *The Lord of the Rings* chosen by the readers to be the book of the century was a veritable nightmare come true<sup>274</sup>). At work, clearly, is one of the processes fueling Eliade’s modern day anxiety, a transformation of scolding Palaephatuses into acrimonious monsters or, rather, monstrous critics. While embittered by fantasy and man’s *free will* to take the ‘road of Imagination’, they themselves could perhaps benefit from a little hope and pure childlike joy such as is awoken by Tolkien’s Saga. The Saga is certainly another peculiar beast, although less like a guardian giant or fearsome dragon (despite its deceptive size). It is more like a hobbit, that diminutive creature who *rises* to the heavy task of preserving the light against the guile of the enemy, a beacon to all “the timid hearts that evil hate /that quail in its shadow, and yet shut the gate.”<sup>275</sup> After all, the great Oxford Dictionary tells us that ‘fairies’ are creatures ‘diminutive’ in size – a definition Tolkien effectively rewrote.<sup>276</sup>

Fantasy-fellows can only hope (or recognize), like the Wise of Tolkien’s Middle-earth had hoped (and recognized), that one small creature has more power to bear the Ring than some ‘great defenders’ did (or would).<sup>277</sup> Indeed, those who willingly fall under the storyteller’s spell become the members of a mysterious fellowship. Moreover, they become a bit like Frodo’s faithful *gardener* Sam, without whom the Ringbearer

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<sup>272</sup> Quite like most of those who felt they needed to unburden the world of myth and fantasy.

<sup>273</sup> *FS*, p. 130.

<sup>274</sup> Greer, Germaine: “The book of the century“ in *W: the Waterstone’s Magazine*, Winter/Spring 1997, No 4, pp. 2-9.

<sup>275</sup> *MP*, vv. 81-82.

<sup>276</sup> See: *FS*, pp. 111-112.

<sup>277</sup> ““Many are the strange chances of the world,” said Mithrandir, ‘and help oft shall come from the hands of the weak when the Wise falter’” (*Sil*, p. 363).



never would have succeeded. Indeed, a bit childish fellow, open-hearted and innocent, profoundly enchanted by the beauties of the road, a sudden lover of Elven-songs (which he knew absolutely nothing about prior to his journey), an explorer of all things fair and gardener of the seed of fantasy. Not a wizard or a magician wielding secret powers and fires, but that ordinary fellow who inherits the world from Frodo (the same world – and garden – that the ‘ordinary’ story-listeners ‘inherit’ from Tolkien), the faithful companion for whom Frodo saves the haven of the Shire (purity of the garden) against the Shadow that threatens to befall it.

The preservation of havens (and gardens) may have seemed as sheer escapism to some (Greer and her ilk), but Tolkien was yet again ahead of the game in suggesting that man would need no escape if he did not find the world that he himself had built (not the nature that was given) so artificial and *ugly* – the machine of modern living the very noise of which (loud and endlessly repeated) is enough to breed anxiety.<sup>278</sup> Tolkien penned these thoughts seven decades ago, yet the huff and puff of the machine has not abated. On the contrary, it has gained momentum – and ugliness. Piles of concrete and glass are hurriedly replacing the view of mountains. Gray and black pointy shaped towers are growing taller and taller. Nature, gardens and animals that once freely roamed the land are being confined to smaller and smaller frames (people who once freely roamed the land are confined inside those same frames!) while billboards and screens are being given frames of monstrous proportion for the advertisement of industry and profit of the corporation. Art is losing its once hallowed place as the haven of beauty. Culture itself *proudly* became industry. Painting and sculpting are growing in morbidity, hurrying into the sharp rectangular perspective, distorting into ‘installation’ and ‘performance’ (so often based upon ‘endless repetition’ of a single image yet devoid of the genuinely inspired and cautionary element such a repetition held for instance in the surreal art of one Rene Magritte where the faceless gray-suited man hauntingly repeated *ad nauseum*). The grace of the old oils on canvas is being airbrushed in Photoshop and locked away ‘for safekeeping’ into museums, the entrances into which are also blocked (adorned?) by huge glass pyramids and metal constructions. Music is losing touch with genuine melody while becoming increasingly loud, ‘produced’ for the masses mostly by the machines, simultaneously less ‘inspired’ and

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<sup>278</sup> *FS*, pp. 148-149.

equally less inspiring. Poetry is becoming vulgar and profane (its profanity commended as ‘realistic’ and its vulgarity admired as ‘honest’) and the numbers of those who once took delight in this sacred art form are dwindling at an alarming rate. Novel, the once great bastion of reason, is *outperformed* by self-help books because the common reader neither has the time (since time is money!) for the great questions about life such as once posed by a Dostoyevsky, nor the patience to read anything even half as ‘lengthy’ (perhaps also why some of Tolkien’s adversaries never bothered to actually *read* the books in full<sup>279</sup>). The ‘new’ reader is pressed for time to find a quick fix and a most practical solution to life (during the commercial break) in the desperate attempt to break out of his ‘personal pandemonium’, while the very idea of breaking out is deemed *escapism*. When we hear the announcement that something is ‘coming to theaters’ that no longer means cathartic drama of the great playwrights but the latest cash cow (golden calf) of the Movie Lords, and best we can hope for is the Hollywood version of one *Romeo and Juliette* (or perhaps *The Lord of the Rings*?). And all the while the society is being eaten away by cancer, the leading cause of which is ‘stress’, the most widely talked about chimerical monster of the late twentieth and twenty first centuries, that ‘inevitable’ side-effect of modern life.

Thus, we are welcomed to the Machine, a *manmade* monstrosity fueled by the inner workings of human corruption, vanity, secret shame, possessiveness, superiority complexes and more (including the lust for more!). Operated by lies and fear, the Machine furthers the idea not only of its own supremacy but also of inevitability (why bother fighting it when such a feat is ‘as doomed’ as that *foolish* venture upon a windmill of an old knight who was under the preposterous delusion he was seeing dragons!). Such a mechanism calls for the beheading not only of fantasy but of all those ‘perilous things’ which may wake one up from the machine: hope, joy, belief, innocence, ‘childfulness’, *true* critical thinking, not only the glimpsing of the beyond but also the realization of the now, the beauty and the truth art revealed to man long, long ago... It (inevitably) brings about the decline (fall) into artificiality (or, as Tolkien says in *Mythopoeia*, the gaping dark abyss to which such progress tends<sup>280</sup>).

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<sup>279</sup> See: p. 167 of this thesis & footnote on p. 168.

<sup>280</sup> *MP*, vv. 120-121.

So why should it be childish or foolish to want release from the ‘real’ illusion instead – the illusion of this *inevitability*? Is fantasy ‘really’ the trickster in that equation, or are we only ‘fooling’ ourselves? Are we to so carelessly dismiss the urge to break out of that prison as escapism, or can we recognize it as the call for struggle for the preservation of that which is sacred – *real life*? Can we ‘imagine’ it as a call to wake up to the beauty of the world like the once ignorant little hobbit and to the importance (rather than scarcity) of *the time we are given*? Instead of being so adamant upon breaking the spell of fantasy, can we allow ourselves to view the world with fresh eyes, willingly rinsed with the crystal clear waters from the deeps of the enchanted realm, and wake to our real yet vision-ennobled world, full of marvel and awe, and break the illusion of the inevitability of the path of discord and decay we are proudly rushing down? Can we be more like those –

[...] *those that felt astir within*  
*by deep monition movements that were kin*  
*to life and death of trees, of beasts, of stars:*  
*free captives undermining shadowy bars,*  
*digging the foreknown from experience*  
*and panning the vein of spirit out of sense.*<sup>281</sup>

Yet, as the story teaches, Fantasy does give us something more beautiful and fair to *imagine*, but it does not make it happen. It provides us with the vision of a direction, but only ‘real action’ can bring things to *shape* and ‘achieve the vision’. Let us not forget the surprise of the Valar when they arrived upon Earth expecting everything to be *just given*:

But when the Valar entered into Eä they were at first astounded and at a loss, for it was as if naught was yet made which they had seen in vision, and all was but on point to begin and yet unshaped, and it was dark. For the Great Music had been but the growth and flowering of thought in the Tuneless Halls, and the Vision only a foreshowing; but now they had entered in at the beginning of Time, and the Valar

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<sup>281</sup> *MP*, vv. 35-44.

perceived that the World had been but foreshadowed and foresung, and they must achieve it.<sup>282</sup>

In the letter to Waldman Tolkien points us that the only time Power is given an entirely positive connotation in the Saga is precisely in reference to the Valar. And indeed, *their power* is not about *power* at all, that is, it is not about what we usually mean by power – supremacy, control and tyranny; rather, it is about power as *strength* and *force* with which they labored to make the world a *livable* place (and therefore ready for the arrival of God’s Children), unwavering before the Enemy’s constant attacks and ceaseless efforts of unmaking of all which was beautiful. They came down to Earth ennobled by the vision of the world that God had given them and they directed all their might (power) at making this vision come true – in achieving the World. As Powers of the World, the Valar are the carriers of the seed of purity. Power, and thus sub-creation, as practiced by the Valar (and Elves at their best) is used in the service of recovery and healing; as practiced by either of the Dark Lords, it is used in the service of control and corruption. In the first instance, power weaves Enchantment and delivers Art; in the latter, it breeds Magic and produces the Machine (Technology in its negative aspect).

So began their great labours in wastes unmeasured and unexplored, and in ages uncounted and forgotten, until in the Deeps of Time and in the midst of the vast halls of Eä there came to be that hour and that place where was made the habitation of the Children of Ilúvatar.<sup>283</sup>

Thus, we arrive at the majestic core of any truly successful fairy-story: it does not *only* reveal the Machine for what it is, exposing the dragon and instigating sorrow for the world marred by evil and plagued by the enemy (even if man *is* this evil himself). It brings the reader out into the field of *eucaastrophe* – the field where dragons can be slain! The witnessing of a dragon-slaying (Dark Lord being beaten, monster killed, Machine stopped, one’s own vanity conquered – Evil overturned) is what awakes the ‘eucaastrophic’ sensation, sorrow *pierced* by hope and joy.<sup>284</sup> A true fairy-story *will*

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<sup>282</sup> *Sil*, pp. 21-22.

<sup>283</sup> *Sil*, p. 22.

<sup>284</sup> Sorrow and joy consistently intermingle in Tolkien’s imaginarium. Cf. “For if joyful is the fountain that rises in the sun, its springs are in the wells of sorrow unfathomable at the foundations of the

eucatastrophically enchant the mind to dive into the deeps of the being and awake the eyes into tears. It will rinse away desolation and bitterness, the fear of hopelessness before the supremacy and inevitability of the self-imposed Machine, ennobling the eye to see that sudden glimpse, the mind to recognize a secret being revealed – the lesson *how* to kill a dragon!

By enchanting, ennobling, enbeautying the human mind to look upon the world from the top of the Fantasy Tower with fresh eyes (not as conquest-driven climber but as spectator enjoying the marvel of the view) and act in accord with the marvel he has been shown (if even a glimpse), the fairy-story enforces itself as the conductor of a world-vision that reveals the sacred pattern, a *conductor* not aiming to command by power but to communicate by strength – the mission of all *true* Art. Although the battle against the Machine is still raging, there are still Artists out there fighting the dragon. As we are currently being reminded by an Artist who welcomed us to the Machine decades ago and who never since stopped banging his ‘bleeding heart’ against the ‘wall’ of anyone who dared listen and would not close his eyes before the arriving Horde: the tide *is* turning! Victory may seem like only ‘a fool’s hope’ yet for those who still *dare hope* – the sudden happy turn is coming. “I bow not yet before the Iron Crown,” exclaims Philomythus, “nor cast my own small golden sceptre down.”<sup>285</sup>

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Earth” (*Sil*, p. 46). But, also: “Among the tales of sorrow and of ruin that came down to us from the darkness of those days there are yet some in which amid weeping there is joy and under the shadow of death light that endures” (*Sil*, p. 194).

<sup>285</sup> *MP*, vv. 129-130.

## Chapter 7: DISCOVERING LANGUAGE

*Sí man i yulma nin enquantuva? [Who now  
shall refill the cup for me?]*<sup>286</sup>

By 1937 Tolkien was deeply enmeshed with the study of languages; he had already spent a great deal examining Old English and Germanic languages, Latin and Greek, Welsh and Finnish, and these (especially Gothic and Welsh) profoundly fed into his *secret vice* and found their way into a variety of languages he imagined had been spoken by Elves. It was as early as 1910 that Tolkien began devising a certain proto language of the Elves, an “Elvenlatin” of sorts,<sup>287</sup> the name of which he changed repeatedly from *Elfin* and *Qenya* to the eventual *Quenya*, which ultimately became its enduring form. This particular language – phonologically based on Latin, with a strong influence of Finnish and to a lesser degree also Welsh – was designed from what Tolkien dubbed “phonaesthetic” considerations.<sup>288</sup> As he would write to W.H. Auden years later:

It has been always with me: the sensibility to linguistic pattern which affects me emotionally like colour or music; and the passionate love of growing things; and the deep response to legends (for lack of a better word) that have what I would call the North-western temper and temperature.<sup>289</sup>

Indeed, the strong connection between Tolkien’s sensibility toward the linguistic pattern and the stories that give it context, and thus *life*, is of the utmost importance in understanding the nature and cause of his literary endeavors. Like in his youthful story of the *green great dragon* when Tolkien suffered wonder at the power of word and story alike, Tolkien considered languages inseparable from the legends and mythology associated with them. Thus, as he would assert, languages like *Esperanto*, *Ido* or *Novial* “are dead, far deader than ancient unused languages, because their authors never

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<sup>286</sup> *LotR* II: 8. The verse is from *Namárië* (v. 8), a poem in Quenya language. The poem is subtitled “Galadriel’s Lament in Lórien” and loosely translates as *Farwell*.

<sup>287</sup> *LT* 144, p. 194.

<sup>288</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>289</sup> *LT* 163, p. 228.

invented any Esperanto legends.”<sup>290</sup> Tolkien, on the other hand, did invent a mythology to provide context for his languages, and his proto-Elven soon settled on its very own system of legends. Accordingly, the Elven language of Quenya received its counterpart in the form of the early *Lost Tales* (and later in *The Silmarillion*): the fantastic mythology that provided the imagined “history” and “life” to an imagined (fantastic) language. Many Tolkien scholars accept, to varying degrees, that Tolkien ventured to recreate a mythology for England.<sup>291</sup> Admittedly, such a claim is not *entirely* groundless, mainly in view of certain segments of the *Lost Tales*, particularly the ‘framework story’, which provides a specific ‘lost link’ to the ‘real world’.<sup>292</sup> We have already stated, however, that mapping out the ‘lost road’ was a critical aspect of Tolkien’s quest, yet to narrow it down to a search for a ‘link to England’ would clearly entail doing a disservice to Tolkien. Bringing Man and Elf into connection is the building of a bridge between reality and fantasy *i.e.* reality and art. The link between Elfland and England is a symbolic representation of said bridge, rather than its ultimate structure. Ultimately, both the *Lost Tales* and the stories from its successor *Silmarillion* are essentially envisions of an *Elven* mythology, lived out and eventually “recorded” by the Elves themselves, following their arrival (awakening) upon Arda – and their *discovery of language*.

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<sup>290</sup> *LT* 180, p. 250.

<sup>291</sup> For instance, Verlyn Flieger (Flieger, Verlyn: “A Cautionary Tale” in *The Chesterton Review*, Vol. xxvii, Nos. 1&2, February/May 2002, Seton Hall University, South Orange, New Jersey, pp. 97-103) admits that the phrase “mythology for England,” which is commonly attributed to Tolkien, is an obvious *misnomer*, as was originally pointed out by Anders Stenström (Stenström, Anders: “A Mythology? For England?” in *Proceedings of the Tolkien Centenary Conference*, ed. Patricia Reynolds and Glen H. Good-Knight Tolkien Society, Milton Keynes & Mythopoeic Press, Altadena, CA, 1995, pp. 310–314). Yet, she argues that the phrase is “now so firmly entrenched in Tolkien scholarship it is too late to dislodge it.” Moreover, she sees “little qualitative difference” between said phrase and Tolkien’s intent to create “a mythology he could ‘dedicate’ to England.” She therefore opts to take “as given” both the Saga’s “status as an invented mythology and its connections, direct or oblique, with Tolkien’s England” (Flieger, 2002, p. 97). Shippey (2003, p. 177) attempts to dislodge the ‘firmly entrenched’ misnomer by proposing that Tolkien’s attempt was “not so much to create a ‘mythology for England’ [...] as a mythology *of* England” (emphasis his). What both Flieger and Shippey seem to neglect, however, is that Tolkien, while admittedly writing to Milton Waldman about a desire to “dedicate” a mythology to England (notorious quote that instigated the debate), places the given aspiration into “once upon a time” and into the context of a youthful and *abandoned* excursion (“my crest has long since fallen,” *LT* 131, p. 168).

<sup>292</sup> It should also be noted that Tolkien never even considered publishing the *Lost Tales*. They were the earliest renderings of his mytho-legendarium, abandoned along with its ‘framework’. By the time they evolved into the ‘*Silmarillion*’, Tolkien had already forsaken all attempts at creating a link to the myth of England.

[The first three Elves] Imin, Tata and Enel awoke before their spouses, and the first thing that they saw was the stars, for they woke in the early twilight before dawn. And the next thing they saw was their destined spouses lying asleep on the green sward beside them. Then they were so enamoured of their beauty that their desire for speech was immediately quickened and they began to ‘think of words’ to speak and sing in.<sup>293</sup>

In *The Silmarillion*, we find a comparable passage:

[The Elves] began to make speech and give names to all things that they perceived. Themselves they named the Quendi, signifying those that speak with voices; for as yet they had met no other living things that spoke or sang.<sup>294</sup>

Thus, the Elven language of Quenya got its first “living” speakers, who “named themselves” the *Quendi*, that is, those who speak in voices, or perhaps, in a rather more loose translation, those who tell stories. The Elven word for story is *Quenta* (hence, *Quenta Silmarillion*, or the Story/Saga of the Silmarils, which forms the main body of the tales). There is no over-accentuating the importance of this *discovery of language* within Tolkien’s imaginarium. The moment language (or specifically, word) is discovered, *story* is discovered, vision is attained – and mission is acquired. The explication of the sub-creative process of discovering word and story is delightfully evident in the poem *Mythopoeia*, where the Myth-fellow declares:

*Yet trees are not ‘trees’, until so named and seen  
and never were so named, till those had been  
who speech’s involuted breath unfurled,  
faint echo and dim picture of the world,  
but neither record nor a photograph,  
being divination, judgement, and a laugh  
response of those that felt astir within  
by deep monition movements that were kin  
to life and death of trees, of beasts, of stars:  
free captives undermining shadowy bars,  
digging the foreknown from experience*

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<sup>293</sup> *HoME XI*, p. 421.

<sup>294</sup> *Sil*, p. 56.



*and panning the vein of spirit out of sense.*<sup>295</sup>

This is not only true on the story level itself; it is also true on the story-telling level. For, as the Myth-fellow continues:

*Great powers they slowly brought out of themselves  
and looking backward they beheld the elves  
that wrought on cunning forges in the mind,  
and light and dark on secret looms entwined.*<sup>296</sup>

Yet, in the field of Tolkien interpretation (which substantially grew after 2000), we often find the notion of ‘fantastic’ substituted by ‘artificial’, both in connection to the mythology and to the languages Tolkien shaped into being. However, such a qualification could not be further from the truth, as one of the main strivings within Tolkien’s imaginarium is precisely the battle against artificiality. Tolkien’s *mythopoeic* process was quite like his *glossopoeia*, the crafting of languages (a term he coined for the 1939 lecture/essay *A Secret Vice*). On a more metaphysical note, Tolkien’s approach did not invoke the usual “inventing” of things (which he associated with the artificial, mechanical/iron and ultimately even *magical*),<sup>297</sup> rather the recognition of the true, the sub-creative, that “splintered fragment of the true light” which ultimately allows man to “aspire to the state of perfection that he knew before the Fall.”<sup>298</sup>

In his unfinished ‘confessional’ work *The Notion Club Papers*, Tolkien goes to great lengths to accentuate a point he had previously made in *The Lost Road*, a thought that also resurfaces throughout his letters. Tolkien knew well enough what it meant to invent, both stories and languages, but he frequently had a feeling that not everything in his imaginarium was *simply* invented (we perceive with Tolkien that the idea of invention itself bore a note of artificiality). Characters in both of these (autobiographical) works receive visions of mythical events in their dreams, and hear echoes of peculiar words in unknown languages. Such words Tolkien called

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<sup>295</sup> *MP*, vv. 29-40.

<sup>296</sup> *MP*, vv. 41-44.

<sup>297</sup> To *magic*, which he mostly understood as manipulation, Tolkien contrasted *enchantment*.

<sup>298</sup> *Bio*, p. 182.

“ghostwords” and drew a clear line of distinction between these and the words he had in fact invented.

Most of these “ghostwords” are, and always were, to all appearance casual, as casual as the words caught by the eye from a lexicon when you’re looking for something else. They began to come through, as I said, when I was about ten; and almost at once I started to note them down. Clumsily, of course, at first. [...] But later on, when I was older and had a little more linguistic experience, I began to pay serious attention to my “ghosts”, and saw that they were something quite different from the game of trying to make up private languages.<sup>299</sup>

These ghosts, as Tolkien calls them, have a parallel in the fragmentary images that haunted Tolkien, like the vision of a massive wave destroying land, around which Tolkien effectively built his tale of Númenor. The entirety of Tolkien’s world successfully plays on these fantastic recollections, as if the storyteller were extrapolating images from the collective subconscious, dream visions of forgotten times, told in forgotten languages, buried in the memory of the earth and in the dark corridors of the human mind.

But in making up a language you are free: too free. It is difficult to fit meaning to any given sound-pattern, and even more difficult to fit a sound-pattern to any given meaning. [...] When you’re just inventing, the pleasure or fun is in the moment of invention; but as you are the master your whim is law, and you may want to have the fun all over again, fresh. You’re liable to be for ever niggling, altering, refining, wavering, according to your linguistic mood and to your changes of taste. [...] It is not in the least like that with my ghost-words. They came through made: sound and sense already conjoined. I can no more niggle with them than I can alter the sound or the sense of the word polis in Greek. Many of my ghost-words have been repeated, over and over again, down the years. Nothing changes but, occasionally, my spelling. They don’t change. They endure, unaltered, unalterable by me.<sup>300</sup>

Of course, such a process was deeply connected to Tolkien’s idea of sub-creation, according to which all art was but an echo of the one True Creation. Ultimately, it is

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<sup>299</sup> *HoMe IX*, p. 239.

<sup>300</sup> *HoMe IX*, pp. 239-240.

precisely that mirroring of Creation which enables the individual to become the collective (image and word), and *vice versa*, which enables the collective to be communicated through the individual. The need to express oneself in the true language of being, and thus expose the depths of the self in the fullness of individual reality (or as close as such fullness can be reached), and present it to the ‘other’ is a process Tolkien recognized as an expression of a deep-rooted primal urge: the need “to hold communion with other living things.”<sup>301</sup> The shaping of the language of the individual, man’s “secret vice” and a passion that comes fairly naturally to children, usually lost to the rational grown-up yet not fully dismissed by the artist (and kept alive in the symbol), embellishes thought by riddling the ‘ordinary’. While it may seem that such ‘riddling’ obscures communication in its introduction of the cypher – since any human attempt at communication is a certain collision of two or more individual and inner worlds, each with its own set of symbols and associated meanings – and, thus, the introduction of a new level of meaning, the nature of the symbol/cypher, when not intellectualized and deliberately burdened by the rationality of meaning but rather simply recognized from the depths of the self, draws from the unconscious mind where understanding does not depend on the logical (analytical) rationalization of meaning (the inevitable course of any interpretation), but on an immediate primal reaction of the being, an intuitive sensation (perhaps indeed somewhat childish in nature yet in a constructive sense *i.e.* in the sense that it bypasses logic in the purity and immediateness of reaction, unburdened by analytical vivisection of experience). In reality, such an immediate intuitive reaction facilitates communication, opening a field not of new levels of *meaning* but of new levels (possibilities) of *understanding*. Ultimately, this was the nature of Tolkien’s “ghosts,” which unveiled a fusion between sound and sense, placing Tolkien *inside language* (as C. S. Lewis once so gracefully phrased it<sup>302</sup>) and challenging De Saussure’s theory that there could be no relationship between a word and reality apart from arbitrariness.

Like an ancient alchemist, whose very soul would brew and purge before the essence of the fire coming from his faithful furnace, Tolkien would himself become enchanted by the essence of the words. It is not in the least bit difficult to imagine

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<sup>301</sup> *FS*, p. 116.

<sup>302</sup> In the obituary for Tolkien published in *The Times* (in: *Bio*, p. 138).

Tolkien spending hours in his study (perhaps sitting in an armchair, wearing one of his favored ornamented vests), enjoying long whiffs of his pipe and simply pronouncing words in Elvish, delighting in their sounds. He would perhaps (when not feverishly battling with grammar), pronounce a single word, or an entire phrase, or even a long passage, whispering it into the silence or voicing it solemnly. At times, he would perhaps pronounce one word several times, or maybe explore a different accent. What did these words say to him? What sorts of visions and sensations would occupy him once he would pronounce a word like *Ainulindalë*? What sort of enchantment hid there? To Tolkien, this particular word discovered The Creation itself, that point not in time but in the mind – in the *imagination* – when the world came to be, when the primordial thing happened, when God released his thought and out of it arose *everything* – a cosmos, and in it a world, and upon it man, and around him art. As Tolkien would tell it, from the very first to the very last *lost tale* he would ever encounter and venture to record, the point of Creation is such: out of the thought of The One, came the first beings, thus the most direct carriers of the thought, the *Ainur*. The very first experience that the *Ainur* obtain is that of melody that the One (*Eru*) grants to them. Thus the Music begins. *Ainu – lindalë*, the Music of the *Ainur*.<sup>303</sup> However, the world itself is yet not made, the thought exists only on the level of cosmos, as a cosmic harmony – until a cord strikes out, the harmony breaks and The Fall occurs, the world its consequence.

This is the one concept that Tolkien never changed, although he did rewrite this passage many times, at times making its language less archaic, and at times reverting it back into archaic form. While this part remained unchanged, the very act of the creation of Arda itself (that is, the story that came after The Fall) did see revisions in not only

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<sup>303</sup> *Ainulindalë* (“The Music of the *Ainur*”), a tale of the origins of the cosmos and consequent shaping of the world, undeniably represents the heart of all the tales that would come into Tolkien’s imaginarium. In *The Silmarillion*, it is featured as a separate work, along with its symbiotic counterpart, the *Valaquenta* (“Tale of the Valar”). In the initial 1918 version of the ‘Lost Tales’ manuscript, the two existed under a joint title *The Music of the Ainur* and were woven into the framework of a mariner’s voyage to Tol Eressëa (*The Cottage of Lost Play*, pub. in *HoMe I*) which was soon after abandoned. Both textual and conceptual histories of *Ainulindalë* are unusually straightforward, although five versions of the Tale are in existence (all published within various volumes of *HoMe*). Notwithstanding changes of wording and names, including other minor additions and omissions, the key concepts behind the Creational Tale of *Ainulindalë* have changed remarkably little throughout the decades. Additionally, this is the only section of *The Silmarillion* for which there is a direct lineage of manuscripts, each one being a direct revision of the last. Such simplicity and careful sequencing of revisions, otherwise hardly prominent features of Tolkien’s work, surely attest to the importance the story held for Tolkien. Verlyn Flieger is, therefore, certainly right to read Tolkien’s ‘Music’ as the metaphor for his own creative process, a continuing yet never fully achieved vision. See: Flieger, 2005.

language but concept as well. The world would at times be flat and at times round, depending either on Tolkien's philosophical ponderings or on fervent linking between other passages. He would be revising, rewriting, adding, connecting and providing supplementary sequences (some of which *were* explanatory and some of which were *not*), or even delivering entirely new versions to tales or single events inside the tales. Yet, the moment of the shaping and the first utterance of the Music inside the cosmos, the world accordingly being sung into existence, would become the one piece of the puzzle that Tolkien would never change, the primordial moment of Creation out of which the entire world of Arda will arise, and Tolkien's entire *imaginarium* with it.

As words would whisper their stories of enchantment to Tolkien, the storyteller would meticulously pen them down; enchanting the readers in his own right, in what would become a synesthetic process. The initial image Tolkien presents us with is one filled with the feelings of grace and calm. The rhythm of its telling has a naturally soothing effect on the reader, forced to simultaneously become the story *listener* – in accordance with the initial thought that Tolkien confronts us with: that the Creator originally spoke not by means of words but by means of music, and through cosmic harmony, calling upon us to take a step beyond the written word, by engaging our imagination of sound and provoking us to bring it into use. This is further amplified by the *melodious appearance* of the text itself, which this is achieved even without applying the specific scripts Tolkien also devised to accompany language, the most prominent of which is certainly the *Tengwar* script (or *The Alphabet of Rúmil*).<sup>304</sup> Indeed, once a word like Ainulindalë appears before our eyes in the text, strumming its cord, we are, if nothing else then by means of natural human inquisitiveness, simply compelled to bring it into sound (if even only *mental* sound within our imagination), to endeavor to sense and somehow verify its melodic feel and shape. The reader, or should we say listener, is consequently driven to pronounce such a peculiar word within his own mind, or even out loud, and once he does, he becomes entrapped by its sound, struck and enchanted by its essence, finding himself one step closer to understanding the *beauty* – and the *truth* – that splinters without.

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<sup>304</sup> During the course of 1919, Tolkien wrote his diary using solely the Tengwar script.

At the point when the Music becomes our own, when the word becomes our own, does the *myth* then not become our own as well? Does the language not become truly *alive* when nearly half a century after Tolkien's death one Tolkien reader greets another with the words: *Mae govannen, mellon nin*,<sup>305</sup> as it so frequently happens between speakers of otherwise utterly diverse native languages? Even an average Tolkien enthusiast who perhaps never got beyond the reading of *The Lord of the Rings*, and who is thus fairly inept at Elven, will know that this means "Well met, my friend." Should a fellow speaker be perhaps only a little more *fluent*, or a little more enthusiastic, he might reply to such a greeting with the words *Elen síla lúmenn' omentielvo*<sup>306</sup> ("A star shines on the hour of our meeting").



**Figure 4: The inscription *Elen síla lúmenn' omentielvo* written in Tengwar script.**

The number of Tolkien enthusiasts, especially when viewing the practically immeasurable online community, is vast indeed. There are countless web forums dedicated to Tolkien, to Arda, to the languages and to the stories. Some of these are indeed far from average, as learned debates, verging on academic (and some indeed are even precisely that) sprout on such topics as the investigation into the mythological sources and language patterns. Certainly, there is also the incessant humdrum created by Hollywood, which also captured a whiff of enchantment (realizing, as the publishers once did, that there is money to be made in it). Yet, it would be unfair to state that the movies did not also possess their very own flights of mythmaking genius, contributing in their own right to the *life of the myth*. This is true especially if we take into consideration Tolkien's own desire to "leave scope for other minds and hands, wielding

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<sup>305</sup> From the meeting between Aragorn and Glorfindel, *LotR*, I: 12.

<sup>306</sup> Frodo's greeting to Gildor Inglorion, *LotR*, I: 3.

paint and music and drama.”<sup>307</sup> The Hollywood industry did in fact bring together bold minds and hands that wielded art. The famous Tolkien-inspired illustrators Alan Lee and John Howe were recruited as lead concept artists to Peter Jackson’s *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* series, bringing their already well-known illustrations to the screen. Some of Tolkien’s songs/poems (like *The Song of the Lonely Mountain*, sung by Thorin Oakenshield and his company in *The Hobbit*) were put to music as well, becoming part of the soundtracks. Perhaps most peculiarly, entirely new phrases were constructed in Tolkien’s languages, using the grammar and vocabulary Tolkien provided – for instance, Aragorn’s remarks to his horse, made in Sindarin, or the inscription on the sword Narsil in Quenya, appearing in Tengwar script. Ultimately, this is precisely what enables us to speak of the ‘life’ of Tolkien’s myths, as well as of the cultural phenomenon that Tolkien represents.

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<sup>307</sup> *LT* 131, p. 168.

## PART III: IMAGINATION vs. PUBLICATION

### Chapter 8: THE TREE OF TALES

*I shan't call it the end, till we've  
cleared up the mess.*<sup>308</sup>

The attempt to verify the exact nature of Tolkien's literary opus, especially when taking into consideration the posthumously edited works, is a task riddled with difficulty, verging on impossible. As we shall soon discover the reasons for this are many, the most obvious certainly being that the construction was left *unfinished* (although such a qualification could, in some sense of the word, be attributed to the work of any great artist). Tolkien was no *homo unius libri*, says Tom Shippey, and he is certainly right, even if we take the Saga to be in fact only one book.<sup>309</sup> As the true storyteller he was, Tolkien was compelled to write and tell stories throughout his life. At times this urge would manifest as simply as telling a story to his children. Correspondingly, various children's tales were envisioned (and told) over the years, light-hearted (fairy-) stories, some of which ended up on paper, although some "never progressed beyond the first few sentences,"<sup>310</sup> ultimately to appear in print many years later, once the name of Tolkien had acquired its appeal among readers worldwide.<sup>311</sup> On occasions, the vision would strike Tolkien without heed or warning, oftentimes in the middle of an entirely different business, and the story would simply 'haunt' him until he would tell it, quite like in the case of *The Hobbit*. Another such instance of being simply 'struck by vision' was certainly the case with Tolkien's "purgatorial"<sup>312</sup> short story *Leaf by Niggle*,<sup>313</sup> written at a point in 1938-9 (while working on *The Lord of the Rings*):

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<sup>308</sup> *LotR*, VI: 9.

<sup>309</sup> Shippey, Tom: *J. R. R. Tolkien: Author of the Century*, HarperCollins, London, 2000, p. 264.

<sup>310</sup> *Bio*, p. 165.

<sup>311</sup> This appeal, however, was still insufficient for the publishers to accede to the publication of 'The Silmarillion' manuscript; it provoked merely the publication of several short tales, like *Leaf by Niggle* (1945) and *Farmer Giles of Ham* (1949). Moreover, as Carpenter reminds the reader, many of these short stories in fact saw their publication only posthumously, like *The Father Christmas Letters* (1920-1942, pub. 1976), *Mr. Bliss* (1932, pub. 1983) and *Roverandom* (1925, pub. 1998).

<sup>312</sup> *LT* 153, p. 210.



Except that that story was the only thing I have ever done which cost me absolutely no pains at all. Usually I compose only with great difficulty and endless rewriting. I woke up one morning (more than 2 years ago) with that odd thing virtually complete in my head. It took only a few hours to get down, and then copy out. I am not aware of ever ‘thinking’ of the story or composing it in the ordinary sense.<sup>314</sup>

In fact, many of Tolkien’s stories began as “something else.”<sup>315</sup> For instance, an attempt at writing an essay in English mythology in 1937 would have Tolkien compose a comic medieval fable entitled *Farmer Giles of Ham* (which remained unpublished until 1949; in fact it was published as a sort of appeasement, during the lengthy negotiations over the publishing of the equally lengthy *The Lord of the Rings*). The following year (1938), Tolkien would set about writing a preface to George MacDonald’s fairy-story *The Golden Key* only to discover a vision on the meaning of *Færy* which would take Tolkien under its sway and, developing a life of its own, become the fantasy novella *Smith of Wootton Major* (the publication of which was delayed for almost twenty years before it finally appeared in 1967). Not to forget that the massive saga of *The Lord of the Rings* itself initially began as a sequel to the rather more simplistic children’s adventure *The Hobbit*, but turned out to be the missing link to Tolkien’s then yet unpublished fantastic legendarium of the world, changing the fate of *The Hobbit* as well. Indeed, Tolkien was highly driven by the urge to create, or rather, as he deemed, to sub-create *i.e.* to shape the visions he was granted into story or verse, at times also delivering illustrations, maps, or rather more peculiarly translations into (or from!) fantastic languages. Well aware that this fantasy-weaving urge had no biological function as such, Tolkien found it equally essential to the inner life of his being.

Yet, notwithstanding these few irresistible ‘diversions of sub-creation’, Tolkien, the man who spent his entire life deciphering one riddle, was also a storyteller who devoted his entire inner being to the telling of one single tale (the tale behind the riddle) and to the conducting of one single vision into the world. Essentially, Tolkien poured

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<sup>313</sup> Published in *Dublin Review* of January 1945 and later also included in J. R. R. Tolkien: *Tree and Leaf*, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1964.

<sup>314</sup> *LT* 98, p. 128.

<sup>315</sup> *Bio*, p. 244.

himself into one single piece of *art*, of elaborate (lifelong) and grand-scale design, like some mystical painter who would spend his entire life painting one single painting, sometimes coating over entire portions of it or reshaping the hues, sometimes spending years in the process of detailing one single corner and sometimes rebuilding the supportive woodwork in order to expand the canvas (sometimes even including shapes that may seem like they do not belong within the overall structure). Such an artist knows of no ‘finite’ framework, he dispenses with it rather naturally, even without conscious deliberation. The art he invites into his being is a continual process in a state of open flow and the one permanence it knows of is the source from which it freely emerges (it is thus quite along these lines that by 1926 Tolkien dispensed with the original framework to the ‘Silmarillion’ and ‘repainted’ a large portion of that canvas).

In fact, this was precisely the state of affairs portrayed in Tolkien’s *Leaf by Niggle*, which was in consequence oftentimes considered an autobiographical allegory, a term Tolkien disliked both due to the biographical and the allegorical reductionism therein applied:

It is not really or properly an ‘allegory’ so much as ‘mythical’[...] Of course some elements are explicable in biographical terms (so obsessively interesting to modern critics that they often value a piece of ‘literature’ solely in so far as it reveals the author, and especially if that is in a discreditable light).<sup>316</sup>

Certainly, Tolkien was well aware that the tale possessed a deeply personal note, that the *Tree* painted by Niggle for the better part of his life was “a symbol of Tale-telling,”<sup>317</sup> and that his own life revolved around the sub-creation of one such a Tree as well – the one great “*branching* and acquisitive theme”<sup>318</sup> as he would call it in the letter to Waldman. In this letter, Tolkien also states that many of the shorter stories in fact escaped from the grasp of this theme, “being ultimately and radically unrelated,”<sup>319</sup> where he also included *Leaf by Niggle*. Yet, while the short purgatorial tale may have escaped from the narrative plot of the Saga, it *did* belong, in the broadest sense at least, to its mythopoeic structure, even if only as a specific appendix or at the very least a

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<sup>316</sup> *LT* 241, p. 340.

<sup>317</sup> *LT* 263, p. 372.

<sup>318</sup> *LT* 131, p. 168, emphasis mine.

<sup>319</sup> *Ibid.*

‘footnote’ on the importance of sub-creation (after all, it too was ‘mythical’). Evidence of this can be traced through the fact that the 1964 collection *Tree and Leaf* where the story originally appeared also featured the essay *On Fairy-Stories*, clearly establishing which ‘Tree’ the ‘Leaf’ comes from. Additionally, the second edition of the collection included the poem *Mythopoeia*, Tolkien’s defense (and manifesto) of mythmaking, which refers not only to the shaping of myths but fairy-stories as well. In a certain way, these three seemingly divergent pieces (essay – story – poem) are peculiarly interconnected, effectively setting the context of Tolkien’s imaginarium. Thus, instead of ‘autobiographical’ and ‘allegorical’ Tolkien dubbed the story his “pan-apologia, pan-confession.”<sup>320</sup>

Writing to his aunt Jane Neave, and upon sending her a copy of *Leaf by Niggle*, Tolkien would disclose:

Also, of course, I was anxious about my own internal Tree, *The Lord of the Rings*. It was growing out of hand, and revealing endless new vistas – and I wanted to finish it, but the world was threatening.<sup>321</sup>

Yet, *The Lord of the Rings* was really only the latest budding of the ‘branching’ internal Tree,<sup>322</sup> one that sprouted back in 1914, growing new leaves and the ever unattainable vistas until the end of Tolkien’s life. Writing to his son Christopher, Tolkien notes:

A story must be told or there’ll be no story, yet it is the untold stories that are most moving. I think you are moved by *Celebrimbor* because it conveys a sudden sense of endless *untold* stories: mountains seen far away, never to be climbed, distant trees (like Niggle’s) never to be approached – or if so only to become ‘near trees’ (unless in Paradise or N[iGGLE]’s Parish).<sup>323</sup>

In light of such reflection, the unfinished state of Tolkien’s work becomes more easily comprehensible, even more meaningful; Tolkien’s imaginary reality in fact thus more *alive*. Consequently, the reading of Tolkien opens a curious dimension in viewing the wholeness of a single work of art, and *vice versa*, in viewing the singularity of a lifelong

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<sup>320</sup> *LT* 98, p. 128.

<sup>321</sup> *LT* 241, p. 341.

<sup>322</sup> Years later (1955), Tolkien would write to W. H. Auden that “*The Lord of the Rings* is only the end pan of a work nearly twice as long” (*LT* 163, p. 230).

<sup>323</sup> *LT* 96, p. 125.

process of artistic creation, even when this envelops – in terms of artwork as the final product – more than *one* work of art (and even more peculiarly, *more than one version* of a single work).

Tolkien's *imaginarium*, as we have decided to identify it – as is especially suitable should we hereby imply the notion of *place* which the term commonly denotes, that is, 'a place of fantasy where imagination becomes real' – can only be *one place*, and that is Arda. Tolkien began shaping (imagining) this place, this world and cosmos, this thriving imaginary reality along with its languages, cosmogony, legends and histories as early as in 1914, when he was but a twenty two year-old student. He initially developed several of the legendary narratives in poetic form alone, while the first prose versions of the tales came into existence some two years later (c. 1916-1917), when the then young soldier was recuperating from The Battle of the Somme in the midst of World War One. As Tolkien would affirm in a letter to Katherine Farrer, "I have (in the cracks of time!) laboured at these things since about 1914," although, as he laments, "I have never found anyone but C.S.L[ewis] and my Christopher who wanted to read them; and no one will publish them."<sup>324</sup> Yet, this is surely how Tolkien knew, almost two decades of labor later, whence the hobbits had come. Certainly, they too were the residents of Arda and the land of Middle-earth within it (which is also perhaps one of the reasons why Tolkien had a *map* for *The Hobbit* long before he had set out to deal with the actual story).

As we have observed, in his lifetime Tolkien saw through the publication of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, and out of the whole of his *imaginarium* he considered only these two works finished, or rather complete, although in actuality both saw revisions and consequently revised editions. Inevitably, we must therefore engage in a short examination of the publication history behind these two works, and the many difficulties Tolkien faced, before these (and new ones) would pass onto his son. Certainly, the publication difficulties were not only faced *by* Tolkien, his publishers faced numerous difficulties *with him*, for not only was Tolkien a renowned perfectionist and procrastinator, but also, as he admitted to Rayner Unwin, "I am a natural niggler, alas!"<sup>325</sup> (as the pan-confessional *Leaf by Niggle* surely corroborates).

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<sup>324</sup> *LT* 115, p. 150.

<sup>325</sup> *LT* 236, p. 333.

## Chapter 9: DOWN THE HOBBIT HOLE

*I come from under the hill, and under the hills  
and over the hills my paths led.*<sup>326</sup>

The publication of *The Hobbit* occurred, as we have already mentioned, by matter of fortunate circumstance – the circumstance being that what Tolkien called the “home manuscript” of the tale,<sup>327</sup> otherwise written for Tolkien’s children (one of the few that actually ended on paper and went beyond the first couple of sentences – although it too lacked the final chapter) found its way out of its home environment when Tolkien had lent it to the “then Rev. Mother of Cherwell Edge when she had flu, and it was seen by a former student who was at that time in the office of Allen and Unwin.”<sup>328</sup> Tolkien’s former student was Elaine Griffiths,<sup>329</sup> who was tutoring undergraduates at Cherwell Edge in the early 1930s. It remains inconclusive whether she received the manuscript from the Reverend Mother or directly from Tolkien, and whether it was in typescript or manuscript – in any case, she did pass on the word of *The Hobbit* to Susan Dagnall, then an Oxford graduate working for Allen and Unwin Publishing.

Upon reading the story (which suddenly broke off at the death of the dragon Smaug), Dagnall greatly encouraged Tolkien to produce a complete version which could be considered for publication. On October 3, 1936, Tolkien sent the completed typescript to the office of George Allen and Unwin, where the firm’s chairman Stanley Unwin was in the habit of employing his own children to review the children’s book submissions (as he suspected them to be the best judges). As it already became nigh on proverbial, the manuscript was then given to the ten-year-old Rayner Unwin to write a report for the standard fee of *one shilling*. On October 30, 1936, Rayner gave the book a very positive review, declaring “with the superiority of a ten-year-old that it should appeal to all children between the ages of five and nine.”<sup>330</sup>

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<sup>326</sup> *Hobbit*, p. 204.

<sup>327</sup> *LT* 9, p. 20.

<sup>328</sup> *LT* 257, p. 365.

<sup>329</sup> See: *Bio*, p. 183-184 & „Introduction“ to Anderson, *op. cit.*

<sup>330</sup> Anderson, *op. cit.*, p. vi. Anderson supplies the the facsimile, while the original of the manuscript is kept in the *J. R. R. Tolkien Collection* at Marquette University Libraries (Series 5, Box 2, Folder 7).

Report on "The Hobbit"  
by  
30 OCT 1936

Bilbo Baggins was a hobbit who lived in his hobbit-hole and never went for adventures, at last Gandalf the wizard and his dwarves persuaded him to go. He had a very exciting time fighting goblins and wargs. at last they got to the lonely mountains; Smaug, the dragon who guards it is killed and after a terrific battle with the goblins he returned home - rich!

This book, with the help of maps, does not need any illustrations it is good and should appeal to all children between the ages of 5 and 9.

Rayner Unwin

Figure 5: Rayner Unwin's book report on *The Hobbit*.

Consequently, *The Hobbit* was approved for publication. In early January 1937, Tolkien offered a redrawing of two maps (in addition to Thrór's map which he was now referring to as the "chart" there was also a Wilderland map or "the general map") and several pencil and ink illustrations redrawn from what he had previously devised for his home manuscript, "conceiving that they might serve as endpapers, frontispiece or what not."<sup>331</sup> To Tolkien's own surprise, these were accepted, despite the additional costs for their monochromatic reproduction, and by the end of January Tolkien sent several other illustrations, to a total of nine: *Mirkwood*, *The Trolls*, *The Mountain Path*, *The Misty Mountains looking West*, *Beorn's Hall*, *The Elvenking's Gate*, *Lake Town*, *The Front Gate* and *The Hall at Bag-End*. Yet, this is where the unsuspecting publishers would learn just how big of a perfectionist Tolkien truly was. On February 5, Tolkien begins:

<sup>331</sup> *LT* 9, p. 20.

I approve the rough prints. Reduction has improved all except ‘the Trolls’. On this there are one or two defects, probably simply due to the impression. I have marked them: the thin white outline of one of the background trees is slightly broken; some of the tiny dots outlining a flame have failed to come out; the dot after ‘Trolls.’ also. In the ‘Hall at Bag-End’ I misguidedly put in a wash shadow reaching right up to the side beam. This has of course come out black (with disappearance of the key) though not right up to the beam. But the print is I think as good as the original allows. Please note – these are not serious criticisms!<sup>332</sup>

Indeed, they were not – yet, although Tolkien was certainly not happy with the crude treatment of detail. Moreover, the matter of illustrations was not the only diversion at hand. As Carpenter makes note, Tolkien returned the proofs of *The Hobbit* to Allen and Unwin in mid-March, having marked them with such a large number of alterations to the original text that he was told he might have to pay part of the cost of correction as a result.<sup>333</sup> Other grievances sprung forth, chief among them the matter of Moon-runes which were part of Thrór’s map (the runic inscription ‘visible only in moonlight’). As Christopher Tolkien notes in the “Preface” to the 1987 edition of *The Hobbit*, the Moon-runes were originally to appear on the reverse of the chart, with the caption: ‘*Thrór’s Map. Copied by B. Baggins. For moon-runes hold up to a light.*’ Yet Charles Furth of Allen and Unwin held that readers would not understand how to read the runes and was promising a certain ‘cunning method’ of letting the runes ‘both be there and not be there’. This certainly delighted Tolkien, only to shortly thereafter find out that the “magic” was left out due to misunderstanding on the part of the block maker. Tolkien then redrew the runes in reverse, so that when printed they would read the right way round held up to the light.<sup>334</sup>

On September 21, 1937, *The Hobbit: or There and Back Again* was finally published. Regardless of Tolkien’s attention to every detail, there were still omissions in print, for instance, the border of the *Mirkwood* illustration was cut, sadly never to be restored for Tolkien gave the original to a Chinese student of his, and it was never to be

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<sup>332</sup> *LT* 11, p. 22.

<sup>333</sup> Note to *LT* 12, p. 23.

<sup>334</sup> *Hobbit*, p. viii.

retrieved again.<sup>335</sup> Thus, the crippled black and white illustration that appeared in the first British and American editions of *The Hobbit* as an illustration to Chapter 8 was expelled from all subsequent printings (and was not restored until the fifth 1987 edition, appearing as such, only with the lower border in place).

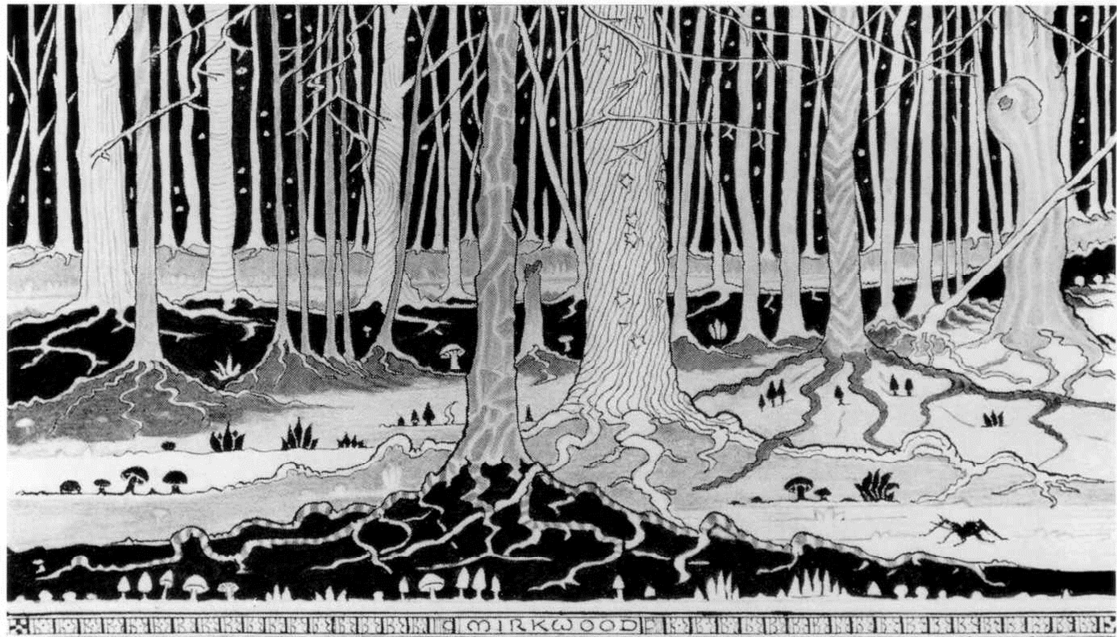


Figure 6: *Mirkwood* by J. R. R. Tolkien

[NOTE: In fact, this picture was redrawn according to an earlier painting of a forest ‘darker and deeper still’, that of *Taur-na-fuin*, wherein transpired the events recounted in the “Tale of Túrin” from *The Silmarillion*. It then became the *Mirkwood* of *The Hobbit*, and yet it lived again for the third time, drawn and entitled as *Fangorn Forest*, Treebeard’s forest in *The Lord of the Rings*.]

In May 1937, Allen and Unwin notified Tolkien that they had also interested “one of the outstanding firms of American publishers” in *The Hobbit*, which was in fact Houghton Mifflin Company of Boston, Massachusetts, who were also interested in publishing a number of color illustrations. During the course of the following months, Tolkien sent four entirely new colored drawings to the attention of Houghton Mifflin (via Allen and Unwin): *Rivendell*, *Bilbo woke with the early sun in his eyes*, *Bilbo comes to the Huts of the Raft-elves*, and *Conversation with Smaug*, to which he later

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<sup>335</sup> *Hobbit*, p. x.



added a colored version of the now famous *The Hill: Hobbiton-across-the-Water*. To Tolkien's satisfaction, all of these except for the *Huts of the Raft-elves* came to be featured in the first American edition, which came out in March of 1938, not six months after the UK publication, and all of the color plates except for *Bilbo woke with the early sun in his eyes* were simultaneously added to the second British impression.<sup>336</sup> After its original appearance in 1937, *The Hobbit* was revised twice by Tolkien and consequently twice republished in his lifetime. The second edition appeared in 1951 just prior to the publication of *The Lord of the Rings*, when the narrative sustained considerable modification in order to provide a more suitable link to its "sequel". Most notably, this included changes to the better part of Chapter V (which Tolkien had revised in 1947) along with some other minor alterations, chiefly because Tolkien realized that Gollum would not have offered the Ring to Bilbo freely, not even in an otherwise sacred riddle-game. *The Hobbit* was later revised yet again, though not nearly as drastically, and the third edition was published in 1966.

*The Hobbit* was an immediate success, and both readers and publishers instantly called for the continuation of the story. A review by C. S. Lewis appeared in the *Times Literary Supplement* (2 October 1937) and though only three paragraphs long its praise of Tolkien's work echoed far. Lewis places *The Hobbit* in the company of George MacDonald's *Phantastes: A Faerie Romance for Men and Women* (1858), Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and Kenneth Grahame's *Wind in the Willows* (1908). While he grants that *The Hobbit* is "very unlike *Alice*" Lewis stipulates that "both belong to a very small class of books which have nothing in common save that each admits us to a world of its own – a world that seems to have been going on long before we stumbled into it but which, once found by the right reader, becomes indispensable to him."<sup>337</sup> It has later been argued that Lewis's praise was influenced by his ongoing friendship with Tolkien, although there is no genuine reason to question whether Lewis was anything short of sincerely delighted and moved by the world into which he had stumbled. On the contrary, that he compares it to *Phantastes* (of all MacDonald's works) is indicative, for the discovery of this particular work had left a

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<sup>336</sup> Note to *LT* 15, p. 26.

<sup>337</sup> Lewis, C. S.: „A word for children: J. R. T. Tolkien, *The Hobbit, or There and Back Again*,“ pp. 95-96 in Walter Hooper ed., *Image and Imagination*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2013, p. 95.

longstanding imprint on Lewis. “That night, my imagination was, in a certain sense, baptized,”<sup>338</sup> Lewis recollects his first reading of MacDonald’s ‘Faerie Romance’ at the age of sixteen (one is inclined to believe him, since he obviously had no ongoing friendship with MacDonald, save for the sort any delighted reader has toward the author who enchanted him). Moreover, it would be grounded to suspect that Tolkien was not too fond of the comparison either to *Phantastes* or to *Alice*, for as he would specify in *On Fairy-Stories* only two years later, *Alice* was not a “true fairy-story” because it relied on the machinery of dream to approach its story-world, a trait Tolkien considered in many ways fatal, and a certain form of cheating.<sup>339</sup> “I am afraid this stuff of mine is really more comparable to Dodgson’s amateur photography, and his song of Hiawatha’s failure than to *Alice*,” Tolkien remarks in a letter.<sup>340</sup> While Tolkien does not refer to *Phantastes*, the same would certainly apply, as the story uses a similar framework (its hero Anodos is pulled into a dreamlike world, only to wake up in the end).

Still, Lewis was not the last to associate Tolkien with Carroll or MacDonald, even Grahame, and influence of the latter two on Tolkien’s work (not only *The Hobbit*) was often underlined, including by Humphrey Carpenter in his 1985 *Secret Gardens*. It is very curious to note, however, that Carpenter does not really see Tolkien as being one of the ‘gardeners’. He devotes his *Secret Gardens* to the study of two currents that overturned the sentimentalized view of children, erected by the Victorians: the ‘deconstructivists’ who shunned or sneered at the perceived adult superiority (he places both Carroll and MacDonald in this group), and the ‘Arcadians’ who interpreted childhood as the golden age of imagination and freedom, implying that adults had lost something in the process of growing up (he sees such tendencies in works of Grahame, J. Barrie and A. A. Milne). While he allows that both Tolkien and C. S. Lewis make efforts to “recapture the Arcadian tone and message” (Lewis “more consciously than Tolkien”), Carpenter maintains they are “not a part to their movement.”<sup>341</sup> He passes over *The Hobbit* quite lightly, invoking the words of Bilbo Baggins in claiming it a

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<sup>338</sup> Lewis, C. S: *Surprised by Joy*, in *The Inspirational writings of C. S. Lewis*, Inspirational Press, New York, 1994, p. 100.

<sup>339</sup> *FS*, p. 117.

<sup>340</sup> *LT* 15, p. 27.

<sup>341</sup> Carpenter, *op. cit.*, p.212.

“bitter adventure,”<sup>342</sup> as if neglecting the fact that Bilbo utters these words in farewell – a sad and bitter business indeed, not only for Bilbo but also for the reader who must now leave this world into which he had stumbled. Admittedly, Tolkien’s ‘garden’ is not *just* for children, even when one considers only *The Hobbit*. As Lewis points out in his review, “it must be understood that this is a children’s book only in the sense that the first of many readings can be undertaken in the nursery.”<sup>343</sup> That fairy-stories are not to be confined to the nursery is a thought Tolkien also entertained, and perhaps it is this ‘exodus’ of the fairy-story from the nursery that drove Carpenter to unjustly expel Tolkien from his ‘secret garden’ for children; however, as adults, we must be grateful that Tolkien admitted us into his.

Ultimately, Carpenter fails to see *The Hobbit* as anything more than its author’s bitter memory of the First World War, so he swiftly moves his concern with Tolkien to the interpretation of *The Lord of the Rings* where he essentially applies the same procedure, calling it “a tract for its times, the work of a man who had seen two World Wars, and who anticipated a civilization dominated by the nuclear threat.”<sup>344</sup> As for allowing the Arcadian message, he interprets the Shire as a private Arcadia of the book’s heroes (by which he clearly means the hobbits, although it is questionable whether they are truly the sole heroes), lastly concluding it “striking that at the end of *The Lord of the Rings* Tolkien attacks the very same thing against which the Arcadian movement in children’s literature had reacted nearly a century earlier: the mindless industrialization of society.”<sup>345</sup> Such a conclusion is puzzling to say the least, especially coming from Carpenter, given that Tolkien’s ventures against industrialization and materialistic pursuits (which are deeply entwined) can hardly be confined to “the end” of *The Lord of the Rings*; they are central to his work, and already become obvious in

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<sup>342</sup> *Hobbit*, p. 262.

<sup>343</sup> Lewis, 1937, p. 714.

<sup>344</sup> Carpenter, *op. cit.*, p. 214. An anticipatory retort to Carpenter’s claim can be found in C. S. Lewis’ review of the second and third volumes of *LotR* (*Time and Tide*, Oct 22, 1955), where Lewis, irritated by the idea “that some people want to identify the Ring with the hydrogen bomb, and Mordor with Russia,” rightfully asks: “How long do people think a world like his takes to grow? Do they think it can be done as quickly as a modern nation changes its Public Enemy Number One or as modern scientists invent new weapons?” (Lewis, C. S.: “The dethronement of power: J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Two Towers* [being the Second part of *The Lord of the Rings*] and *The Return of the King* [being the Third part of *The Lord of the Rings*],” pp. 104-109 in *Image and Imagination*, ed. Walter Hooper, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2013, p. 107).

<sup>345</sup> Carpenter, *op. cit.*, p. 225.

*The Hobbit* where much revolves around the notion of greed for gold (including, of course, the dragon himself).



The hill : hobbiton~across~the Water

Figure 7: *The Hill: Hobbiton-across-the-Water*, by J. R. R. Tolkien

## Chapter 10: THE “NEW” HOBBIT

*Elves and Dragons!* I says to him. *Cabbages and potatoes are better for me and you.*<sup>346</sup>

Given the success of *The Hobbit*, Allen and Unwin wanted a sequel, but what probably drove Tolkien in the direction of actually attempting one was the reaction of readers. *They* wanted to know more about the peculiar race of hobbits, and about the wanderings of the wizard Gandalf; they wanted answers to who the mysterious Necromancer really was and to what had happened to Bilbo after his adventure had ended. Thus, Tolkien started writing what he referred to at the time as “the new Hobbit,”<sup>347</sup> entering into a decade of battle with himself and his publishers, a race against time, against mundane chores and against his own compulsions (a ‘niggle-esque’ situation indeed) – in the midst of yet another Great War. At times he would be making rapid progress, writing almost feverishly, while at others he would be stuck, or his attention diverted, causing large gaps that could amount to months or even a year.

I was *dead stuck*, somewhere about Ch. 10 (*Voice of Saruman*) in Book III – with fragments ahead some of which eventually fitted into Ch. 1 and 3 of Book V, but most of which proved wrong especially about Mordor – and I did not know how to go on. It was not until Christopher was carried off to S. Africa [Christopher entered the Royal Air Force in summer 1943 and was sent to South Africa for flight training] that I forced myself to write Book IV, which was sent out to him bit by bit. That was 1944. (I did not finish the first rough writing till 1949, when I remember blotting the pages (which now represent the welcome of Frodo and Sam on the Field of Cormallen) with tears as I wrote. I then myself typed the *whole* of that work all VI books out, and then *once again* in revision (in places many times), mostly on my bed in the attic of the tiny terrace-house to which war had exiled us from the house in which my family had grown up.)<sup>348</sup>

Indeed, Tolkien toiled away at the manuscript for almost twelve years, several of which were spent consistently assuring his publishers at Allen and Unwin that the book

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<sup>346</sup> *LotR*, I: 1.

<sup>347</sup> *Bio*, p. 187.

<sup>348</sup> *LT* 241, p. 341.

was *nearly* finished.<sup>349</sup> As Rayner Unwin later recalled, the youngest ever Tolkien critic who was now fully employed at his father's company, Allen and Unwin "indulged" Tolkien to the extent that "at times it nearly drove one mad."<sup>350</sup> Indeed, not only was Tolkien a well-known procrastinator, but this was certainly aggravated by his perfectionism which, when combined, led to revisions virtually *ad nauseam*. "I am a pedant devoted to accuracy, even in what may appear to others unimportant matters," Tolkien admits.<sup>351</sup> Indeed, as his friend and fellow "Inkling" (and perhaps most amiable reader and critic, not including Christopher) C. S. Lewis would corroborate, Tolkien's standard for self-criticism was so high that "the mere suggestion of publication usually set him upon a revision, in the course of which so many new ideas occurred to him that where his friends had hoped for the final text of an old work they actually got the first draft of a new one."<sup>352</sup>

These friends, *the Inklings*, were an informal literary gathering, generally affiliated with the Oxford University, who met once a week mostly in C. S. Lewis' and J. R. R. Tolkien's college rooms in Oxford during the 1930s and 1940s for readings and debate on literature as well as their own work, good old banter and general *tête-à-tête* (they also frequented Oxford pubs, most notably the "Eagle and Child" commonly known as the "Bird and the Baby"). Apart from Tolkien and Lewis the group notably included Hugo Dyson who, in their company, became involved in the making of more than one *legend of the Inklings*, in fact, anecdotal situations which *really happened*. One such 'legend that really happened' is certainly the story of the fateful evening of September 19 at Magdalen College at Oxford, back in 1931, when one Inkling Lewis exclaimed before one Inkling Tolkien and one Inkling Dyson that myths are lies, although beautiful lies, *breathed through silver*.<sup>353</sup> For in the mind of C. S. Lewis, agnostic at the time, there simply could not have been any possible connection between myth, that is, imagination, and truth. Reason was the organ of truth, its sole conductor. Imagination,

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<sup>349</sup> *Bio*, p. 205.

<sup>350</sup> Quoted in: Ripp, Joseph: *Middle America Meets Middle-Earth: American Discussion and Readership of J. R. R. Tolkien's Lord of The Rings, 1965-1969*, pp. 245-286 in *Book History*, Vol. 8, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 2005, p. 251.

<sup>351</sup> *LT* 294, p. 405.

<sup>352</sup> *Bio*, p. 154.

<sup>353</sup> *Bio*, pp. 150-152 & *FS*, pp. 143-144.

he admitted, was “the organ of meaning”<sup>354</sup> and it crafted things of great mystical beauty, like myths and fairy-stories, but these were not the truth. They are, exclaimed Inklings Tolkien, turning himself into a *Philomythus*.<sup>355</sup> “Just as speech is invention about objects and ideas, so myth is invention about truth,” he said.<sup>356</sup> Man the creator is in truth a sub-creator, for his creation is the *shaping*, not the making, of visions bestowed upon him in accordance with the law – by which man is the created one, a conductor not an artificer, drinking from the enchanted well of his own immortal and divine soul, connected to the one source it truly knows of, its divine homeland: God. This *was* the truth for Philomythus; this was the secret he discovered in the riddling darkness. Man was the mirror of God; his myths were his homage: his chance at redemption. According to the story, the three Inklings Lewis, Dyson and Tolkien spoke for long hours before they parted ways. That evening Lewis went home and became a believer (in Christ and in myths), and Tolkien went home and wrote the poem *Mythopoeia*.

Another ‘legend’ of the Inklings (that really happened) revolved most specifically around Dyson. Namely, the Inklings habitually indulged in reading sessions, and this would often in fact mean they would impose upon each other the reading of their own manuscripts. And, as expected, Tolkien would frequently read passages from *The Lord of the Rings* before his fellow Inklings, or would have Christopher read them. “It is an Inklings’ duty to be bored willingly. It is his privilege to be a borer on occasion,” he wrote to Lewis.<sup>357</sup> Yet, when it came to *The Lord of the Rings*, this was a privilege Inklings Dyson could hardly suffer to allow Tolkien willingly. Dyson’s hostility toward *The Lord of the Rings* “had been voiced so often that eventually he was allowed a veto”<sup>358</sup> to silence Tolkien when he could take no more. The most controversial part of this story came from the pen of Lewis’ biographer A. N. Wilson, who reports that “Hugo Dyson, used to lie on the sofa with a whisky, grunting occasionally: ‘Oh f---, not

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<sup>354</sup> Lewis, C. S.: “Bluspels and Flalansferes: A Semantic Nightmare,” in *Selected Literary Essays*, ed. Walter Hooper, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1979, p. 265. “I am a rationalist,” Lewis asserts. “For me, reason is the natural organ of truth; but imagination is the organ of meaning. Imagination, producing new metaphors or revivifying old, is not the cause of truth, but its condition.”

<sup>355</sup> The subtitle to the poem *Mythopoeia* reads “Philomythus to Misomythus”.

<sup>356</sup> *Bio*, p. 151.

<sup>357</sup> *LT* 128, p. 147.

<sup>358</sup> *Bio*, p. 212.

another elf.”<sup>359</sup> It is impossible to tell whether this is merely apocryphal or not, but there is no doubt that Dyson suffered greatly hearing the many versions, revisions and drafts that Tolkien had in store, compiled over the long twelve-year period of his Sagatelling. The perfectionist that he was, Tolkien was compelled to follow up on even the smallest change of direction or emphasis with exhaustive amendment *ab initio*. In 1947, he wrote to Stanley Unwin:

But forgive me! It is written in my life-blood, such as that is, thick or thin; and I can no other. I fear it must stand or fall as it substantially is. It would be idle to pretend that I do not greatly desire publication, since a solitary art is no art; nor that I have not a pleasure in praise, with as little vanity as fallen man can manage (he has not much more share in his writings than in his children of the body, but it is something to have a function); yet the chief thing is to complete one’s work, as far as completion has any real sense.<sup>360</sup>

At long last, after twelve years of carrying the burden of the story that wanted to be told, writing it in his very blood, and blotting it with tears, Tolkien got it off his chest. Recalling it some years later in a letter to W.H. Auden, Tolkien describes it indeed as a “great labour; and as the author of the *Ancrene Wisse* says at the end of his work: ‘I would rather, God be my witness, set out on foot for Rome than begin the work over again!’”<sup>361</sup> In February 1950, Tolkien wrote to Stanley Unwin to inform him that the book was finished. Yet, this was not entirely joyous to report, as Tolkien was well aware of the reaction the final estimate of length would have on Unwin. The tone of Tolkien’s letter is grim; his despair apparent:

For eighteen months now I have been hoping for the day when I could call it finished. But it was not until after Christmas that this goal was reached at last. It is finished, if still partly unrevised, and is, I suppose, in a condition which a reader could read, if he did not wilt at the sight of it. [...] And now I look at it, the

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<sup>359</sup> Wilson, A. N.: *C. S. Lewis: A Biography*, W. W. Norton, New York, 1990. p. 217. Wilson, who had a penchant for sensationalism (with a long career as a newspaper columnist), did not censure out the comment and, rather peculiarly, neither did Verlyn Flieger, certainly one of the most relevant authorities on Tolkien, who references the passage as such, in: *Interrupted Music: The Making of Tolkien’s Mythology*, Kent State University Press, Kent, 2005, Note on p. 148. Due to its provocative nature, the quote had been referenced by many, some of whom mistakenly attribute it to C. S. Lewis, despite the obvious lack of logic behind it, given that virtually no one was as moved by Tolkien’s work as Lewis.

<sup>360</sup> *LT* 109, p. 141.

<sup>361</sup> *LT* 163, p. 227.



magnitude of the disaster is apparent to me. My work has escaped from my control, and I have produced a monster: an immensely long, complex, rather bitter, and very terrifying romance, quite unfit for children (if fit for anybody); and it is not really a sequel to *The Hobbit*, but to *The Silmarillion*. My estimate is that it contains, even without certain necessary adjuncts, about 600,000 words. One typist put it higher. I can see only too clearly how impracticable this is. But I am tired. It is off my chest, and I do not feel that I can do anything more about it.<sup>362</sup>

Indeed, Stanley Unwin was dismayed by the length of the manuscript. He realized well enough that this was no sequel to *The Hobbit*, and the prospect of publishing this ‘monster’ which was in fact tied to an even bigger one (‘The Silmarillion’) was menacing. Furthermore, Tolkien’s subsequent refusal to have the monster cut into volumes certainly aggravated the matter. Tolkien was adamant; he wanted the entirety of the Saga published together, in one book. There is no *true* explanation in his letters, or elsewhere, as to why he was so fixated on such an impractical notion. Doubtlessly such a book would have been extremely difficult to handle, and would have more likely ended up a fine sight on shelves than a story in the hands of readers. In any case, the reviewing of Tolkien’s manuscript was yet again entrusted to Rayner Unwin, no longer a child (as indeed ‘the new Hobbit’ was no longer a tale for children), and he found it brilliant. Yet, his heartfelt admiration for the book unwittingly added to Tolkien’s misfortune as he had made a comment that he did not sense the lack of ‘The Silmarillion’ while reading it, and had recommended that an editor incorporate “any *really* relevant material from *The Silmarillion* into *The Lord of the Rings*” or otherwise “drop *The Silmarillion*” entirely.<sup>363</sup> Stanley Unwin passed Rayner’s review to Tolkien hoping he would get the gist of it. He did. This upset him to the point that he confronted Stanley Unwin with an ultimatum to publish it *all* and *immediately*, demanding a straight ‘yes or no’ answer. To this Unwin replied: “As you demand an immediate ‘yes’ or ‘no’ the answer is ‘no’; but it might well have been yes given adequate time and the sight of the complete typescript.”<sup>364</sup> In fact, Stanley Unwin’s requests for “breaking the

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<sup>362</sup> *LT* 124, p. 159.

<sup>363</sup> *Note to LT* 127, p. 163.

<sup>364</sup> *Note to LT* 128, p. 164.

million words into, say, three or four to some extent selfcontained volumes”<sup>365</sup> were hardly irrational. This, for some reason, Tolkien simply failed to grasp.

Despondent, Tolkien then turned to Collins, where Milton Waldman assured him a unified Saga would be published, but after two years of delays Tolkien lost patience and again posed an ultimatum, and again received a negative answer.<sup>366</sup> However, in June 1952, Tolkien’s correspondence with Rayner Unwin continued, and rather desperate to have at least a portion published, Tolkien enquired, “But what about *The Lord of the Rings*? Can anything be done about that, to unlock gates I slammed myself?”<sup>367</sup> Rayner was very much inclined to say ‘yes’ but there was the issue of pricing, and of the post-war paper shortages that had their own ‘say’ in the matter.

I regret very much (in some ways) having produced such a monster in such unpropitious days; and I am very grateful to you for the trouble you are taking. But I hope very much that you will be able before very long to say ‘yea’ or ‘nay’. Uncertainty is a great weight on the heart. The thing weighs on my mind, for I can neither dismiss it as a disaster and turn to other matters, nor get on with it and things concerned with it (such as the maps).<sup>368</sup>

Finally, “Allen & Unwin decided to publish *The Lord of the Rings* in three volumes, priced at twenty-one shillings each. Tolkien’s contract stipulated that the manuscript of the book should be delivered, ready for the printer, by 25 March 1953.”<sup>369</sup> However, only *one day* prior to this deadline, Tolkien wrote to Rayner (most of his letters were now addressed to him instead of Stanley) Unwin, saying that he was “in ‘articule mortis’” which in translation to common-life terms read as: engaged in moving home due to his wife’s ill health and the doctor’s recommendation to move to a house “on high dry soil and in the quiet.”<sup>370</sup>

I am afraid I must ask for your lenience in the matter of the date. But I see some hope in your letter, since it appears that *the first 2 books* would suffice to keep the

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<sup>365</sup> *LT* 126, p. 162.

<sup>366</sup> *Note to LT* 133, p. 180.

<sup>367</sup> *LT* 133, p. 181.

<sup>368</sup> *LT* 135, p. 183.

<sup>369</sup> *Note to LT* 136, p. 184.

<sup>370</sup> *LT* 136, p. 184.

ball rolling. I practically completed a detailed revision of these before disasters overtook me; and I can let you have them by the end of this month.<sup>371</sup>

The end of the month came and went, and, on April 11, Tolkien wrote another lengthy letter of apologies and assurances to Rayner. “I am extremely sorry that it is already eleven days after the end of the month (March)! But I have had a very bad time indeed, far worse even than I feared [...] Also, the matter of ‘appendices’ at the end of volume III, after the final and rather short sixth ‘book’, has not been decided [...] I am not at this time returning, re-drawn, the design required in Book II Ch. iv, since I have not had a chance to re-draw it [...] Maps are worrying me.”<sup>372</sup> Some of these issues were more or less settled by the beginning of August, when the question for the volumes’ titles arose, occupying much of the correspondence, while Tolkien’s letter of October 9 revealed that ‘more or less’ in fact meant ‘less’: “The Maps. I am stumped. Indeed in a panic. They are essential; and urgent; but I just cannot get them done. I have spent an enormous amount of time on them without profitable result. Lack of skill combined with being harried.”<sup>373</sup> On January 22, 1954, Tolkien sent “Book III, first half of Vol. II, carefully corrected” assuring Rayner that “Book IV is nearly done and shall follow on Monday,”<sup>374</sup> which in fact meant that Volume I was ‘ready’ for print and Tolkien was asking Rayner whether it would be possible to have it published in July. In June Tolkien was asked to approve the designs of the dust-jacket for the volumes, which he did not. He found them “very ugly indeed ... I tell you what I think, since I am asked: tasteless and depressing. But surely asking my opinion is a formality. I do not suppose that any of my criticisms could be met without serious delay. *I would rather have the things as they are than cause any more delay. But if this can be done without delay, I would like a different type for the title-lettering at least (on the page; the spine is passable).*”<sup>375</sup> Tolkien was yet again “indulged” by Allen and Unwin and the dust-jackets were changed.

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<sup>371</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>372</sup> *LT* 137, p. 185.

<sup>373</sup> *LT* 141, p. 190.

<sup>374</sup> *LT* 143, p. 192,

<sup>375</sup> *LT* 146, p. 199.

It was a great moment yesterday when I received the advance copy of *The Fellowship of the Ring*. The book itself is very presentable indeed. I think the jacket is now much improved, and is rather striking.

However,

...the specimens of the jackets for II and III do bring home to me the point, which I had not fully appreciated: the need for differentiation. Since the same device is, for economy, to be used throughout, they do look too much alike; and choice of colour is perhaps less important than distinction. But this could perhaps better be achieved by varying the colour of the major lettering? Title and author in red? I do not really myself mind at all, and leave it to you.<sup>376</sup>

Finally, on July 21, 1954, *The Fellowship of the Ring: being the first part of The Lord of the Rings* appeared. It was followed ‘relatively’ soon by *The Two Towers: being the second part of The Lord of the Rings* on November 11, 1954. The publication of the third volume was yet again delayed, to surmise – because of Tolkien’s last minute revisions to the many appendices (which counted 104 pages!). Almost a year later, on October 20, 1955, *The Return of the King: being the third part of The Lord of the Rings* finally saw the light of day. The entirety of the book was later revised for the second edition, enclosing a new *Foreword*, appearing in 1966, when all three volumes were published at the same time. Tolkien was never truly happy with the division into volumes, and even less happy about any mention of the “trilogy.”<sup>377</sup> *The Lord of the Rings* effectively consists of ‘Six Books’ and this is the only ‘division’ Tolkien ever fully acknowledged. In America, the book was yet again entrusted to Houghton Mifflin, and *The Fellowship of the Ring* appeared on October 21, 1954, *The Two Towers* on 18 April 21, 1955, and *The Return of the King* on January 5, 1956. Both British and American first editions were printed in hardback covers only, as Tolkien expressly desired, although this made the book less accessible to a wider public. In addition, it eventually led to the appearance of a ‘pirate’ paperback edition in America during 1960s, which caused a massive scandal but inadvertently made the book more popular, after which Tolkien acceded to an official paperback edition as well.

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<sup>376</sup> *LT* 147, p. 200.

<sup>377</sup> See: *LT* 149, p. 203 & *LT* 165, pp. 232-234.

The reactions to the book were instantaneous and vociferous. Two different poles established themselves at once, equally uncompromising in their condemnation and praise respectively. Yet these were mostly impressionistic in nature, on either poles, and decades would pass before sound criticism would appear from the pen of either faction. Obviously, in Tolkien's day fantasy did not have the same genre treatment it received in modern literary discourse; in fact, Tolkien's literary presence changed the course for the understanding of fantasy to a substantial degree. Certainly, Tolkien was not the first fantasy writer, in modern day terms or otherwise (one only needs think of George MacDonald), yet when *The Lord of the Rings* won the "International Fantasy Award" in 1957 it became the sole title in the history of the award that would come to be described (now) as actual *fantasy* rather than science fiction.<sup>378</sup> In fact, as Tom Shippey asserts, *The Lord of the Rings* has, to a certain extent, "created its own genre."<sup>379</sup> After the initial appearance of *The Lord of the Rings*, criticism was stumped as to where to place it, and its seeming 'placelessness' was not only the source of many interpretational conundrums but also a breeding ground for various misapprehensions and quite feasibly also the root of sharp rejectionist tendencies that sprung around the name of Tolkien – at the forefront of which stood, now virtually anecdotally, Edmund Wilson.

Both fantasy and Tolkien received their share of debasement and neither was (or ever truly became) a welcomed guest in the mainstream circles. More commonly than not, critical recognition of elements of fantasy in the works of 'serious' authors would immediately raise red flags, dictating that fantasy be hurriedly renamed into something more suitable, or at least less recognizable. Such was also the case for Borges, where sound interpretation quickly clothed fantasy into 'magical realism', a rather more 'mature' term (since it was a sort of realism after all). One common thread that continually resurfaces throughout the treatment of both Tolkien and fantasy, propelling their rejection, is clearly the (erroneous) assumption that fantasy somehow belongs to a 'juvenile' state-of-affairs and that no respectful adult would, or should, stoop to the level of dabbling in such nonsense. "One is puzzled to know why the author should have supposed he was writing for adults," Wilson wonders in his infamous review appearing in *The Nation* of April 14, 1956, as "there is little in *The Lord of the*

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<sup>378</sup> Ripp, *op. cit.*, p. 256.

<sup>379</sup> Shippey, 2000, p. 221.

*Rings* over the head of a seven-year-old child.”<sup>380</sup> What seemed even more unfathomable to Wilson, clearly fueling his rage, was the fact that this “children’s book which has somehow got out of hand”<sup>381</sup> received praise from such ‘adults’ as W. H. Auden and C. S. Lewis (the two headed the faction of dissenters – admirers of Tolkien’s work). It seems that Wilson lacked the (fantastic) capacity to approach the unfathomable, and it is hardly surprising he could not arrive at any other answer save for the sour conclusion “that certain people – especially, perhaps, in Britain – have a lifelong appetite for juvenile trash.”<sup>382</sup> This is rather reminiscent of David Hume’s 1772 invocation of “*avidum genus auricularum*,” that is, “the gazing populace [who] receives greedily, without examination, whatever soothes superstition and promotes wonder.”<sup>383</sup> Yet, as Tolkien points out, creating the sort of fantasy that actually commands (secondary) belief is in fact a rare achievement of Art, one that requires hard labor and thought, even a certain special skill, an elusive kind of “elvish craft.”<sup>384</sup>

Interestingly, Wilson’s ‘critical reading’ of Tolkien – he boasted to having read the whole thousand pages of *The Lord of the Rings* out loud to his seven-year-old daughter – had surprisingly little to do with actual reading: Wilson persistently misspelled the name of a central character, ‘renaming’ Gandalf into ‘Gandalph’. He was matched in this by Edwin Muir, reviewer for *The Observer*, who opted for ‘Gandolf’ instead.<sup>385</sup> Little need be said of the sort of criticism whose authors fail to spell properly the names of main characters from the work they are interpreting. Would anyone bother reading a study of Anna *Karetina*? This hardly seems likely, even if it were to come from the pen of a Viktor Shklovsky. Yet, both of these authors’ sentiments were given a substantial amount of weight and attention. There is hardly a study on Tolkien that fails to make note of their conclusions, despite the fact these are nigh on foundationless, especially in the case of Wilson – whereas Muir at least attempted to produce some arguments, Wilson merely produced insults. Both of these authors’ claims (and many

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<sup>380</sup> Wilson, Edmund: “Oo, those awful Orcs: A review of J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*,” pp. 312-314 in *The Nation*, CLXXXII, April 14, 1956, p. 312.

<sup>381</sup> Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 314.

<sup>382</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>383</sup> Hume, David: “Of Miracles,” pp. 115-136 in *On Human Nature and The Understanding*, ed. Antony Flew, Collier Books, New York, 1962, p. 121.

<sup>384</sup> *FS*, p. 140.

<sup>385</sup> Muir, Edwin: “A Boy’s World,” p. 11 in *The Observer*, November 27, 1955.

others) were most successfully dismantled by Tom Shippey, one of the founding fathers of sound Tolkien criticism, in *The Road to Middle-earth*. In a learned yet unobtrusive manner, Shippey tackled nearly each of their misplaced judgments, recognizing such tendencies as pertaining to what he dubs the “criticism of denial.”<sup>386</sup>

No compromise is possible between what one might call ‘the Gandalf mentality’ and Tolkien’s. Perhaps this is why *The Lord of the Rings* (and to a lesser extent Tolkien’s other writings as well) makes so many literary critics avert their eyes, get names wrong, write about things that aren’t there and miss the most obvious points of success.<sup>387</sup>

Yet, despite Shippey’s accomplishment, which was exhaustively consolidated by Patrick Curry’s breakdown of Tolkien criticism, the voice of Edmund Wilson seems to haunt the study of Tolkien quite unabatedly. Joseph Ripp thus rightfully calls him the ‘*bête noir*’ of Tolkien criticism<sup>388</sup> and even Ursula LeGuin lamentingly states she can still hear Wilson sneering ‘Oo, those awful Orcs’.<sup>389</sup> For LeGuin, as for Curry, Wilson’s derision of Tolkien is symbolic of academic, especially left-wing modernist, treatment of fantasy at large.

The specific charges against Tolkien and the values in whose name they are made make up a strong family resemblance, and I have suggested we call it modernism. Indeed, Williams’s Marx, Jackson’s Freud, Brooke-Roses’s Saussure – these are among the very avatars of modernism, whose the “grand narratives” of modernity – secularised versions of divine revelation – were supposed to supply essentially complete accounts of our progress towards the realisation of the truth. But there have been too many broken promises by now, and too many terrible “successes”.

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<sup>386</sup> Shippey, 2003, p. 282. Both Shippey and Curry also place Christine Brooke-Rose in this group (*A Rhetoric of the Unreal: Studies in Narrative and Structure, Especially of the Fantastic*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1981). Brooke-Rose wrote on Tolkien nearly three decades after Wilson and Muir, yet “like so many professional critics, she resents her subject too much to read it fully,” Shippey asserts. “Like Muir, she is a guide often only to what Tolkien was not” (Shippey, 2003, pp. 282-283). “No wonder,” says Curry, “that Brooke-Rose [...] cannot seem to comprehend Tolkien, or indeed, even read him.” He goes on to list her “astounding catalogue of errors,” which is genuinely scandalous: “‘orks’ – ‘the Gollum’ – ‘Tolkien’s trilogy’ – ‘Sam Gamjee’ – ‘Elf-people’ – ‘Belin’ (for Balin) – ‘Edora’ – ‘Minas Mogul’ – ‘Moria Mountain.’” As if the list was not long enough, she “gives the wizards their own language, states that Gandalf, ‘although a wizard, can only perform minor magic’ (!), and has Arwen’s father Elrond as her brother” (Curry, *op. cit.*, p.103).

<sup>387</sup> Shippey, 2003, p 5.

<sup>388</sup> Ripp, *op. cit.*, p. 255.

<sup>389</sup> Le Guin, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

The human being has become a stranger not only to the cosmos and the Earth but to each other, and him- and herself.<sup>390</sup>

Six decades after Wilson's 'avid' reading of Tolkien, not much has changed. "The modernist missionaries," Curry concludes, "arrive in Middle-earth dressed in a hard-shell suit of Theory, protected from contamination by what they have already decided is its infantilism, escapism and reactionary politics."<sup>391</sup> The epithet of 'juvenile trash' seems so deeply entrenched within the literary establishment that few bother to read the books prior to issuing a condemning judgment. Furthermore, we often find Tolkien's work aligned with many of the post-Tolkienian fantasy offshoots like the 'sword and sorcery' genre. The question, however, remains: if Tolkien's work is merely the sort of trash no person past the age of seven should bother themselves with – why have so many advocates of modernism (surely we must add Raymond Williams and Fred Inglis to the list) spilled their ink in such zealous attempts to attack and disparage it? Le Guin provides a potential answer when she remarks that fantasy "isn't factual, but it's true. Children know that. Adults know it too, and that is precisely why many of them are afraid of fantasy."<sup>392</sup>

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<sup>390</sup> Curry, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

<sup>391</sup> Curry, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

<sup>392</sup> Le Guin, *op. cit.*, p. 36.



## Chapter 11: QUENTA (OF THE) SILMARILLION

*Behold! the hope of Elvenland  
the fire of Fëanor, Light of Morn  
before the sun and moon were born,  
thus out of bondage came at last,  
from iron to mortal hand it passed.*<sup>393</sup>

As has become abundantly clear, the history of both Tolkien's revisions and his publications is a rather tempestuous one, and yet this only covers the works that he had in fact considered finished! As for his great *unfinished* work 'The Silmarillion', which was edited and published posthumously by his son Christopher<sup>394</sup> in 1977, the situation becomes even more complicated. By 1938, Tolkien was already referring to 'The Silmarillion' as such (in the letter to *The Observer* he qualifies it as 'the source' of *The Hobbit*<sup>395</sup>), and in 1937 the manuscript was even offered to Allen and Unwin for publication. At that given point, 'the Silmarillion' manuscripts – the *Quenta Silmarillion* of 1937 and its adjoining pieces – were already mainly possessive of the shape (and name) familiar to the reader of the 1977 publication. Yet, this was but the latest (and not the last) chapter of an ongoing mythopoeic process, one that began with the 'Eärendel poems' back in 1914, and had already suffered quite radical alterations of form. In order to understand how *The Silmarillion* came to be (and how, through it, the entirety of Tolkien's imaginarium manifested itself into one Saga), we must take our story back some twenty odd years prior to the publication of *The Hobbit*, onto the great battle stage of World War One, and into a (just as vast) battlefield inside one man. Against the background of fear that lingered above the heads of Tolkien and his fellow compatriots, and perhaps as a primordial reaction to that fear, Art arose as the lifeline. Therein Tolkien seized the thread of salvation that would ultimately help him weave

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<sup>393</sup> *HoMe* III, p. 362. These are the verses from *Lay of Leithian* ('Release from Bondage'), the versified rendition of the *Tale of Beren and Lúthien*. The stanza could be read as a Tolkienian riddle, the answer to which is – *Silmaril*.

<sup>394</sup> For the sake of avoiding repetition and confusion, we shall, with due respect to both, hereafter refer to the son as Christopher and the father as Tolkien.

<sup>395</sup> *LT* 25, p. 39.

‘Book of Lost Tales’, the narrative forerunner to *The Silmarillion* and the fantastic seed out of which Tolkien’s entire mythopoeic reality grew.

The young J. R. R. Tolkien had just received his first class English degree from Exeter College at the University of Oxford in 1915 when the Great War swept across Europe, taking the budding philologist (who had already developed a fondness toward language-craft and an inclination toward the writing of verse) onto the Western Front in 1916, and eventually into the trenches of the Somme offensive. There, as a member of the Lancashire Fusiliers Company C, Tolkien suffered the loss of all but one of his close friends (including Robert Gilson, who was killed by shell on the very first day of the offensive, and Ralph Payton, one of Tolkien’s oldest childhood friends). After months of incessant fighting, Tolkien developed a typhoid-like infection (classed as trench fever) which landed him back home in England. Granted immediate medical leave and declared temporarily unfit for service pending a review from the medical board, Tolkien spent months in a hospital bed in Birmingham. He briefly recuperated during the course of 1917 only to develop a case of gastritis after which he was given a desk job and later assigned to home service, luckily never to be shipped out to the front again.<sup>396</sup> Upon the end of war in 1918 Tolkien was accepted as a junior staff member of the *New English Dictionary* (which was later to become the *Oxford English Dictionary*) and went on to pursue his M.A. thesis at Exeter College, while simultaneously writing *A Middle English Vocabulary* (although it was not published until 1922). Somewhere in between trenches, hospitals, desks, vocabulary and dictionary entries, perhaps as early as in 1916 and certainly during 1917 and onward,<sup>397</sup> Tolkien began devising a body of stories he referred to as ‘The Book of Lost Tales’ – the earliest forms of the complex mythopoeic structures which would eventually become the ‘*Silmarillion*.’<sup>398</sup>

In fact, the initial writings pertaining to Tolkien’s imaginarium were not at all stories, but a body of poems centering on the voyages of the hero Eärendel, composed for the better part during 1914 and 1915. These gave way to far-reaching visions, taking Tolkien along on a seafaring voyage to ‘The Shores of Faëry’ (later ‘The Shores of

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<sup>396</sup> See: *Bio*, pp. 80-95 & *Forward to LotR*.

<sup>397</sup> See: *Bio*, pp. 97-107.

<sup>398</sup> In his *Forward to HoMe I*, Christopher Tolkien writes, “Some fifty-seven years after my father ceased to work on the Lost Tales, *The Silmarillion*, profoundly transformed from its distant forerunner, was published” (p. i.).

Elfland'<sup>399</sup>). Sometime in 1916, Tolkien set foot on this land and began penning the first 'lost' tales from the history of Arda. Christopher confirms that *The Fall of Gondolin* was the first of the tales of the First Age to be composed, in 1916 or 1916-17,<sup>400</sup> "scribbled on the back of a piece of paper setting out 'the chain of responsibility in a battalion,'" corroborating Tolkien's claim that he "first began to write [The *Silmarillion*] in army huts, crowded, filled with the noise of gramophones."<sup>401</sup> *The Tale of Beren and Lúthien*, considered one of Tolkien's most touching romances, followed almost immediately, its earliest short draft dating from 1917.<sup>402</sup> The Tale possessed a certain personal note for Tolkien who envisaged his wife Edith as Lúthien (or, rather, the Lúthien of the Tale was an image of Edith)<sup>403</sup> and he referred to it as "chief" of the legends of the First Age<sup>404</sup> or otherwise the "kernel of the mythology."<sup>405</sup> In his lifetime, Tolkien would come to write eight different versions of the Tale, and it would even emerge in *The Lord of the Rings* as a song sung by Aragorn to the members of the Fellowship at Weathertop.<sup>406</sup> Successively, tales continued to amass. *Turambar and the*

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<sup>399</sup> See our commentary on these poems on p. 51.

<sup>400</sup> Interestingly, *The Fall of Gondolin* is also the first piece of Tolkien's writings connected with Arda that he would openly reveal, reading it aloud before the Exeter College Essay Club in 1920, to the general delight of the listeners (except for perhaps Hugo Dyson). Tolkien attempted revision of the tale several times, only to abandon each subsequent version. Thus, the published *Silmarillion* features the original 1916 tale, which, regardless of its brevity, remains one of the essential pieces within the imaginarium, ushering in the theme of the union between a Man and an Elf. "The earliest manuscript is still in existence, filling two small school exercise-books; it was written rapidly in pencil, and then, for much of its course, overlaid with writing in ink, and heavily emended" *Forward to HoMe II*, p. xii).

<sup>401</sup> *Forward to HoMe II*, p. xii.

<sup>402</sup> The penciled draft was shortly thereafter overwritten in ink to compose *The Tale of Tinúviel*, where Tolkien changed Beren's lineage to that of an Elf! During the 1920s, Tolkien transformed the tale into an epic poem *The Lay of Leithian*, consisting of over 4200 lines of iambic tetrameter, written in rhyming couplets. Sadly, Tolkien never finished the poem, leaving three of seventeen planned cantos unwritten. Within the poem, Beren was reverted to his mortal stature and in the later prose versions Tolkien would persevere in this choice, including in the latest version of the Tale, which would ultimately form Chapter 19 of *The Silmarillion*.

<sup>403</sup> "I never called Edith *Lúthien*," Tolkien writes, "but she was the source of the story that in time became the chief pan of the *Silmarillion*. It was first conceived in a small woodland glade filled with hemlocks at Roos in Yorkshire (where I was for a brief time in command of an outpost of the Humber Garrison in 1917, and she was able to live with me for a while). In those days her hair was raven, her skin clear, her eyes brighter than you have seen them, and she could sing – and *dance*" (*LT* 340, p. 463). Edith Tolkien passed away in November of 1971, leaving her 'Beren' bereft with grief. In 1972, Tolkien would write to his son Michael: "But now she has gone before Beren, leaving him indeed one-handed, but he has no power to move the inexorable Mandos, and there is no *Dor Gyrth i chuinar*, the Land of the Dead that Live, in this Fallen Kingdom of Arda, where the servants of Morgoth are worshipped" (*LT* 332, p. 455). Shortly thereafter he wrote to Christopher he had decided to inscribe *Lúthien* on her grave, "which says for me more than a multitude of words: for she was (and knew she was) my *Lúthien*" (*LT* 340, p. 463).

<sup>404</sup> *LT* 144, p. 197.

<sup>405</sup> *LT* 165, p. 234.

<sup>406</sup> *LotR*, I: 11.

*Foalókë* was created in 1917 (and became the *Tale of the Children of Húrin* in 1918).<sup>407</sup> By 1920, these amounted to ‘The Book of Lost Tales,’<sup>408</sup> thus forming the initial compendium of Elven/Faëry legends, which Christopher would come to describe as the “distant forerunner” to ‘the *Silmarillion*’.<sup>409</sup>

‘The Book of Lost Tales’ consisted (in the original unfinished manuscript) of sixteen Tales, two of which – the first and the last, the ‘framework stories’ – would be utterly dismissed by Tolkien in ‘The *Silmarillion*.’ The remaining fourteen Tales, their contents at times considerably different and at times quite consistent, would nonetheless find their way into the twenty-four chapters of *Quenta Silmarillion*, or ‘The *Silmarillion*’ proper of 1977. However, the book was left unfinished and these accounts were abandoned in 1920 as Tolkien turned to the reshaping of the major tales into elongated ‘Lays’ instead (*The Lay of Leithian*, in rhyming couplets and *The Lay of the Children of Húrin*, in alliterative verse). Tolkien seems to have incessantly been moving ‘there and back again’ between prose and poetry. It can be argued, in more ways than one, that Tolkien’s mythology indeed enjoys a poetic core (and *vice versa*, that his poetry possesses a mythical core), an intricate relationship that established itself from the very beginning, although years would pass before it would reach the sort of mytho-poetic balance that will become the ‘true language’ of Tolkien’s tale-telling. It seems Tolkien was perpetually drawn (back) to *poiesis*, but poetry was simply not his ‘Doom’, not when standing on its own. Obviously, in the course of 1920s Tolkien was still experimenting, searching for his own narrative expression, in fact *the perfect translation* for the languages that belonged to another plane of existence, the sub-creative reality of Arda. It is not very difficult to understand why Tolkien believed that the language of poetry was more akin to the Elven languages of his imagination, and thus a more

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<sup>407</sup> Various versions and pieces of the story of Húrin and his descendants were created over time. These all came to be featured in different volumes of Christopher’s *History* (prose versions in *HoMe* I and the epic poem in *HoMe* III), while a great part appeared in the *Unfinished Tales* and in *The Silmarillion*. In 2007, Christopher also published the Tale as a single book entitled *The Children of Húrin*, the text of which is in part compiled from these extant texts, and particularly from the sections featured in the *Unfinished Tales*.

<sup>408</sup> As in the case of *The Silmarillion* we shall imply by *The Book of Lost Tales* (in italics) the publication of Christopher Tolkien, in its two successive Parts (pub. 1893 and 1984 respectively), while ‘The Book of Lost Tales’ or simply ‘Lost Tales’ (both in inverted commas) will hereby refer to the body of these manuscripts, in any or all forms, or the concept behind them in general.

<sup>409</sup> *HoMe* I, p. i.

suitable translation for the visions they harbored, than ‘simple English’, even when language was taken to the archaic extreme as he attempted in *The Book of Lost Tales*.

Notwithstanding several fragmentary pieces of scattered writings, the prose narratives remained unattended for several years, and it was not until 1926 that the Tale (in form) was restored and “the ‘mythology’ began again from a new starting-point.”<sup>410</sup> This new ‘starting point’ arose in the form of a brief “Sketch of the Mythology” (only 28 pages long) written as an outline to explain the background of the alliterative *Lay of The Children of Húrin* to Tolkien’s old tutor and friend R.W. Reynolds. In terms of narrative, this manuscript (that Tolkien simply referred to as the “Sketch”) was in fact the first version, albeit extremely condensed, of what will *directly* evolve into ‘The Silmarillion’ by 1937 – *via* the *Quenta Noldorinwa*<sup>411</sup> of 1930 – deciding with it the history of Arda. It was not until 1938, however (apparently, the letter to *The Observer* marked this turning point), that the title ‘Silmarillion’ had spread out to become the comprehensive designation for the thriving body of writings pertaining to Elven history (substituting *Eldanyare* ‘History of the Elves’), the focal constituent of which was certainly its name-giver the *Quenta Silmarillion*, to which Tolkien subsequently referred as the ‘Silmarillion’ *proper*. In the course of the 1930s, various other texts were fashioned and refashioned in support of the main narrative and among these were the ‘related fragments’ Tolkien makes note of in the correspondence with Stanley Unwin. Depending on various stages in conception, the compendium of Elven histories incorporated different pieces (or different forms of related pieces), but all of these *together*, including two sets of Annals that were not sent to Unwin, were the ‘Silmarillion’. In all honesty, nothing was ever truly decided or settled with Tolkien, but the *Quenta Silmarillion* of 1937 was the version of the manuscript offered to the publishers that same year, as fixed as it could have been, although it too was not quite finished.

The body of writings that Tolkien delivered to Unwin in the course of 1937 was rather heterogeneous. It included two short stories, *Farmer Giles of Ham* and *Mr. Bliss*;

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<sup>410</sup> With the exception of *The Music of the Ainur* which in a sense was the sole ‘unadulterated survivor’ from the ‘Lost Tales’ (at this point in the conception at any rate).

<sup>411</sup> “The Tale of the Noldor” (the Noldor were the High-Elves of the First Age legendarium), also known simply as the *Quenta* (“The Tale”). By 1937, it became *Quenta Silmarillion* instead (“Tale of the Silmarils”).

the unfinished time–travel tale *The Lost Road*; the unfinished *Lay of Leithian* (referred to in the correspondence of that time as “The Gest(e) of Beren and Lúthien”); and lastly, “the [Quenta] *Silmarillion* and related fragments.”<sup>412</sup> Tolkien probably never even realized how much he desired to see the ‘*Silmarillion*’ published until the favorable reception of *The Hobbit* had actually opened the doors to such a prospect. He considered the mythology a private affair and this was perhaps even truer of the languages it harbored. Into the bargain, he was wary of the implications of his mytho-linguistic inventions – and especially of the fact that he never really saw them as inventions, but *discoveries*. His rational mind was telling him this was all nonsense, or, at the very least, that it would be construed as nonsense if ever released. All of these qualms were aptly conveyed in Tolkien’s rather openly ‘confessional’ tale *The Lost Road* (also sent to Unwin), where the young philologist by the name of Alboin<sup>413</sup> starts receiving dream-echoes of a mythical language that he comes to discern as Elf-latin. As if in anticipation of Tolkien’s own circumstance, the young Alboin is cautioned by his father: “Don’t go putting any bits of your Eressëan, or Elf-latin, or whatever you call it, into your verses at Oxford. It might scan, but it wouldn’t pass.”<sup>414</sup> The rational verdict on the matter seemed evident: “you’ll get into trouble, if you let your cats out of the bag among the philologists.”<sup>415</sup> Certainly, the philologists were not the only judges, but they were an inevitable part of the equation. Philology was Tolkien’s ‘bag of tricks’, but now the cats were indeed let out of the bag and the ‘*Silmarillion*’ was, both to Tolkien’s fear and delight, being forwarded to the publisher’s reader for review – or at least that is what Tolkien thought.

Despite Christopher’s claim that “the text of *The Silmarillion* was at that time a fine, simple, and very legible manuscript,”<sup>416</sup> it seems that the publishers could not make heads or tails of the received materials. One possibility, which Christopher allows

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<sup>412</sup> *LT* 19, p. 33. See also: “Note on the original submission of the Lay of Leithian and The Silmarillion in 1937” in *HoMe* III, pp. 261ff. The “Note” shows that along with the incomplete 1937 version of the *Quenta Silmarillion* three texts in particular were delivered to Allen & Unwin: the cosmogony *Ainulindalë* ‘The Music of the Ainur’ (which was by then already treated as an individual narrative), the cosmography *Ambarkanta* ‘The Shape of the World’ and the cataclysmic account *The Fall of Númenoreans*.

<sup>413</sup> *Alboin* is the Langobardic equivalent of the Anglo-Saxon *Ælfwine* (‘Elf-friend’).

<sup>414</sup> *HoMe* V, p. 41.

<sup>415</sup> *HoMe* V, p. 43.

<sup>416</sup> *HoMe* III, p. 262.

rather hesitantly, was “that the different manuscripts were not very clearly differentiated, while the title-pages of the different works would certainly seem obscure.”<sup>417</sup> Carpenter appears to corroborate that the problem arose from the fact that the manuscripts were incoherent, noting that the “bundle of manuscripts” had in fact arrived “in a somewhat disordered state” and that “the only clearly continuous section seemed to be the long poem ‘The Gest of Beren and Lúthien.’”<sup>418</sup> Yet, it is difficult to say whether he simply surmised this from the events that followed or from actual knowledge of the state of the texts received. Surely, another possibility was that the obscurity arose from the contents and not the form – exactly as Tolkien feared. The title-page of the ‘Silmarillion’ manuscript read thus:

The  
*Quenta Silmarillion*

Herein  
is *Qenta Noldorinwa* or *Pennas in Geleidh*  
or  
History of the Gnomes.

This is a history in brief drawn from many older tales; for all the matters that it contains were of old, and still are among the Eldar of the West, recounted more fully in other histories and songs. But many of these were not recalled by Eriol, or men have again lost them since his day. This Account was composed first by Pengoloð of Gondolin, and Ælfwine turned it into our speech as it was in his time, adding nothing, he said, save explanations of some few names.<sup>419</sup>

It is quite easily imaginable that at Allen & Unwin they found this incomprehensible, not because of the illegibility of the manuscript but because it was, as Tolkien would later phrase it himself, “full of mythology, and elvishness, and all that ‘heigh stile,’”<sup>420</sup> especially in contrast with the clearly preferred, and expected, hobbit material. Christopher was certainly right to detect a “note of helplessness” in the manner in which the manuscripts were listed upon arrival at Allen & Unwin: the ‘Geste’ was written

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<sup>417</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>418</sup> *Bio*, p. 183.

<sup>419</sup> *HoMe* V, p. 201.

<sup>420</sup> *LT* 182, p. 256.

down (or off) as “Long Poem” and the *Quenta Silmarillion* and related fragments as “The Gnomes Material.”<sup>421</sup>

There is no evidence that the designated reader Edward Crankshaw (or any other reader) ever received to his attention the full manuscript of *Quenta Silmarillion* or any of the related narratives. What Mr. Crankshaw did receive, without being informed of the authorship, was the ‘Geste’, accompanied by what looked to him an identified short prose fragment. The fragment actually came from the tale of Beren and Lúthien (*i.e.* from the ‘Silmarillion’) and was clearly attached to the poem, as Carpenter asserts, “for the purpose of completing the story, for the poem itself was unfinished.”<sup>422</sup> However, none of this was conveyed to the confounded reader nor was he ever notified of the existence of the manuscript from which the fragment came. Crankshaw was effectively given so little to go on that it is hardly surprising he landed at a most peculiar conclusion: that before him in fact stood an *authentic Celtic Geste* and that the prose-version must have been the original transcript, which an unspecified versifier had subsequently turned into a poem!

I am rather at a loss to know what to do with this – it doesn’t even seem to have an author! – or any indication of sources, etc. Publishers’ readers are rightly supposed to be of moderate intelligence and reading; but I confess my reading has not extended to early Celtic Gestes, and I don’t even know whether this is a famous Geste or not, or, for that matter, whether it is authentic. I presume it is, as the unspecified versifier has included some pages of a prose-version (which is far superior).<sup>423</sup>

However, his final (one might call it a particularly independent) assessment was strikingly unfavorable towards the poem, wherein he saw lacking the ‘original’ qualities inherent in the prose-version: “the primitive strength is gone, the clear colours are gone.”<sup>424</sup> On the other hand, he praised the ‘far superior’ prose for its “brevity and dignity” (although he remarked against its “eye-splitting Celtic names”), lastly concluding it possessive of “that mad, bright-eyed beauty that perplexes all Anglo-

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<sup>421</sup> *HoMe* III, p. 262.

<sup>422</sup> *Bio*, p. 184.

<sup>423</sup> *HoMe* III, p. 262.

<sup>424</sup> *Ibid.*



Saxons in the face of Celtic art.”<sup>425</sup> However, the (unconscious) commendation of the ‘Silmarillion’ fragment never led to the consideration of the entirety of the manuscript at the office of Allen & Unwin. It seems that ‘The Gnome Material’ was simply written off right at the title-page.

All of this was relayed to Tolkien in a noticeably misleading fashion, yet it is beyond doubt that there was no ill will in the matter: Stanley Unwin simply considered the ‘Silmarillion’ unpublishable at first (and last) glance, and his intent was to spare Tolkien’s feelings in the process, at the cost of bending the truth. He, therefore, passed on a convenient selection of the reader’s comments to Tolkien, tactfully beginning with the unenthusiastic reading of the poem, intercepted by the expressed admiration for the prose version, culminating at the *coup de grâce*: “*The Silmarillion* contains plenty of wonderful material; in fact it is a mine to be explored in writing further books like *The Hobbit* rather than a book in itself.”<sup>426</sup> In consequence, as is rather obvious from Tolkien’s reply to Unwin of 16 December 1937, Tolkien was led to believe that the ‘Silmarillion’ “had been read and rejected, whereas it had merely been rejected.”<sup>427</sup> Moreover, the rejection had been so subtle that Tolkien was left with the impression that the doors to the publication of the ‘Silmarillion’ were kept ajar and not in fact slammed shut. However, another thing becomes evident from Tolkien’s letter, somewhat justifying Unwin’s *beau geste* in extending Tolkien the courtesy of not being direct (in the end, his only true ‘error’ was not having the certain taste required for the consumption of such a material): had Unwin not meandered around the truth, Tolkien would have been utterly devastated, perhaps even to an imagination-numbing degree.

My chief joy comes from learning that the Silmarillion is not rejected with scorn. I have suffered a sense of fear and bereavement, quite ridiculous, since I let this private and beloved nonsense out; and I think if it had seemed to you to be nonsense I should have felt really crushed. I do not mind about the verse-form, which in spite of certain virtuous passages has grave defects, for it is only for me

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<sup>425</sup> Note to *LT* 19, p. 32.

<sup>426</sup> *HoMe* III, p. 263.

<sup>427</sup> *Ibid.*

the rough material. But I shall certainly now hope one day to be able, or to be able to afford, to publish the Silmarillion!<sup>428</sup>

Tolkien's words divulge an innocence that has yet not been refuted by experience; he lays bare the contents of his heart right before the tiger who is about to devour him. Looking back on this exchange (with the critical benefit of hindsight), the pathos is palpable, the poignancy of Tolkien's candor heightened by his obliviousness before the clamor of Fate slamming the gates shut: Tolkien would never live to see the 'Silmarillion' published. However, there is more than tragedy in this tale, just as there is more than despair in doom. There was no choosing between *wyrd ðe warnung* ('fate or foresight')<sup>429</sup> for Tolkien in this matter, and there was no benefit (or detriment) of hindsight either, but there *was* hope – even in the face of (his fear of) rejection. Unwin gave no false promises to Tolkien, his rejection of the 'Silmarillion' may have been tactful but it was specific, and Tolkien may have been misled about the manuscript being read, but not about it being rejected. Yet, in his equation, this *still* amounted to hope. It was no easily-won hope, as there was no easy hope for Tolkien's characters; they would oftentimes have to accomplish their feats against all odds, in the face of utter despair.<sup>430</sup> Yet, in concluding his passage on the submission of the 'Silmarillion', Christopher cannot help but wonder, considering the workings of Wyrd:

It is strange to reflect on what the outcome might conceivably have been if The Silmarillion actually had been read at that time, and if the reader had maintained the good opinion he formed from those few pages; for while there is no necessary reason to suppose even so that it would have been accepted for publication, it does not seem absolutely out of the question. And if it had been?<sup>431</sup>

There are many 'ifs' in this predicament, but Christopher recognized the answer: had the reaction to the publication of the 'Silmarillion' been a positive one, Tolkien most likely never would have written *The Lord of the Rings*. It is easily conceivable that

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<sup>428</sup> *LT* 19, p. 32.

<sup>429</sup> In the Old English poem *Solomon and Saturn*, Saturn asks which will be the stronger, *wyrd ge warnung*, 'fated events or foresight', and Solomon tells him that 'Fate is hard to alter ... And nevertheless an intelligent man can moderate all the things that fate causes, as long as he is clear in his mind' (Shippey, 2003, p. 168).

<sup>430</sup> On the relation between *wyrd* and hope, 'theory of courage' and 'theory of laughter' in Tolkien's work see Shippey, 2003, pp. 152-160.

<sup>431</sup> *HoMe* III, pp. 263-264.

instead he would have continued to rework the mythology, preparing it for the publication he desired and dreaded, perhaps *ad infinitum*. Reverting again to the critical benefit of sight, a large portion of what was to become the posthumously edited *The Silmarillion* was in fact already written, but it was up to *The Lord of the Rings* to achieve it. From the latter part of Tolkien's letter to Unwin of 19 November 1937 we see that he is almost reluctant to embark on another hobbit adventure and that he would much rather stay in the comfort of his mythopoeic home (just like his Bilbo once). Nevertheless, the Road was calling (it was the Lost Road of course) and it was time for him to follow.

I did not think any of the stuff I dropped on you filled the bill. But I did want to know whether any of the stuff had any exterior non-personal value. I think it is plain that quite apart from it, a sequel or successor to *The Hobbit* is called for. I promise to give this thought and attention. But I am sure you will sympathize when I say that the construction of elaborate and consistent mythology (and two languages) rather occupies the mind, and the Silmarils are in my heart. So that goodness knows what will happen. Mr Baggins began as a comic tale among conventional and inconsistent Grimm's fairy-tale dwarves, and got drawn into the edge of it – so that even Sauron the terrible peeped over the edge. And what more can hobbits do?<sup>432</sup>

As it turned out, the hobbits had much more to do, and merely within three days, Tolkien again wrote to Unwin to report that he had already written “the first chapter of a new story about Hobbits – ‘A long expected party.’”<sup>433</sup> Was this Tolkien's Doom then: that the cost of writing the latter would entail sacrificing the publication of the first? Had there been *warnung*, would Tolkien have willingly accepted such *wyrd*? “I will take the Ring,” said one small hobbit, “though I do not know the way.”<sup>434</sup> Ultimately, Tolkien said the very same thing; he took on the very same burden (although there was a glint of foresight involved: Tolkien knew that the inexorable force on his journey would be the light of the Silmarils).

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<sup>432</sup> *LT* 19, p. 32.

<sup>433</sup> *LT* 20, p. 34.

<sup>434</sup> *LotR* II: 2.

### ***1.1. Elf-friend of England***

Among the earliest written segments from the ‘Book of Lost Tales’, composed nearly from within the trenches of the Somme offensive, or during 1917 at the latest (while Tolkien was recuperating in a hospital in Birmingham), is the introductory narrative, originally entitled *The Cottage of Lost Play*. This tale, which served as a specific framework to the entire legendarium, was subsequently abandoned, surviving in mere hints, and Christopher ultimately eradicated all traces of it in the published *Silmarillion* (although he later came to question such a decision). In writing *The Cottage of Lost Play*, Tolkien was attempting to place the legendary history of an Elven-land (Elfinesse) inside a framework that brought the mytho-imaginary world into *direct* (in-universe) contact with the *real* world. In doing so, Tolkien brought Faery unto history (hence, fairy-story) as close as they will ever be, struggling to extrapolate the forgotten fantastic past from the oblivious mind. Clearly, Tolkien felt there was hope for *memory* still, through the redemptive sub-creation of myths, these *inventions about truth* – our soul’s recollections of homeland. As he would pronounce two decades later in *Mythopoeia*, although Man may be “long estranged”<sup>435</sup> from the sacred source, he was not “wholly lost,”<sup>436</sup> as long as he “draws some wisdom from the only Wise / and still recalls him.”<sup>437</sup>

Accordingly, in the opening of *The Book of Lost Tales* Tolkien tells of a man of northern descent, a seafarer filled with wanderlust, who – not wholly estranged from his *imaginary nature* (rather than *imaginative* nature, although essentially both qualifications are pertinent) and not wholly lost – chances upon the seaward Straight Path (the *Lost Road*) to the Lonely Isle of Tol Eressëa where the Elves dwell, and from the Elven sage Rúmil learns the *lost tales* of the Creation of the World and of the Elder Days (in fact ‘The Silmarillion’ and the surrounding legends), which he then records and makes known to the world. Many notes and drafts exist in connection to this seafarer, who is originally known only by the name the Elves give him upon his arrival – *Eriol*, meaning “one who dreams alone” while “of his former names the story

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<sup>435</sup> *MP*, v. 55.

<sup>436</sup> *MP*, v. 56.

<sup>437</sup> *MP*, vv. 54-55.

nowhere tells.”<sup>438</sup> In this initial version of the ‘framework’ (c. 1916-17), only brief reference is made to Eriol’s seaward arrival to Tol Eressëa, and his origin is scarcely mentioned save for a vague reference to his northern origins.

However, as Christopher recounts, Eriol’s role “was at first to be more important in the structure of the work than (what it afterwards became) [...] at first, Eriol was to be an important element in the fairy-history itself – the witness of the ruin of Elvish Tol Eressëa.” Thus, the introduction of “‘historical legend’ was at first not merely a framework, isolated from the great tales that afterwards constituted ‘The Silmarillion’, but an integral part of their ending.”<sup>439</sup> Indeed, among what are the oldest existing outlines, scribbled in Tolkien’s pocket books, there is an entire series of notes entitled “Story of Eriol’s Life,”<sup>440</sup> which tells that he was in fact Ottor Wáfre, son of Eoh, born in Angeln, between the Flensburg Fjord and the Schlei River. After his father was killed by his uncle Beorn, he fled to the island Heligoland, where he married Cwén, fathering Hengest and Horsa (who were later to become great chiefs of their people). When Cwén died, sea longing consumed him and he set out onto the sea, eventually reaching the Lonely Isle. Upon his arrival on Tol Eressëa, the Elves had given him the name Angol, after the regions of his home. Different versions of the story appear after this point, which Christopher compares in detail, while providing extensive commentary, ultimately succeeding in presenting a coherent structure.<sup>441</sup> Namely, during his stay in Tol Eressëa, Eriol visited the city of Tavrobel, where he wrote down what he had learnt into the Golden Book, and drank *limpe*, the potion of youth. He wedded an Elf maiden and had a son by her, named Heorrenda (Half-elven). There, he ‘witnessed the making of Elven history,’ chiefly their rise against the dominion of Melko (Melkor), and the great “Faring Forth” took place, in which Tol Eressëa was drawn east back across the Ocean and into the geographical position of England, while the western half of the island broke off when the sea-guardian Ossë tried to drag it back, and it became the Isle of Iverin (Ireland). Evil Men and Orcs had then taken over the Island while the defeated Elves faded and eventually became invisible to the eyes of most Men. Eriol’s three sons (Hengest, Horsa and Heorrenda) conquered the Island back and it became England. As

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<sup>438</sup> *HoMe* I, p. 2.

<sup>439</sup> *HoMe* I, p.22.

<sup>440</sup> *HoMe* I, p.23

<sup>441</sup> *HoMe* I, pp. 24-25.

they were not hostile to the Elves, from them the English received “the true tradition of the fairies.”<sup>442</sup>

Sometime between 1920 and 1925, Eriol became *Ælfwine* (“Elf-friend”) and the story of Ottor Wáfre, son of Eoh, author of the great Golden Book, was then confined to the small pocket notebook in which it was written. *Ælfwine*’s story, on the other hand, was an entirely different narrative projection, one that belonged to the second “Scheme” of the Lost Tales, “an unrealized project for the revision of the whole work.”<sup>443</sup>

*Pus cwæð Ælfwine Wídlást Éadwines sunu:*

*Fela bið on Westwegum werum uncúðra,  
wundra and wihta, wlitescéne land,  
eardgeard ælfa and ésa bliss.  
Lýt énig wát hwylc his langoð síe  
þám þe eftsíðes eldo getwáfeð.*

[Thus spake *Ælfwine* the Fartravelled, son of *Éadwine*:

There is many a thing in the west of the world unknown to men;  
marvels and strange beings, a land lovely to look on,  
the dwelling place of the Elves and the bliss of the Gods.  
Little doth any man know what longing is his  
whom old age cutteth off from return.]<sup>444</sup>

A narrative entitled “*Ælfwine of England*” then occupied Tolkien’s notes, again, appearing in revised variations. In comparison to Eriol’s story, substantial changes occur, most notably to the fact that England was no longer identified with the Elven isle of Tol Eressëa (or in fact, Tol Eressëa was no longer identified with England), but was merely the distant homeland of the Mariner *Ælfwine*, who, unlike Eriol, does not

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<sup>442</sup> *HoMe* II, p. 290.

<sup>443</sup> *HoMe* I, p. 234

<sup>444</sup> *HoMe* V, p. 44 & *HoMe* IX, p. 244. The poem *Pus cwæð Ælfwine Wídlást* or otherwise “Thus spake *Ælfwine* the Fartravelled” (composed for the unfinished tale called *The Lost Road*) is imagined as a *lost* Anglo-Saxon poem of which one of the characters (a later new-world descendant of *Ælfwine*) gets echoes in a dream, experiencing memory visions that take him ‘back’ to the mythological time of *Atalantie* i.e. *Akallabêth* (“Downfall” in the Elven Quenya and Númenórean Adûnaic languages, respectively).

partake in Elven history. His part is only to learn and to record. While sailing the Sea one day, Ælfwine Wídlást (“The Fartravelled”), son of Éadwine, 10<sup>th</sup> century Anglo-Saxon, follows the directions of an old Man of the Sea (who turns out to in fact be *Ulmo*, one of the *Valar*<sup>445</sup>) and is cast away on Tol Eressëa. Like Eriol, he also goes to the city of Tavrobel, but instead of Rúmil there he meets Pengoloð who then shows him books of ancient lore written by Rúmil (or those that Pengoloð compiled from Rúmil’s writings), including *Ainulindalë*, the *Quenta Silmarillion* and the *Golden Book* itself (now also attributed to Rúmil), ancient chronicles such as the *Annals of Aman* and *Annals of Beleriand*, and ultimately the *Lhammas*, Rúmil’s “History of Tongues.” Thus, instead of progressive evolution of one world into another, world of fantasy (fairy) into history, as the Eriol story portrayed, the story of the Elf-friend Ælfwine Wídlást is a tale of two worlds existing simultaneously, eventually to meet somewhere in the mist of the great Sea, history in fact reaching out to fantasy, longing for its untold secrets, and its own histories of the world.

While the tales of the 1937 *Quenta Silmarillion* (and its 1977 edition) contain the ‘Lost Tales’ in a more or less varied state, the noble seafarer Ælfwine is permanently lost to them. In *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien partly reassigns his role to Bilbo Baggins, author of the *Red Book of Westmarch*,<sup>446</sup> which includes translations of certain ‘Elvish lore’ he compiled in Rivendell (while Tolkien never made it explicit, by all accounts, these would include *Ainulindalë*, the *Valaquenta* and *Quenta Silmarillion*).<sup>447</sup> However, certain Tolkien’s writings created after 1951 (thus, after the writing of *The Lord of the Rings*) reference Ælfwine yet again, hinting at the possibility that Tolkien had not completely forsaken his Anglo-Saxon voyager (ultimately, the ‘Ælfwine framework’ and Bilbo’s ‘Translations from the Elvish’ are not mutually exclusive). To

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<sup>445</sup> Throughout the *Lost Tales*, the Valar are called ‘the Gods’ as befitting a pagan pantheon of an old lost world. As Tolkien moved away from the pagan setting, however, he continually stressed that they were *not really* Gods, although most directly descending from the God Ilúvatar, the One Creator who was present from the earliest to the last versions of the imaginarium.

<sup>446</sup> Cf. C. G. Jung’s enigmatic *Red Book*, a long hidden journal of the Soul’s descent into itself.

<sup>447</sup> In the „Forward” to *HoMe I*, Christopher agrees with the assumption originally forwarded by Robert Forster in his *Complete Guide to Middle-earth* that ‘Quenta Silmarillion’ is in fact one of Bilbo’s ‘Translations from the Elvish’. “So also have I assumed: the ‘books of lore’ that Bilbo gave to Frodo provided in the end the solution: they were ‘The Silmarillion’. But apart from the evidence cited here, there is, so far as I know, no other statement on this matter anywhere in my father’s writings; and (wrongly, as I think now) I was reluctant to step into the breach and make definite what I only surmised” (*HoMe I*, p. x).

which extent Tolkien kept him alive in his mind, we can only conjecture. Yet, it is safe to say that while the old notebooks were tucked away into the attic, and the framework story with them, the key concepts behind the ‘Lost Tales’ were certainly kept. This is apparent even in the case of Tolkien’s turning to the poems at the expense of the Tales, for the poems were a direct continuation of the line of thought that once bred the narratives, and the ‘mythology’ they conveyed. It is, thus, nearly impossible to say Tolkien had ‘abandoned’ them. Rather, the Tales evolved on (as would be the case with the narratives of any mythology).

The original ‘Lost Tales’ are in fact very naïve in style, clearly the work of a young writer who was yet to discover his real voice and direction. For one thing, the presence of Fairy/Færy/Faërie was much more palpable and direct than it would later come to be. Fairies were yet to become Elves, and Elves of the house of Noldor were yet to shed their epithet of Gnomes. Notably, there is also the element of Children, or more precisely, Children’s *Play*, hence: (Cottage of) *Lost Play* and (Hall of) *Play Regained*; Play here rather obviously – too obviously – substituting Milton’s Paradise. The sort of play Tolkien had in mind was certainly fantasy weaving of the mythopoeic kind, an art nearly lost to the world that Tolkien hoped could be regained (however, he was well aware this actually had very little to do with children). From the conceptual standpoint, they are also most directly anchored in the imagined history of England, which Tolkien later came to disconnect from the Saga. Certainly, of all the riddles attached to these Tales, the riddle of ‘English mythology’ is by far the biggest and most controversial, especially since it left a lasting imprint on the reading of *The Silmarillion*. However, even if we consider the possibility of Ælfwine’s reemergence within the narrative, his presence clearly no longer equates England with Elfland (as the story of Eriol did – *briefly*), merely places England (thus, history *i.e.* reality) into contact with the land of Faërie (fantasy).

It is no secret that Tolkien lamented over “the poverty of my own beloved country,” as it had “no stories of its own (bound up with its tongue and soil), not of the quality that I sought.”<sup>448</sup> The quality which Tolkien had sought, one of “heroic epic on

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<sup>448</sup> *LT* 131, p. 167.



the brink of fairy-tale and history”<sup>449</sup> was not to be found in existence. It had presumably existed *once* (once long ago or once upon a time), but was lost to the modern day. The natural solution, certainly: to *find these lost tales*, to extricate them from the long forgotten memory of the world, by the sole means available: imagination. Indeed, young Tolkien must have had in his mind an elaborate calculus for said recreation, consisting partly of the elements found in surviving neighboring mythological systems and in the legends of “North-western temper and temperature,” “for lack of a better word [than *legend*]”<sup>450</sup> (indeed, what *is* the word for Færy history?) – components which he believed would have been common threads, likely found within (perhaps even deriving from) the lost Anglo-Saxon mytho-legendarium as well; partly of those few origins of *Færy* surviving in Old and Middle English *language* for want of legend (or better word), and elements still *alive* in the few surviving poems like *Deor*, *Pearl*, *Seafarer* and *Wanderer*, certainly most notably encompassing the epic poem *Beowulf*, or *Beowulfiana* as Tolkien preferred to call it;<sup>451</sup> partly of his educated guess on the evolution and natural progression of said mythological elements, most commonly, and most naturally in Tolkien’s case, deriving from his knowledge of the linguistic evolution that came hand in hand with the evolution of ideas, beliefs and inevitably stories, thus establishing a system of *mytho-linguistic interdependence* that Tolkien would build on throughout his storytelling days; and ultimately of pure invention, or at the very least of what any interpreter would most likely classify as invention, although in Tolkien’s mind it really represented a process of sub-creation, a form of discovery that was closer to *fantastic remembering* than to inventing, a peculiar feat again achieved *via* language, within a virtually alchemical word brewing process, through which words would *invoke* stories – an urge perhaps best attributed to his “passionate love for growing things.”<sup>452</sup>

Certainly not all of these ponderings would become parts of the story structure, but young Tolkien did engage with the bold idea of *discovering* (in fact, sub-creating) a

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<sup>449</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>450</sup> *LT* 163, p. 228.

<sup>451</sup> See: *BW & Bio*, pp. 138-144. The impact that *Beowulf* had made on Tolkien, and upon which he would make a tremendous impact in return, was tremendous. Prior to Tolkien’s interpretation, *Beowulf* was hardly even considered a work of literary merit, but was mainly approached as a historic document!

<sup>452</sup> *LT* 163, p. 228.

mythology for England (its Færy-history), as he would rather timidly confide to Milton Waldman decades later: “Do not laugh! But once upon a time (my crest has long since fallen) I had a mind to make a body of more or less connected legend, ranging from the large and cosmogonic [...] which I could dedicate simply to: to England; to my country. [...] Absurd.”<sup>453</sup> Perhaps such a dream was absurd, and perhaps it was not. In any case, this *is* what the initial ‘Lost Tales’ brought about. Within it met, perhaps even collided, two passions of Tolkien’s: a certain nostalgic urge to prove that the Engle (English) “have the true tradition of the fairies [Elves], of whom the Iras and the Wéalas [the Irish and the Welsh] tell garbled things,”<sup>454</sup> and a longing to steer his ship “not to Sussex, but to shores a great deal further off.”<sup>455</sup> While the latter clearly prevailed, the image of a ‘mythology for England’ had left a long-standing imprint on the interpretation of Tolkien. It seems, however, that the most salient point in this respect can be attributed to C. S. Lewis, who proclaimed in his review of *The Fellowship of the Ring (Time and Tide*, Aug 14, 1954) that the hobbits “are not an allegory of the English, but they are perhaps a myth that only an Englishman (or, should we add, a Dutchman?) could have created.”<sup>456</sup> In a manner of speaking, Tolkien did *invent a past*, but the fantastic past Tolkien opened up before the reader was not that of England, but *of Man*. Tolkien’s Middle-earth, the battle stage upon which mind confronts the machine, is not a field made of soil and rock, it is the soul of Man – that most elusive fantastic substance there is. The myth of England may have brought this vision about, it may have been its instigator and early form, but it was the myth of Man, this highly fantastic being with the capacity to imagine, that gave it true utterance.

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<sup>453</sup> *LT* 131, p. 168.

<sup>454</sup> *HoMe* II, p. 290.

<sup>455</sup> *HoMe* IX, p. 230.

<sup>456</sup> Lewis, C. S.: „The gods return to earth, J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* (being the First part of *The Lord of the Rings*),” pp. 99-103 in Walter Hooper ed., *Image and Imagination*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2013, p. 101.

## Chapter 12: THE SOUP OF HISTORY

*Even the wise cannot see all ends.*<sup>457</sup>

The history of the making and breaking of *The Silmarillion* begins in 1914<sup>458</sup> and effectively remains *open* to this date. If its publication in 1977 offered any kind of ‘illusion’ of permanence and solidity (finality of the manuscript), this was utterly overturned in 1983 when *The Book of Lost Tales* first appeared. It was already partly overturned, or at the very least seriously suspected, when Christopher edited the *Unfinished Tales* in 1980, and when Tolkien’s *Letters* appeared in 1981, as it then became abundantly clear that nothing was really *fixed* when it came to these manuscripts, and that a number of different versions of the tales regarding the complex history of Middle-earth and Arda were in fact in existence. While some of these (but certainly not all) questions are resolved now, they most certainly presented a critical and an interpretational conundrum in 1977, although, it must be also noted, the plain, un-critical reader (interested in the *living*, not dissected, fantasy) did not really find it exceedingly distressing.

For some Tolkien readers, and for some Tolkien critics (though not all of the readers are critics and not all of the critics are readers), the tales of *The Silmarillion* are simply a needless background to the story (or rather stories) about the hobbits. As Christopher would acknowledge, Tolkien “was himself well aware that the absence of hobbits would be felt as a lack, were ‘The Silmarillion’ to be published – and not only by readers with a particular liking for them.”<sup>459</sup> Indeed, while the leap between *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* is vast in its own right (although on the surface both seem to treat the same adventurous ‘hobbit matter’), the leap between *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Silmarillion* is vaster still. What is merely glimpsed in *The Lord of the Rings*, through intermittent yet somehow always elusive mention of old epic songs, ancient histories and the old world’s song and lore, this entire ‘secret world’ is openly present within *The Silmarillion*. The very doors of Faërie are here unlocked and passage

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<sup>457</sup> *LotR* I: 2.

<sup>458</sup> The year 1914 is connected to the ‘Eärendel poems’. The prose form of the legendarium, however, was not developed until 1916-1917.

<sup>459</sup> *Forward to HoMe* I, p. vii. See: *LT* 182, p. 265.

freely given. Sadly, some critics interpret such proximity to the ‘source’ as a narrative flaw rather than a beautiful gift. For Tom Shippey, the abundance of these glimpses in *The Lord of The Rings* created a “Beowulfian ‘impression of depth,’”<sup>460</sup> a quality which was then utterly lost to *The Silmarillion* due to the ‘immediate’ presence of that which is otherwise only glimpsed. “How could ‘depth’ be created,” asks Shippey, “when you had nothing to reach further back to?”<sup>461</sup> What is more, Shippey continues, there is no respect for “novelistic convention”<sup>462</sup> in *The Silmarillion* because there is no single character to follow, and no mediation, like in the case of *The Hobbit*’s Bilbo Baggins “who acts as the link between modern times and the archaic world of dwarves and dragons.”<sup>463</sup>

With regard to the ‘missing link’, Christopher lamentingly admits, six years after his edition of *The Silmarillion*, that there was a hint in his late father’s writing that pointed towards such a link, although “(wrongly, as I think now) I was reluctant to step into the breach and make definite what I only surmised.”<sup>464</sup> Obviously, Christopher is alluding to the ‘Ælfwine material’ and the supportive framework for *The Silmarillion* that once existed, before it too was lost, like the ‘Lost Tales’ it had once given frame to. As for *The Silmarillion*, many misapprehensions arose from this “version of the primary ‘legendarium’ standing on its own and claiming, as it were, to be self-explanatory,” with the unforeseeable result of adding “a further dimension of obscurity to ‘The Silmarillion’, in that uncertainty about the age of the work, whether it is to be regarded as ‘early’ or ‘late’ or in what proportions, and about the degree of editorial intrusion and manipulation (or even invention).”<sup>465</sup> Christopher was clearly dismayed by the conclusions certain critics had reached, and three of these conclusions in particular seem to have weighed especially heavily on him. Consequently, to these conclusions Christopher would pay special heed in his 1983 “Forward” to *The Book of Lost Tales*, making the very publication of the book (and ultimately the entirety of the *History*) his way of answering these charges and clearing out the ‘obscurities’.

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<sup>460</sup> Shippey, 2003, p. 228.

<sup>461</sup> Shippey, 2003, p. 171.

<sup>462</sup> Shippey, 2003, p. 185.

<sup>463</sup> Shippey, 2003, pp. 185-186.

<sup>464</sup> *Forward to HoMe I*, p. x.

<sup>465</sup> *Forward to HoMe I*, p. vii.

The first conclusion Christopher addresses (virtually in the opening lines to his “Forward”), simultaneously the most wide-ranging one, is that *The Silmarillion* “is a ‘difficult’ book, needing explanation and guidance on how to ‘approach’ it.”<sup>466</sup> Perhaps the fact that such a conclusion was wide-ranging did not affect Christopher as much as the fact that this was accentuated by Shippey, whose critical voice surely resounds louder than many others. Shippey’s formulation, which is indeed rather regrettable, is that “*The Silmarillion* could never be anything but hard to read.”<sup>467</sup> Obviously, such a statement (as well as the catalogue of ‘flaws’ with which he charges the work) must simply be ascribed to a lack of certain taste (perhaps appetite is a more suitable word) for the specific kind of mythopoeic wonder, which marks *The Silmarillion*. Shippey’s treatment of *The Silmarillion* is no more surprising than the fact that there are also readers of one William Blake (even fond readers) who simply do not have the appetite for his mythopoeic works, admittedly cryptic – readers who indeed find these “hard to read” and insufferable to digest. Yet, there are also those who find in Blake’s mythopoeia an indispensable element for the understanding of the whole, who revel in these offered glimpses however enigmatic these might be, who do not mind the “hard work” of deciphering, but in fact delight in it. Shippey’s allegiance, quite palpably, belongs to *The Lord of the Rings*. Even when he references *The Silmarillion*, one feels he does so almost forcefully. There can be no doubt *The Silmarillion* comes into Shippey’s system ‘secondly, although inevitably’ – much in the same way Men enter into Tolkien’s Arda.<sup>468</sup> Despite the fact that Shippey’s aesthetic considerations may have pained Christopher, his literary taste cannot – and should not – be held against him. Nonetheless, Christopher seizes on one last opportunity to reproach Shippey for being “clearly reluctant” to see *The Silmarillion* “as other than a ‘late’ work, even the latest work of its author,” despite “my assurance that a ‘very high proportion’ of the 1937 ‘Silmarillion’ text remained into the published version.”<sup>469</sup> Whilst Christopher’s retorts to Shippey’s ‘misconceptions’ are sharp and his dissatisfaction rather unconcealed, what clearly aggravated him even more was the conclusion reached by

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<sup>466</sup> *Forward to HoMe I*, p. i.

<sup>467</sup> Shippey, 2003, p. 201.

<sup>468</sup> Quite the opposite seems to be true of Verlyn Flieger, who clearly sees “*The Silmarillion* – by which I mean the legendarium as a whole, including *The Lord of the Rings*,” as the crucial piece in the Tolkienian puzzle (Flieger, 2002, p. 98).

<sup>469</sup> *Forward to HoMe I*, p. v.

Randel Helms in *Tolkien and the Silmarils*. Identifying a “long-standing problem in literary criticism,” of which, “*The Silmarillion* is a classic example,” Helms goes on to ask, “what, really, is a literary work? Is it what the author intended (or may have intended) it to be or what a later editor makes of it?”<sup>470</sup> While this is certainly a legitimate question, the nature of Helms’ inquiry reveals a rather unconcealed projection of the ‘corrupted state’ of *The Silmarillion* text. “Christopher Tolkien has helped us in this instance,” Helms continues, rubbing salt on the wound, “by honestly pointing out that *The Silmarillion* in the shape that we have it is the invention of the son not the father.”<sup>471</sup> In a similar vein, Constance B. Hieatt lamentingly pronounces it “very clear indeed that we shall never be able to see the progressive steps of authorial thinking behind *The Silmarillion*.”<sup>472</sup>

Obviously, no one at the time could possibly have fathomed the fine precision of Christopher’s editorial enterprise, or the meticulousness with which he approached the task. Perhaps these misconceptions could have been avoided had Christopher simply provided a more extensive background to the compositional process of the work, and the editorial process behind it, other than his brief and rather vague 1977 “Forward” to *The Silmarillion*. In his own admittance, “The published work has no ‘framework’, no suggestion of what it is and how (within the imagined world) it came to be. This I now think to have been an error.”<sup>473</sup> It is debatable, however, whether this was truly an error or merely another misconception (this time, Christopher’s) helped by the indictment raised by the critics. At any rate, Christopher clearly felt inculpated, and very eager to prove that *The Silmarillion* of 1977 was *not* in fact a mere editorial “invention of the son” or “the latest work of its author.” Since his ‘assurances’ have clearly proven to be of no avail, Christopher decided to allow the world to “see the progressive steps of authorial thinking behind *The Silmarillion*” for themselves. He revealed it *all*.

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<sup>470</sup> Helms, Randel: *Tolkien and the Silmarils*, Houghton Mifflin, New York, 1981, p. 93.

<sup>471</sup> Helms, *op. cit.*, p. 94. It is interesting to note that Helms posed similar questions, and reached similar conclusions, regarding *The Bible* as well. Aside from *Tolkien's world* (1974), and *Tolkien and the Silmarils* (1981), Randel Helms, avid proponent of historical criticism, also authored *Gospel Fictions* (1988), *Who wrote the Gospels?* (1997) and *The Bible against itself* (2006). Sadly, we will never know what Tolkien would make of his claims.

<sup>472</sup> *Forward to HoMe I*, p. iii.

<sup>473</sup> *Ibid.*

Step by step, from 1983 to 1996, Christopher published the twelve volumes of *History*, history of the envisioning and textual shaping of Arda (and Middle-earth within it), providing even the obscurest of Tolkien's handwritten notes, followed up with detailed commentary. The first five volumes, together with volumes ten and eleven, pursue the history of the making of 'The Silmarillion,' whereas volumes six to nine, and again twelve, predominantly include poetry, notes and stories that follow and examine *The Lord of the Rings*.<sup>474</sup> The significance of these is certainly *invaluable*, not only because they shed light on the work of Tolkien, but also because they reveal the creative process of genius, such as is *hardly ever* accessible to criticism. It must also be observed, in light of this reflection, that Constance B. Heatt's remark is rather peculiar in itself, as it is virtually foundationless to expect any *real* abundance of 'progressive steps' *vis-à-vis* the work of *any* author to be revealed, or even to exist, regardless of whether the work in question is 'edited' by the author himself or by another. Franz Kafka's *The Trial* comes to mind, Friedrich Nietzsche's *Will to Power*, Leo Tolstoy's *Hadji Murat*, and certainly also Carl Gustav Jung's *The Red Book* – to mention only a few of the famous posthumous editions, around which may well exist a certain background, a *story* if we will, but no real *record* of the 'progressive steps' there taken before the authors' arrival at their respective destinations. Being allowed entrance into an author's secret depository of discarded notes, provisional drafts and superseded story versions is certainly a rare privilege in the literary realm, especially since these obscurities (while also jewels), if not already destroyed, are intentionally hidden from the world by the author, as undisclosed notes to himself, never meant for close inspection by the reading public, and certainly not meant for the sharp teeth of criticism, one's entrails turned inside out and displayed for the monsters to have their feast.<sup>475</sup>

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<sup>474</sup> To this colossal editorial undertaking Christopher Tolkien would add various other titles, the most prominent of which are certainly the *Unfinished Tales of Numenor and Middle-earth* (1980) and *The Children of Húrin* (2007). The first is a collection of scattered tales that provide background to the world of Arda (like the origins of *Istari* the wizards, romances of Galadriel and Celeborn, or the meeting of Aragorn and Arwen), while the latter is a single story woven out of the many extant versions of the *Tale of Túrin* (and his sister Niniel).

<sup>475</sup> Critics like Tom Shippey question whether Tolkien's unfinished and/or discarded writings should ever have been published at all. While such hesitations clearly refer to the *History*, we must keep in mind that the 'Silmarillion' never would have seen the light of day either had a recipe been applied! It is interesting to note that a similar debate currently revolves around the latest publication of Tolkien's translation of *Beowulf* (Tolkien, J. R. R.: *Beowulf: A Translation and Commentary, with Sellic Spell*, ed. Christopher Tolkien, HarperCollins, London, 2014). Notwithstanding several outbursts of poetic genius, the word-for-word translation is hardly inspirational. Created for the purposes of language-study, it was

Nevertheless, the twelve-course banquet had been served and, to use Tolkien's own metaphor, both the 'soup' and the 'bones of the ox' were offered to the feasting guests (rather expectedly, some decided to savor the taste and others to gnaw at the bones). The first dish served was *The Book of Lost Tales*, described by Christopher as "the first substantial work of imaginative literature by J. R. R. Tolkien."<sup>476</sup> However, the degree to which this work qualifies as substantial is rather questionable. Even Christopher goes on to admit that the 'Lost Tales' "never reached or even approached a form in which my father could have considered their publication before he abandoned them; they were experimental and provisional, and the tattered notebooks in which they were written were bundled away and left unlooked at as the years passed."<sup>477</sup> In the wake of the publication of the *Lost Tales*, many riddles were left, as the book paradoxically raised more questions than in answered (just as *The Silmarillion* did, six years before).

On one hand, it revealed the earliest, fairly naïve, mythic vision of its then young creator, which in comparison to the mature style of the published *Silmarillion* seemed like children's play (which it actually referenced). On the other hand, it ascertained the scope of the undertaking Christopher had taken upon himself, in not only the compiling and the editing of *The Silmarillion* according to his late father's final revisions and instructions, but also in the careful reconstruction of the many transitions within Tolkien's Saga that he systematized and successively published with extensive and detailed commentary. Ultimately, it showed Tolkien had truly written not only *The Lord of the Rings* but the entirety of his Saga in his very 'life's blood', offering virtually every fiber of his imagination to the quest for a 'perfect fit' of each piece in the grand puzzle of Arda. It quickly became clear that to each of Tolkien's Tales there was in existence more than one version, of finished, fragmented or interrupted text, and that oftentimes a tale would be told both in prose and in verse (one version abandoned for the sake of the other). Christopher's commentary revealed that some rewritings occurred rather instantly and that in many cases the newly composed versions written out in ink would overlay the previously penciled out plot outlines. To aggravate matters, at least

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clearly never intended for publication. Many Tolkien scholars today find it nigh on insulting that such a work was published, contrary to Tolkien's intention.

<sup>476</sup> *Forward to HoMe I*, p. i.

<sup>477</sup> *Forward to HoMe I*, p. viii.



from the textual viewpoint, since Tolkien during this time “used bound notebooks rather than loose sheets, he was liable to find himself short of space: so detached portions of tales were written in the middle of other tales, and in places a fearsome textual jigsaw puzzle was produced.”<sup>478</sup> Moving away from the earliest compendium, Tolkien was enlisting changes of literary style (mostly in favor of abandoning the many archaic and obsolete words). Some of the structural concepts also underwent major transitions (ranging from a shift in the framework of the story to the change in the physical shape of Arda itself). The same was true of names – at times, even a single manuscript would hold sever name variables written out and rejected in turn. Even more puzzlingly, sometimes a name used to signify one thing would receive an entirely different application while another would then take its place.<sup>479</sup> This was not only the case with the ‘Silmarillion’ matter. As later volumes of *History* disclosed, that the same ‘niggling’ process was applied to *The Lord of the Rings* as well. Perhaps one of the fundamental questions, or riddles, Christopher’s *History* leaves us with is this: how do these findings relate to our understanding of Tolkien’s genius, and the inner workings of his creative process?

Tom Shippey asks the same question in the expanded second edition of *Road to Middle-earth*. Shippey commences the newly added chapter on ‘The Course of Actual Composition’ with the invocation of Tolkien’s bones-of-the-ox metaphor. “By ‘the soup’,” Shippey quotes on Tolkien, “I mean the story as it is served up by the author or teller, and by ‘the bones’ its sources or material.”<sup>480</sup> Curiously, Shippey takes this to mean, “critics should study stories in their final forms, as ‘served up’ or published, not in their *intermediate* stages.”<sup>481</sup> Clearly, Shippey’s ‘interpretation’ of Tolkien’s metaphor is tailored to suit his assail on Christopher’s *History*, most likely in response to the treatment he received in the *Forward* to its volume. Rather assertively, Shippey concludes that “much of ‘The History of Middle-earth’ demands to be taken as ‘ox-bones’.”<sup>482</sup> However, Shippey’s claim is rather briskly dismantled by Gergely Nagy,

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<sup>478</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>479</sup> For instance, the house of Elves referred to as the *Teleri* in the original ‘Lost Tales’ would become the *Vanyar* within the ‘Silmarillion,’ while another house of the Elves originally called the *Solosimpi* would then become known as the *Teleri*.

<sup>480</sup> Shippey, 2003, p. 289 (*FS*, p. 120.)

<sup>481</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>482</sup> *Ibid.*

who observes that Tolkien does not necessarily imply only the stories in their final form. “The comment can refer to any individual version in which the story appears, and thus the very complex of (even the unfinished) versions becomes meaningful, not a soup but a menu.”<sup>483</sup> Nagy is certainly right to detect that Shippey’s interpretation “does not assign full importance to this corpus.”<sup>484</sup> In fact, Shippey seems perhaps too eager to discredit its merit. Yet, what Shippey, the founder of Tolkienian *source criticism*, seems to neglect, or deliberately ignore, is that Tolkien’s rendering of the ‘bones’ quite explicitly points to *sources*, and ultimately warns against all such excavations. Not that Shippey’s work should be denied its own merit, but perhaps he should avoid casting the first ‘bone’. Paradoxically, reactions of critics like Shippey, including Shippey, were precisely what drove Christopher to publish the *History* material in the first place.

Putting aside the little bone-throwing game that appears to transpire between Christopher and Shippey, Shippey’s bewilderment at certain segments revealed throughout the *History* should be taken as genuine, as surely any other reader of this ‘fearsome textual jigsaw’ can corroborate. “It is a surprise to learn that Aragorn could ever have been a name for a horse,” Shippey writes. “All this comes as a shock.”<sup>485</sup> Indeed, when taken out of context, many of these instances seem difficult to imagine – Beren being an Elf, Aragorn nicknamed Trotter instead of Strider, the Ring ever considered harmless, the noble Elves called Gnomes. Shippey’s qualm with these occurrences is that Tolkien does not seem to have “started off with meaning; rather with sound.”<sup>486</sup> Shippey is certainly right, Tolkien was discovering things as he went along – he even admitted to this on various occasions. In the letter to Auden, Tolkien says some of the encounters with the characters *surprised* him, while others seemed more familiar.<sup>487</sup> It is true that Tolkien started with sound (over meaning), but only because,

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<sup>483</sup> Nagy, Gergely: “Book review: Tom Shippey, *The Road to Middle-earth: Revised and Expanded Edition* by Tom Shippey,” pp. 258-261 in *Tolkien Studies: An Annual Scholarly Review*, Vol. 2, 2005, West Virginia University Press, p. 259.

<sup>484</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>485</sup> Shippey, 2003, p. 291.

<sup>486</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>487</sup> *LT* 163, p. 230. Tolkien writes: “I met a lot of things on the way that astonished me. Tom Bombadil I knew already; but I had never been to Bree. Strider sitting in the corner at the inn was a shock, and I had no more idea who he was than had Frodo. The Mines of Moria had been a mere name; and of Lothlórien no word had reached my mortal ears till I came there. Far away I knew there were the Horse-lords on the confines of an ancient Kingdom of Men, but Fangorn Forest was an unforeseen adventure. I had never heard of the House of Eorl nor of the Stewards of Gondor. Most disquieting of all, Saruman had

for Tolkien, it was sound that *discerned* meaning. Like in his Creational Tale, where initial communication is achieved precisely through sound, melody yet unshaped into word, sound itself *being* the meaning. Tolkien would write out names in succession, until he would *recognize* the right one, the “true name.” In the beginning, Tolkien was unaware of the Ring’s properties, just like Bilbo. He would have to *discover the truth*. One can imagine such a process resembling Gandalf’s seventeen-year-long (!) pursuit of the true origin of the Ring.

Regrettably, for Shippey, this ultimately cancels out the possibility of the author’s Grand Design. “Discovering that the author does not have a guiding star, and is trying things out at random, can be a disillusionment,” he explains, “as can the realisation that the Grand Design (the Silmarils, the nature of the Ring) was in fact one of the last things to be noticed.”<sup>488</sup> Finally, Shippey ends by concluding that “the real danger in picking over ‘the bones of the ox’” lies in the fact it poses “a threat to our general notion of creativity.”<sup>489</sup> Yet, surely, this depends on the nature of our notion of creativity! The fact that Tolkien did not have the entire plot of a work, which otherwise took decades to develop, set out in his mind *all at once* and *a priori*, hardly disproves the existence of a design. Moreover, Shippey seems to be equating the Grand Design with the Ring or the Silmaril, clearly oversimplifying the concept. However important these symbols may be, they represent no more than the manifestation (‘translation into form’) and the (laborious!) *shaping* of a vision one is given (remember the Ainur’s astonishment upon their realization that vision/design is theirs yet to *achieve*). Surely, creativity entails more than ready-made solutions. Tolkien did not discover the Ring or the Silmaril easily, just as Hope is not easily won in Tolkien’s world. Yet, Tolkien’s Eärendil, ‘the Star of High Hope,’ has been present from the very beginning. Indeed, the light of that star is a splintered one – it takes time, and laborious toiling, to bring to fruition visions with which one is blessed. Even if we accept Tolkien was frequently niggling (or

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never been revealed to me, and I was as mystified as Frodo at Gandalf’s failure to appear on September 22. I knew nothing of the Palantíri, though the moment the Orthanc-stone was cast from the window, I recognized it, and knew the meaning of the ‘rhyme of lore’ that had been running in my mind: seven stars and seven stones and one white tree. These rhymes and names will crop up; but they do not always explain themselves. I have yet to discover anything about the cats of Queen Berúthiel...”

<sup>488</sup> Shippey, 2003, p. 294.

<sup>489</sup> *Ibid.*

fiddling, as Shippey says), with the curtain of *History* rising, the light of Tolkien's imagination shines ever so bright.

## CONCLUSION

*The light shines in the darkness, and the  
darkness has not overcome it.*<sup>490</sup>

In 1979, the late Professor Kocher asked a fundamental question: ‘Is Middle-earth an Imaginary world?’ and his answer has not since been surpassed: “Yes, but –”<sup>491</sup> To build on Kocher’s question (and answer), we must now, finally, ask – Can modern man in all validity assume the role of a true mythmaker? Can one man’s imagination give rise to the feeling of sacred in approaching the Source, thus touching on what Eliade terms the “sacred origin”? Can it provide the lost solace in a moment of dire need (amidst catastrophes of history) in its *practice* of Art? Can it create by sub-creating and thus reach the truth if but presenting us with one ‘imaginary’ possibility? We are inclined to say – yes, even if it is “only a fool’s hope.” For, to claim otherwise, would not only mean to accept that Myth is dead, but, worse still, to accept that all Art is merely a beautiful delusion (sometimes, or to some, not even beautiful!). Lastly, yet perhaps most disgracefully, it would mean to settle for that role of “the *neurotic* mythmaker”<sup>492</sup> that Ernest Becker so ominously assigned to modern man: a gruesome portrait of a man who, deprived of myth, resorts to personal neurotic fiction (a sort of *mythomania*) in order to confront the pandemonium of modern life. Certainly, this is quite along the lines of Eliade’s great exclamation that all modern man’s *anxieties* can be traced to the abandonment of myth and subsequent feeling of sacred.<sup>493</sup> Ultimately, the loss of feeling of sacred leads into modern day Mordor, a Faulknerian reality, where in the battle against *time* (and, as some modern day strivings enforce, battle against God), man resorts to the pandemonium of personal fiction (including personal myth) ultimately *against himself* and to a life-denying degree.<sup>494</sup>

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<sup>490</sup> *John*, 1: 5 (ESV).

<sup>491</sup> Kocher, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

<sup>492</sup> Becker, Ernest: *The Denial of Death*, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1974, p. 199, emphasis mine.

<sup>493</sup> This is, sadly, especially true of Tolkien’s beloved England, one of the most secular European countries, thus perhaps in the direst need of a “sign”.

<sup>494</sup> See: David, William M.: *The Mythic Conquest of Time in Faulkner’s Fiction*, University of New Orleans Theses and Dissertations, Paper 1420, 2010.

In *Myth and Reality*, Eliade points out, “there is always the struggle against Time, the hope to be freed from the weight of ‘dead Time,’ of the Time that crushes and kills.”<sup>495</sup> Tolkien answered that struggle by creating imaginary time, and an imaginary past. Yet, it is not the past that once gave utterance to myth that Tolkien ultimately attempted to resurrect, although certain criticism seems to be particularly fond of such interpretations. Tolkien’s search for lost tradition reaches into depths that surpass mere attempts at imaginative reconstructions of things past. Tolkien delves into realms where literature itself – along with language – becomes not only a field through which art is released, but also a *living body*. Tolkien reverted to creational and developmental patterns of both language and literature to pose (and answer) questions about origin, that “remote Origo”<sup>496</sup> he addresses in the poem *Mythopoeia*. Tolkien’s gaze was directed into the past not in the effort to reconstruct it, but rather strove, in taking the path towards the past, to grasp the meaning behind the equation of the creational pattern and recreate (within the human mind) the forgotten path back to the sacred source. This did not only refer to the restoration of the belief in God, although Tolkien’s own religious conviction inexorably colored portions of that path (which certain criticism often held against him or, perhaps even more detrimentally, over-accentuated to the point of disregard of all other aspects). Tolkien’s quest denotes the return of *sacred values* that dictate both man’s inner state of being and his treatment of ‘the other’, thus the belief in those principles that Tolkien felt ought to be hallowed and consequently upheld. Among the most prominent of these principles is certainly the notion of fellowship, the unity between the self and the other, in terms of not only other beings, but also extending onto the treatment of nature as the other (essentially outspreading otherness onto the entirety of the created universe). Nature itself, being in direct opposition to the artificial, occupied hallowed ground in Tolkien’s mind, as a haven to the creative. As Benjamin reminds us, “the righteous man is the advocate of created things”<sup>497</sup> and the “storyteller is the figure in which the righteous man encounters himself.”<sup>498</sup>

The righteous man, in Tolkien’s world, does not only fight against outer evil but, more importantly, against **inner decay**. Tolkien expressed the idea of inner evil/decay

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<sup>495</sup> Eliade, 1963, *op. cit.*, p. 193.

<sup>496</sup> *MP*, v. 18.

<sup>497</sup> Benjamin, *op. cit.*, p. 375.

<sup>498</sup> Benjamin, *op. cit.*, p. 377.

as the human state *i.e.* possibility of Fall, to which, along with the themes of Mortality and Machine, he gave a central role in his writings, as the more palpable and in a certain way more earthly forms (effectively, consequences) of man's attitude to creation. On one hand, reflected within Tolkien's imaginarium, is man's attitude toward the created world, as the 'other', and the resulting possibilities of understanding and approaching that given otherness. On the other hand, Tolkien points us towards the idea that *man as part of the created world is himself created* and that man as creator mirrors that sacred pattern in which he is made ('the created creator'). Tolkien recognized that the possibilities for the treatment of these notions are to be found quite naturally inside the field of art, due to the most immediate presence of the ideas of creation and creativity as key concepts to define it. Yet, rather than debating artistic creation, Tolkien made art both the contextual backdrop and the agency by means of which he integrated the three 'earthly' themes (deeply interconnected themselves) into the fabric of his Saga. Certainly, these mirror the human fear of – and preoccupation with – mortality, expressed not only as fear of death (although this is its most obvious form) but also as fear of transience and the desire to leave behind something immortal. This can be understood not *only* in terms of artistic creation, yet it clearly encompasses artistic urge to an extensive degree – that deep-rooted need with no apparent biological function. Perhaps most prominent in the equation is the fear of losing the sense of worth and, thus, meaning and aim, which effectively opens the possibility of the fall *i.e.* the collapse of inner values (decay) and distorts creativity into destructiveness (also meaning into meaninglessness). Consequently, it shapes not only the inner structure of the being, breeding Becker's neurotic mythmakers – and Tolkien's Saurons – but dictates the treatment of the outer world, the result of which is inevitably the machine, a man-made shrine to artificiality and meaninglessness that operates on the deconstruction of values.

Although the opening cosmogony of *The Silmarillion* directly treats the Creation, and thus quite explicitly involves the Sacred as the source, the given explicitness of the Creator's presence wanes as the story unfolds. That is, as the Saga moves out of the cosmogonic drama itself, and into the narrative perspective of free-willed beings (initially Elves and later Men), the creatural or, rather, creative force is transferred onto them – onto the individual. Even when Tolkien narratively treats beings within the

scope of race, it is quite possible to see the given race as a single character – it is even possible, if not at times also necessary, to see the fellowship as a single character! Simultaneously, religious truth becomes embedded into, and expressed through, the manner in which any given individual makes use of it (much like in the way individuals make use of power), in accordance with free will. It exists, therefore, in the form of pattern and principle rather than explicit presence (this transference already becomes evident within *The Silmarillion* but is carried out to the fullest and is hence most visible throughout *The Lord of the Rings*). Art, Tolkien believed, ought to renounce any and all attempts to treat religious truths explicitly,<sup>499</sup> and he held true to that course to the point of treating not only religion but even art itself merely implicitly, thus in turn implying that art was a part of the religious truth, a part of the truth-revealing sacred and creation-bearing secret. Essentially, both the relation of man toward the sacred, and toward art as the mode of its expression, *i.e.* to the creational reality (and potential) of both, grant the vital philosophical framework to Tolkien's Saga. At the same time, these translate onto the more earthly narrative plane (descending, like the Ainur, from a realm "beyond the confines of time" into Middle-earth<sup>500</sup>) as notions of Fall, Mortality and the Machine.

Middle-earth, as the central battlefield of successive wars against darkness, and the earthly groundwork upon which the main themes are played out, is essentially an *image of Man himself*. Man is what Tolkien saw when he gazed into the cosmic dark. Man was the middle-ground and the battle-ground (in the Great Chain of Being), and his was the Shadow that modernity reflected. Tolkien understood that modern day darkness was not a matter of materialism casting its shadow upon man; quite the contrary, man was casting his shadow upon life. Man was the artificer of the machine; artificial construction had no life of its own and no meaning outside of what Man 'conducted' into it. Effectively, the central stage of Tolkien's writings is the inner being of man, the battleground riddled by the 'darkness' of the psyche, that is, by the reality of the unknown, the field of the unconscious. To the vastness of the inner realm, that is, to the intangible scope of inner reality, Tolkien matched the vastness and the intangibility of fantasy (imagination) *i.e.* fantastic reality. ***Tolkien's imaginary reality is rather a reality of the imaginary, of the fantasy within the being.*** The Saga reveals not only a

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<sup>499</sup>See: *LT* 131, p. 167.

<sup>500</sup>*Sil*, p. 21.



story about the creation of man, but the creation that happens inside man *i.e.* the process of the creation (birth) of thought – and the ensuing ‘state of war’ exposes the battlefield upon which creative and destructive thoughts (and feelings) persistently collide, creating a battle between ‘good’ and ‘evil’. Essentially, *Man is Middle-Earth*, and in all but explicit form of statement, yet quite vividly in the philosophical undercurrent, Tolkien’s Saga is a testimony of the evolution of human thought, *a fantastic history of human spirit*. The implicit religious truth that continually resurfaces throughout the Saga and underlines the ‘epic state of battle’ (transpiring both on the outer and inner plane), points to the existence of an inner religion, religious truth of the inner being (individual system of belief which draws from an inbuilt sense of morality, *i.e.* understanding of ‘right’ and ‘wrong’). Tolkien’s ‘imagined man’, simultaneously the ‘man who imagines’ (*the created creator*), the shaper of his own imaginary reality (inner realm) and the conductor of inner religion into outer reality, is a ‘magical’ being of thought, endowed with free-willed potential of acting upon his thoughts within the outside world. The highest creative potential that a man wields lies precisely in this ‘magical’ (fairy-story) ability to translate vision into reality, to take part in the shaping of reality, essentially by means of thought, as an active ingredient in the act (art) of creation. Therefore, we must shift the perspective of interpretation from the idea of artificial (or imaginary) reality, onto the awareness of the reality of the imaginary instead. In result, we shall discover that Tolkien’s ‘imaginary mythology’ is rather a **mythology of the imaginary**. It is a mythology of the inner reality of man, even mythology of fantasy itself (if fantasy is understood as inner creative potential, not in the *act of making* but in the *art of envisioning*), hardly ‘artificial’ in its expression of the creative being. Moreover, we perceive that the inner reality of the individual has its own creational tale, its history, poetry, quests and epic journeys, tragedies and romances. Quite naturally, it also possess its very own mythology – inner and rather elaborate system of symbols and associated meanings – and just as expectedly, its own language (again, *language of the imaginary*, that is, language of fantasy, and equally, language of the soul). As for the fairy-story, it too has a place within the inner being, a hallowed place for Tolkien. The inner fairy-story is precisely the story about the presence of the sacred within man, reflection of the inner belief and inner system of values, the inner

healer and an indispensable element in the battle for the preservation of the inner and outer light.

Tolkien often noted that his concepts (or, rather, stories) evolved out of their names (or, rather, words) and not the other way around.<sup>501</sup> This hints at that alchemical process within language, the magic of words, implying that any single word carries a story within it, a testimony of the life of the concept itself, its creational story, along with the life it has in relation to man – the one who gives a thing its name – in its many fluctuations dependent not only on the difference in languages but also on the different stages in the development of a single language, including ‘imaginary’ languages (we are bound to reflect upon the notion that all words, hence languages, were at some point ‘simply imagined’). Much like in the case of Tolkien’s language ‘invention’, the general conclusion of several interpretative factions (not only the dismissive one) is that Tolkien chiefly created an artificial or an imaginary mythology. Yet, the mythology that belongs to the story reality is just one stone in the entirety of the structure that makes up the fullness of Tolkien’s ‘imaginary world’, which in itself is but a materialization of the sacred thought of God, the imaginary sacred source, shaped into life by the artist, who again achieved this venture by means of imagination. The underlying thought to this fusion is that imagination is the vessel of the Sacred, furthered to imply (in accordance with the creational opening of *The Silmarillion*), that Man himself was once imagined by the divine force (before his imaginary form was materialized into the world). In turn, the divine Imaginator is accessible to the ‘now’ material and physical man precisely by means of imagination and not through tangible experience. Imagination, then, is the channel of communication with the Sacred and Art its shape giver. Man the artist creates, or as Tolkien puts it ‘sub-creates’, in the way he himself was created, mirroring the ultimate work of art inside of which *man is the imaginary one*.

Where Jung sought to repair the ‘disenchantment of the world’ that had occurred throughout the Enlightenment by returning to mankind a relationship with his unconscious, Tolkien re-forged a path into Imagination by returning to mankind a relationship with the fairy-story. Thus, in the midst of the riddling dark Tolkien set up

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<sup>501</sup> For instance, with reference to the Ents: “As usually with me, they grew rather out of their name, than the other way about” (*LT* 313, p. 221).

his peculiar “jeweled tent / myth-woven and elf-patterned”<sup>502</sup> and fixated his gaze towards the “Perilous realm”, the realm of the nearly forgotten fairy-story. Our storyteller welcomed the childlike naiveté of its form as purity and innocence, as prerequisite for approaching the sacred and unraveling the story about a world where one man’s fantasy may very well create artistic reality, and where man may very well be the wielder of art, but where strange forces were at work. As Tolkien realized, the secret of art was deeply entangled with the secret of life. Man, as the wielder of both, art and life, in the midst of this sacred field where art and life fused into the shape of creation, could not help but feel that in their presence – of the life that was his own to live and the art that was his own to make – he was in fact in the presence of a miracle. These sacred forces were not only his, although they were given to him as his (birth) right. Simultaneously, they were shares of something grater, at once inside and outside of man’s being. Tolkien knew that man, the artist (ultimately, any man), wielder of life and art, was himself part of this miracle, and an active vessel of the sacred creation: a child of the creational art of life and birth-giver to the creational life of art. For Tolkien, Art was an act of sub-creation, the mirror image of the creational force which gave Life to man himself, and the ‘stuff of fairy-story’ became his methodos of expressing (implicitly) man’s relation to the one supreme Artist, out of which arises the potential for both accord and discord within free-willed beings – the choice that shapes reality. These are the insights he had woven into his story and consequently imprinted on the reader. These are the Silmarils of his imagination-craft, brought to us from the heart of the Perilous Realm, and the eucatastrophic intermingling of the Joy, Sorrow and Hope they emanate, shines as a single light, despite the darkness.

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<sup>502</sup> *MP*, vv. 50-51.

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## Biography of the Author

Marija Gičić Puslojić was born on October 14, 1981 in Belgrade, where she lives and works today. In 2006, she graduated in English Language and Literature from the Faculty of Philology, University of Belgrade, where she also received a Master's degree in 2008 (Master's thesis: *Quest for Life: Imagination and Science in Mary Shelley's 'Frankenstein'*). Ever since her earliest student years, Gičić Puslojić has been actively translating, later also interpreting, literature and poetry. She has catalogued numerous publications in literary periodicals, both nation and worldwide, and has insofar translated ten books of poetry and fiction. From 2007 to 2011, she worked at the Faculty for Foreign Languages, ALFA University as a Teaching Assistant (courses: Literary Translation, Romanticism, and Contemporary English). She became an active member of the Association of Literary Translators of Serbia (ALTS) in 2010. That same year she also became a doctoral student of English Literature at the Faculty of Philology, University of Belgrade. Under the mentorship of Prof. Zoran Paunović, she devoted her doctoral research to J. R. R. Tolkien and the study of fantasy.

# Addendum

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Прилог 1.

## Изјава о ауторству

Потписана \_\_\_\_\_ Марија А. Гичић Пуслојић \_\_\_\_\_

број уписа \_\_\_\_\_ 08194д \_\_\_\_\_

Изјављујем

да је докторска дисертација под насловом

**Mythopoetic Imaginarium of J. R. R. Tolkien**

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- резултат сопственог истраживачког рада,
- да предложена дисертација у целини ни у деловима није била предложена за добијање било које дипломе према студијским програмима других високошколских установа,
- да су резултати коректно наведени и
- да нисам кршио/ла ауторска права и користио интелектуалну својину других лица.

Потпис докторанда

У Београду, 04.07.2015.



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Прилог 2.

**Изјава о истоветности штампане и електронске  
верзије докторског рада**

Име и презиме аутора \_\_\_\_\_ Марија А. Гичић Пуслојић \_\_\_\_\_  
Број уписа \_\_\_\_\_ 08194д \_\_\_\_\_  
Студијски програм \_\_\_\_\_ докторске академске студије \_\_\_\_\_  
Наслов рада \_\_\_\_\_ Mythopoetic Imaginarium of J. R. R. Tolkien \_\_\_\_\_  
Ментор \_\_\_\_\_ проф. др Зоран Пауновић \_\_\_\_\_

Потписани \_\_\_\_\_ Марија Гичић Пуслојић \_\_\_\_\_

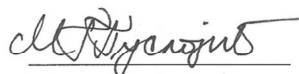
изјављујем да је штампана верзија мог докторског рада истоветна електронској верзији коју сам предала за објављивање на порталу **Дигиталног репозиторијума Универзитета у Београду**.

Дозвољавам да се објаве моји лични подаци везани за добијање академског звања доктора наука, као што су име и презиме, година и место рођења и датум одбране рада.

Ови лични подаци могу се објавити на мрежним страницама дигиталне библиотеке, у електронском каталогу и у публикацијама Универзитета у Београду.

Потпис докторанда

У Београду, 04.07.2015.



Прилог 3.

### Изјава о коришћењу

Овлашћујем Универзитетску библиотеку „Светозар Марковић“ да у Дигитални репозиторијум Универзитета у Београду унесе моју докторску дисертацију под насловом:

**Mythopoetic Imaginarium of J. R. R. Tolkien**

која је моје ауторско дело.

Дисертацију са свим прилозима предала сам у електронском формату погодном за трајно архивирање.

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