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# The Enchanter's Spell: J.R.R. Tolkien's Mythopoetic Response to Modernism

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FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

THE ENCHANTER'S SPELL:

J.R.R. TOLKIEN'S MYTHOPOETIC RESPONSE TO MODERNISM

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

by

Adam D. Gorelick

2013

To: Dean Kenneth G. Furton  
College of Arts and Sciences

This thesis, written by Adam D. Gorelick, and entitled *The Enchanter's Spell: J.R.R. Tolkien's Mythopoetic Response to Modernism*, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgment.

We have read this thesis and recommend that it be approved.

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Oren Baruch Stier

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Whitney Bauman

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Lesley A. Northup, Major Professor

Date of Defense: November 12, 2013

The thesis of Adam D. Gorelick is approved.

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Dean Kenneth G. Furton  
College of Arts and Sciences

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Dean Lakshmi N. Reddi  
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Florida International University, 2013

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my wife, Deborah L. Sherman Gorelick, whom I love profoundly, who has tolerated the time I have spent completing it, and who has brought meaning to my life as well as two beautiful children, Julian Alfred Telperion Gorelick and Elijah Michael Samwise Gorelick.

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS  
THE ENCHANTER'S SPELL:  
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by

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Florida International University, 2013

Miami, Florida

Professor Lesley A. Northup, Major Professor

J.R.R. Tolkien was not only an author of fantasy but also a philologist who theorized about myth. Theorists have employed various methods of analyzing myth, and this thesis integrates several analyses, including Tolkien's. I address the roles of doctrine, ritual, cross-cultural patterns, mythic expressions in literature, the literary effect of myth, evolution of language and consciousness, and individual invention over inheritance and diffusion. Beyond Tolkien's English and Catholic background, I argue for eclectic influence on Tolkien, including resonance with Buddhism.

Tolkien views mythopoeia, literary mythmaking, in terms of sub-creation, human invention in the image of God as creator. Key mythopoetic tools include *eucatastrophe*, the happy ending's sudden turn to poignant joy, and enchantment, the realization of imagined wonder, which is epitomized by the character of Tom Bombadil and contrasted with modernist techno-magic seeking to alter and dominate the world. I conclude by interpreting Tolkien's mythmaking as a form of mysticism.

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## I. INTRODUCTION: J.R.R. TOLKIEN—MYTH AND ENCHANTMENT

The incarnate mind, the tongue, and the tale are in our world coeval. The human mind, endowed with the powers of generalization and abstraction, sees not only *green-grass*, discriminating it from other things (and finding it fair to look upon), but sees that it is *green* as well as being *grass*. But how powerful, how stimulating to the very faculty that produced it, was the invention of the adjective: no spell or incantation in Faerie is more potent. And that is not surprising: such incantations might indeed be said to be only another view of adjectives, a part of speech in a mythical grammar. The mind that thought of *light*, *heavy*, *grey*, *yellow*, *still*, *swift*, also conceived of magic that would make heavy things light and able to fly, turn grey lead into yellow gold, and the still rock into a swift water. If it could do the one, it could do the other; it inevitably did both. When we can take green from grass, blue from heaven, and red from blood, we have already an enchanter's power—upon one plane; and the desire to wield that power in the world external to our minds awakes... But in such “fantasy,” as it is called, new form is made; Faërie begins; Man becomes a sub-creator. (Tolkien, “On Fairy-Stories” 122)

The present thesis grows out of an analysis of the mythic or narrative dimension of religion—the ways in which storytelling is employed to transmit or create ultimate meaning. I will enlist and integrate several theories of myth, explore how mythic themes are expressed in literature, and in particular analyze the literary myth-making of J.R.R. Tolkien, his eclectic use of source material, and his recovery of imagination in response to modernism. Theories about the origin, function, and nature of myth abound in academic discourse, as well they should. What is meant by “myth” varies among practitioners of religious traditions employing myth as sacred story as well as among theorists of various disciplines approaching the topic with differing methods and assumptions. “Myth” as a subject matter is not only attached to particular doctrinal beliefs, ritual practices, and ethical codes, but also generally to the fundamental human

exploration of meaning. As such, what was once considered the purview of traditional religion must be seen in relationship to both older and newer contexts of human expression—older or rather more primary in terms of the fundamental evolution of language and thought, and newer or rather more immediately relevant in terms of “post-religious” contemporary applications of mythic themes, for example in literature.

In the above quotation, Tolkien—famous twentieth-century academic and author of *The Hobbit* (published in 1937) and *The Lord of the Rings* (composed from 1937 to 1949 and published finally in three volumes from 1954 to 1955)—expressed his view of his art form. Originally delivered in a 1939 Andrew Lang lecture at The University of St. Andrews in Scotland and eventually published in essay form, *On Fairy-Stories*—while initially setting out to define the narrow class of folktale called “fairy-story”—is fertile ground for encountering Tolkien’s general philosophy of myth, language, and fantasy. In this important essay, Tolkien makes three points that are immediately relevant to the overall discussion about the origin, nature, and function of myth.

First of all, he identifies a common collective source for the narrative modes of myth, legend, folktale, and history. Tolkien countered the evolutionist assumption that heightened storytelling followed a progression from (a) allegories of nature and myths of personal deities to (b) humanized and localized epics, legends, and sagas about heroes mightier than men to (c) folktales and fairy-stories. “That would seem to be the truth almost upside down... There is no fundamental difference between the higher and lower mythologies” (123). In

other words, it is entirely too simplistic to insist on hard distinctions among religious myth, heroic legend, and common folktale. Each can offer access to ultimate meaning, which I am generally saying is illuminated by the mythic element of storytelling. In his essay, Tolkien employs a helpful allegory to stress the point that this common collective source for the various narrative modes of myth, legend, folktale, and history has always been in flux: “We may say that the Pot of Soup, the Cauldron of Story, has always been boiling, and to it have continually been added new bits, dainty and undainty” (125). In this way, he explains how over the course of time and the transmission of tales, sometimes historical figures “got into the Soup. They were just new bits added to the stock” (126). Rather than simply endorsing euhemerism, Tolkien shows how myth and history can draw from the same collective “soup.” He is skeptical of those claiming absolute knowledge of the “bones of the ox out of which it has been boiled,” which is to say that he was generally skeptical of source criticism and much more interested in the story itself “as it is served up by its author or teller... But I do not, of course, forbid criticism of the soup as soup” (120).

Thus I come to the second immediately relevant point that Tolkien argues in his essay, which is the supreme role of invention over against inheritance and diffusion. In comparing and analyzing these modes of storytelling, and in looking at individual stories, Tolkien does not merely give way to broad universalism when he invokes his “Pot of Soup” but instead champions the particularity of individual authorship. After all, studies of stories or story elements may reveal something of their process of diffusion (“borrowing in space”) and inheritance

(“borrowing in time”), but at the center of diffusion is “a place where once an inventor lived” or similarly with inheritance “an ancestral inventor” (121). “There are many things in the Cauldron, but the Cooks do not dip in the ladle quite blindly. Their selection is important” (128). Invention is ultimately the most mysterious factor when contemplating the creation and evolution of myth and mythic tales, but it is by far the most important factor. While myth is collective in nature and depends upon social transmission, that transmission is successful because a teller has employed or chosen to retain a certain literary effect. I would describe this effect as trans-rational. Tolkien says that 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” (129). Therefore, whatever else myth may be—explanatory, prescriptive, institutional—it is by definition a literary or poetic matter and capable of facilitating transformative experience. While I will not prohibit myself from source criticism simply because Tolkien mistrusted it, I find his emphasis on individual authorship and poetic effect very telling in exploring the literary application of myth.

Tolkien’s third point that I will immediately highlight concerns how the mythic in literature—e.g., fairy-story, fantasy, etc.--facilitates transformative experience. In the lead quotation above, he spoke of an “enchanter’s power” to create “new form” simply by employing the process of abstraction inherent in the use of adjectives: “a part of speech in a mythical grammar.” I should note that Tolkien did not suggest that a fantasist automatically achieves this kind of enchantment simply by throwing around some non-realism or using a few

adjectives. On the contrary, much of the beginning of Tolkien's essay (109-119) is dedicated to defining his genre by weeding out the many failures. That Tolkien himself was successful in achieving the poetic effect of enchantment is difficult to refute if for no other reason than because of the commercial success of his fiction and because of reports from those experiencing his work directly. It is unjust to criticize Tolkien's work without having read it (though exceedingly many have done so) or blaming him for the cheapness of some of his later imitators in the sword and sorcery genre. Ultimately, when Tolkien speaks of opening a door on "Other Time"—foreshadowing my discussion of Mircea Eliade below—it is clear that there is something almost religious or sacred going on, and that is borne out by Tolkien's purpose and by the experience of his readers, who actively participate in imaging the secondary world that Tolkien outlined. When he says, "Man becomes a sub-creator," he is explicitly invoking religion, namely the cosmology of his own Catholicism: "God created man in His own image" (Genesis 1:27). Tolkien took that image seriously and interpreted it to mean that human beings contribute with their creativity to the divine fulfillment of the primary world—of which a fictional or secondary world is but a subset: "we make still by the law in which we're made" (144). Therefore, for Tolkien, doing fantasy well involved employing first of all a sub-creative art that paid homage to the rational experience of the primary world—thus giving to the work "the inner consistency of reality" (138)—and second of all "a quality of strangeness and wonder in the Expression, derived from the Image" (139). In rare cases, such

fantasy could command or induce secondary belief (139), true image-making, imagination: the tale was true while the reader was inside of it.

Consequently, I would summarize Tolkien's view of his art form as follows. The implication of sub-creation is the human fulfillment of divine truth by way of creative writing. The truly mythic in storytelling is characterized by a certain poetic effect of wonder induced by an encounter with new form. Individual authors—accessing a collective “cauldron” of history, myth, legend, and tale—sub-create this new form and if skillful, facilitate for readers a transformative experience of enchantment—enchantment as distinct from magic (which is for Tolkien the attempt to alter the primary world for the sake of power and domination). Enchantment, on the other hand, does not dominate but rather allows readers a moment of justifiable escape from the banal and repressive burdens of modern life, the recovery of a clear perspective, and the appreciation of human language and of the natural world at large (145-153). However, perhaps most importantly, what this experience of enchantment facilitates for readers is consolation: “the Consolation of the Happy Ending. Almost I would venture to assert that all complete fairy-stories must have it” (153). Tolkien coins the term *eucaastrophe* for this purpose: “the sudden joyous ‘turn’...giving a fleeting glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief” (153). He admits that doing the happy ending well is not easy: it depends upon the whole story and upon the imminent probability of *dyscaastrophe*, of sorrow and failure, to set up the sudden turn to a “piercing glimpse of joy, and heart's desire, that for a moment passes outside the frame, rends the very web of story,

and lets a gleam through” (153-154). Thus I interpret Tolkien as suggesting that, in order to facilitate enchantment and consolation, the sub-creator must be receptive to something outside of self and outside of story—something transcendent, trans-rational, and sacred. These ideas are for me salient in describing how the mythic is expressed in literature, and they liken the author of such mythic literature to a mystic or shaman.

If popularity is any indication, very many people have experienced such mystical glimpses of joy in reading Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*. Certainly, fewer are familiar with its mythological backdrop in *The Silmarillion*, with Tolkien’s linguistic scholarship, or with his philosophies about his art form, as described above. As I find his ideas about myth and tale very compelling, I intend to place them in dialogue with many theorists of myth and to arrive at an integrated analysis of what myth is and how it is applicable in literary form. I will also provide some historical background on Tolkien, elaborate further on his eclectic literary application of myth, and further explore his recovery of imagination and enchantment in response to the challenges of modernism. While these components build upon previous research and analysis within Religious Studies, Literary Criticism, and the growing subfield of Tolkien Studies—they have not been synthesized previously in this way.

My thesis builds from an examination of Tolkien’s creative process and suggests that it opened him to influence, direct or indirect, from source material not usually attributed to his work—for example, more eastern and particularly Buddhist material. Thematic material suggesting resonance with Buddhism

culminates in a worldview that—epitomized in the character of Tom Bombadil, uniquely immune to the psychodrama of desire as embodied in the One Ring, and a kind of analogue of an enlightened being in Middle-earth—challenges modernism and recovers something vital to the creative life of humanity.

Tolkien's mythopoeia presents implications for worldview analysis with regard to (a) myth, literary myth-making, and the evolution of language by way of poetry and rationality, (b) the recovery of imagination from the iron grip of modernity—emphasizing the non-possessive wonder of enchantment over against the modern domination of wills through techno-magic (Curry, "Enchantment in Tolkien" 99), and (c) the limiting of the ego—mastery through non-mastery, as exemplified in the character of Tom Bombadil and as fundamental to successful sub-creative art.

I will conclude the thesis with a comment on Tolkien's creative process as analogous to mysticism.



## II. MYTH THEORY AND THE LITERARY EXPRESSION OF MYTH *Nineteenth-Century Theories of Myth: Edward B. Tylor, Max Müller and James G. Frazer*

While everyday usage of the term myth suggests that it is something false, as in “that’s just a myth,” most mythologists point to some interpretation of myth as true: either (1) myth is sacred story held by the devout to be historically factual, or (2) myth is sacred story that poetically or psychologically rings true. The perspective of a given myth theorist is to some extent shaped by his/her historical and intellectual context. In a very general sense the first view of myth as true is often associated with trends in nineteenth-century anthropological discourse about the myths of cultures far away and long ago. Likewise, in a general sense, the second view is often associated with twentieth-century developments in psychology and literary criticism—employing as they do analyses of the psyche and of symbolism. In all cases, myth engages truth by enabling an understanding of meaning in the world, and my intention here is to integrate insights gleaned from several interpretations.

Nineteenth-century theories of myth came on the heels of the Age of Enlightenment and engaged in the anthropological discourse of their time. These theorists saw myth as functioning to explain the world literally; notable among them were Edward B. Tylor, Friedrich Max Müller, and James George Frazer. They were explicit in seeing those explanations as primitive and obsolete in the face of modern science. Tylor in particular described myth as an obsolete proto-science (Segal, *Theorizing about Myth* 7). For him myths were rational attempts to explain natural phenomena, and modern science made those explanations

obsolete by way of an evolutionary development (Doty 126). He saw myth as always religious and always to be taken literally. The age of reason and the rise of rationality, Tylor thought, allowed us to stand outside of and beyond what he called primitive culture, and he saw no enduring value in myth. Actually, ironically, he is somewhat useful because of his narrow focus on a literalist interpretation of myth. Tylor ignores completely the story-telling element of myth and the role of imagination (Segal, *Theorizing about Myth* 18)—which is a grave omission for the overall purpose of my study, valuing as it does the creativity of mythic storytelling—but he nevertheless reminds us of the doctrinal foundations of myth and the important role played by belief. The mandating of doctrine speaks to a key function of myth, which is to illuminate ultimate meaning.

Among Müller's chief concerns was rationalizing solar myth (Cohen 338-339), but in general he saw myth as a misappropriation of metaphor. Though as a philologist he sought to elucidate the inseparability of language and thought, he did so by pitting thoughtful philosophy and science over against misguided mythology, which he disparaged as a "disease of language." Essentially, Müller defined myth as what happens when the referent identified in a metaphor is forgotten and misapplied in a literalist fashion (Rhys Morus 6). Poetic metaphors about natural phenomena become attached to proper names of deities, presented as historical fact, and accepted as gospel. Müller's philological method, known as comparative mythology, was to study comparatively the proper names of gods and heroes (of various Aryan cultures) to ascertain their original meaning and uncover the process whereby a myth was invented to

replace an allegory of nature (6). Therefore, he saw myth as literally true in the eyes of misguided believers. While his method helpfully begins to engage the relationship between myth and language, he assumes a linear progression from concrete language to poetic metaphor to mere superstition—which is too simplistic and dismissive of mythology’s ongoing involvement with each of these.

As for Frazer, his seminal work *The Golden Bough* begins with an interpretation of the rule of succession to the priesthood of Diana at Aricia, which required the successful candidate to murder his predecessor. According to Frazer, this was a savage survival from a time when the priest-king was understood as a human manifestation of a nature god (7). To preserve the king’s power against the decay of his mortal body, he must be sacrificed—all the more since he was associated not just with the god but also with the vitality of the land and its people. While Frazer begins with this case study, he quickly applies the motif of the sacrifice and resurrection of the god/priest/king/land far and wide—taking it to be a universal pattern of myth. Frazer’s approach was that of a secular folklorist, identifying in tales a pattern derived from ritual and applied to the demythologization of story. That his pattern is readily applicable to the myth of Christianity drives this point home. Thus, Frazer’s interpretation abstracts a kill-the-king monomyth, and he takes this pattern as evidence of fallacy on the part of any particular manifestation of the pattern. According to Frazer, adherents believing in the literal truth of their myths are ignorant of the inheritance and diffusion of this pattern. Frazer is useful because he accelerated the process of identifying cross-cultural patterns in myth, but in taking the

existence of such a pattern as a negation of myth's literal truth, he was unable to accept the inherent value of invention and poetic truth employed across the many iterations of the pattern.

Therefore, for the purpose of my study, none of these nineteenth-century theorists—Tylor, Müller, or Frazer—offers a comprehensive tool for the interpretation of myth; however, each of them presents some important initial considerations to explore. In the case of Tylor, his dismissal of myth as obsolete explanatory proto-science misses the point of poetry entirely but begins at least a necessary conversation about the role myth plays in doctrinal belief. Myth is not merely poetry: it is also a group exercise, a social matter, and in many cases is presented to and accepted by adherents as historical fact. In this mode, myth is not a literary application but rather an encounter with the primary truth of the cosmos at large. While I intend to explore how the mythological is successfully employed in literary art, Tylor's view serves as an important reminder of the explicitly religious dimension of myth. Tolkien for one would appreciate making the distinction between the primary truth of gospel accepted as history and the secondary application of literary truth. Sub-creation was always for him a subset of Creation, and again, the literary effect of enchantment induced an inner consistency of reality, that is secondary belief. Furthermore, Tolkien's often quoted dislike of allegory and preference for applicability is noteworthy here:

I cordially dislike allegory in all its manifestations, and always have done so since I grew old and wary enough to detect its presence. I much prefer history – true or feigned – with its varied applicability to the thought and experience of readers. I think that many confuse applicability with allegory, but the one resides in the freedom of the

reader, and the other in the purposed domination of the author.  
(Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* I, 5)

Whether true or feigned, he insisted that fairy-story be presented as true, its fantastic elements “taken seriously, neither laughed at nor explained away” (Tolkien, “On Fairy-Stories” 114). Therefore, Tolkien has defined his literary art form by applying to it a seriousness of myth-as-true which is reminiscent of Tylor’s characterization of myth presented as explanatory and factually true. Again, Tolkien distinguishes between secondary or literary truth and primary truth; but as glimpsed above, not only is successful sub-creative art informed by the stuff of the primary world, i.e., Nature, but also the promise of eucatastrophe is that even in a literary mode, an author or reader may, however briefly, transcend the secondary world (and perhaps the primary as well) and gain access to the sacred. Tylor’s view of myth helps ground the terms of this claim and emphasizes the ultimately religious, spiritual, mystical, or shamanic aspect of Tolkien’s project.

As for Müller, he would seem to negate the value of my study in disparaging mythology as a “disease of language:” positing a concrete proto-language that evolved to include certain poetic metaphors about nature whose original referents being forgotten gave way to the superstitious misidentification of gods acting in the world. Again, I find this line of reasoning too conveniently linear, ignoring as it does the primordial status of metaphor in the development of language as well as the requisite rationality of human minds engaged in poetry

and myth. Tolkien, also a philologist studying the evolution of language, directly countered Müller's claims:

Mythology is not a disease at all, though it may like all human things become diseased. You might as well say that thinking is a disease of the mind. It would be more near the truth to say that languages, especially modern European languages, are a disease of mythology. (121-122)

In other words, Tolkien is claiming that the mythopoetic use of language is fundamental and primary—that literature and metaphor are not late comers to the functioning of language but rather inherent in defining what language is. His description above of adjectives as “a part of speech in a mythical grammar” drives this point home: fantasy—or fiction in general—is not removed from the abstraction operative in applying the word *green*, for example, to more than one object and hence identifying a quality of *greenness*. Furthermore, while Müller saw mythological meaning as irrational, misused and misapplied metaphor, for Tolkien as for his friend Owen Barfield, mythological meanings were latent in language from the beginning and very much indicative of the rational mind at work (Rhys Morus 8). For his part, Müller did advance the field of philology of Indo-European languages, expose eastern texts to the western world, and begin a fruitful discussion about the relationship between language and myth. Ultimately, however, Müller's sober rejection of myth can, in Tolkien's words, “be abandoned without regret” (Tolkien, “On Fairy-Stories” 121).

Finally, Frazer's contribution is to highlight the cross-cultural patterns in myth. The danger with identifying one so-called key to myth is overgeneralization and the reductionist devaluing of a particular culture's sacred

story, simply because it may be analogous or applicable to others. Maintaining respect for particularity is vital, and universalistic claims must always be tempered by critical analysis. Nonetheless, myth is involved with human beings either elucidating or creating ultimate meaning, so it is appropriate that the study of myth would reveal common cross-cultural themes about the experience of being human. Frazer's pattern of the dying and resurrected god-king is one such theme, and it offers a helpful tool in analyzing the role of kingship ideals in myth and storytelling, but it is not exhaustive and does not on its own prove the falsity of such stories. In fact, I would argue that the presence of such a pattern demonstrates the myth has potential value and relevance if executed with literary skill by the myth teller. Tolkien's emphasis on individual authorship is relevant here (Rhys Morus 8). Rejecting the "misleading shorthand" that identified given stories fitting the pattern of their prototype as just "the same stories," Tolkien argued for poetic license:

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. (Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories" 119-120)

Attempts to identify in myth the universal aspects of human experience gain steam in the twentieth century—with the rise of psychology and the further development of literary analysis. Hence, learning to manage the universalistic reductionism of Frazer's pattern while still affirming some value in its cross-cultural insight is an important lesson moving forward.

### *The Myth and Ritual Theory*

Another gateway from Frazer's paradigm leads to consideration of the myth and ritual theory or myth-ritualism, which states in varying degree and forms that these two dimensions of religion, myth and ritual, not only can but must operate together (Segal, *The Myth and Ritual Theory* 1). Biblicist William Robertson Smith pioneered the theory, arguing that myth is an explanation, not of the world as Tylor had suggested, but of existing ritual practice (3). Frazer, a close friend of Smith's, goes much further in stating the interconnection between myth and ritual. Like Tylor, Frazer considers myth an explanation of the world but specifically as a means of controlling the world (5). Frazer describes a stage of development combining both religion and magic in which myth and ritual operate according to the law of similarity. The king does not merely play the part of the god of vegetation: the god actually resides in him, and his ritual murder is an enactment of myth meant to affect the physical world by way of magic (4). Jane Harrison and S.H. Hooke take an even stronger myth-ritualist position by insisting that myth and ritual arise simultaneously and by identifying myth simply as the spoken correlative or script of a living performed ritual (7).

Regardless of whether myth is an explanation of an existing ritual, ritual is an enactment of an existing myth (symbolically or practically as in the form of a magical spell), or myth is the script that accompanies a ritual, the interplay between the verbal and performative expression of sacred symbolic meaning is significant. Of course, much depends on the particular myths and rituals in question; specific examples will seem to confirm one version of the theory, but



others will contradict it in favor of another. However over-general the discussion may seem at times, it is theoretically useful to place these dimensions of myth and ritual in dialogue and to recognize their co-operation. For one thing, while tradition is by definition resistant to change, myth-ritualism can betray a particular tradition's progression or process of development over time. A classic example traces the Eucharist or Holy Communion as a ritual enactment of the myth of the Last Supper (and with the notion of transubstantiation and its insistence that the consecrated bread and wine literally become the body and blood of Christ, we are dealing with a kind of practical magic). However, while the salient context of the myth of the Last Supper as told in the Gospels is the pending death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as savior and messiah, many have commented on the occasion's parallels with the Passover Seder, a springtime communal ritual meal celebrated by Jews featuring prominently specially blessed bread and wine. Of course, the Passover Seder is itself a ritual commemoration of the myth of the Exodus, the story of a people resurrected from the bondage of slavery.

This line of analysis could go on, pursuing further the ways in which myth derives from ritual and ritual from myth. My point in bringing it up is to demonstrate a process of development over time and the opportunity at each point of transmission for imagination to play a role in expressing and preserving symbolic meaning. These are wonderful dramatic stories enriched by performance and capable of inducing a kind of sacred time travel—as Mircea Eliade's brand of myth-ritualism, discussed below, might describe it. Even without yet considering purely literary adaptations of myth, the creative role of

invention is already hard at work in the evolution of religious myth and ritual. Tolkien's concept of sub-creation supports this claim. While he reserved special status for Christian gospel, Tolkien nonetheless regarded the world's mythologies as human manifestations of divine Creation. As such they were necessarily imperfect but valuable approximations and interpretations of Truth. And the real potential for transformative experience lies in the literary effect invented, preserved, or otherwise performed by the mythmaker and ritual practitioner.

### *Mircea Eliade's Sacred Center*

Two twentieth-century theorists offer compelling cross-cultural patterns of mythology: Mircea Eliade and Joseph Campbell. Each is fairly well known and at times suspect for overgeneralizing his particular paradigm of myth, but each nonetheless presents a valuable tool of analysis for myth theory. Both Eliade (for example on pages 201-202 of *Myth and Reality*) and Campbell (in the examples referenced throughout *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*) affirm the enduring value of myth and confirm its applicability in legend, folktale, and contemporary literature.

An important foundation for Eliade's thought was Edmund Husserl's philosophical phenomenology. Husserl shifted the focus of philosophical discourse from pure intellection of the mind to description of *phenomena*, i.e., the "things themselves" (Capps 110-111). Methodologically, Husserl prescribed the use of *epoché* or the "bracketing" out of bias and judgment when encountering and describing phenomena as they appear in the world. Eliade applied this

descriptive phenomenology to religious phenomena in an attempt to understand the experiential perspective of what he termed *homo religiosus*, religious man (Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane* 163). The descriptive mode of this phenomenology was useful because it allowed the analyst to suspend temporarily his analysis and to describe the cosmos in terms of the truth claims of *homo religiosus*. Ultimately, however, rational thought dictates that analysis must eventually follow, as the method of *epoché* is a heuristic and temporary device for gathering data.

Eliade's analysis resulted in an impressive cross-cultural paradigm of the sacred, often still invoked in academic settings when beginning an analysis of what religion is. Building upon Rudolf Otto's theological notion of "numinous" experience (Otto 6-7) of the *ganz andere* or "wholly other"—which is characterized by *mysterium tremendum* and *mysterium fascinans*), at once mysteriously both awe-full (i.e., full of awe) and fascinating (31-32)—Eliade developed the paradigm of the *hierophany*, which is the manifestation, and thus the experience, of the sacred within the otherwise mundane world (Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane* 9-11):

The sacred tree, the sacred stone are not adorned as stone or tree; they are worshipped precisely because they are *hierophanies*, because they show something that is no longer stone or tree but the sacred, the *ganz andere*. (12)

For religious man, especially in the case of a foundational event, where the hierophany physically occurs—i.e., where the completely other, transcendent sacred makes itself known on earth—is obviously of major significance and

influences the geography of subsequent religious tradition. Eliade used the term *axis mundi* to describe this sacred space: the center of the world, as in a sacred mountain, tree, temple, palace, shrine or city—regarded as the meeting point of heaven, earth, and hell (Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return* 12). Whatever the image, there is a tendency to recreate it, ensuring that contact with the fullness of reality is everywhere possible (Sullivan 713).

The axis mundi paradigm has been a reliable tool of analysis for the study of the history of religions (Sullivan 712) because it weaves together a foundational religious experience, mythological retellings of that foundational event (often of cosmogonic dimensions), the consecration of religious spaces and structures, and the institutionalization of ritual behavior in connection with both the sacred space of the axis mundi as well as the sacred time of the foundational event. Indeed, Eliade's brand of myth-ritualism hinges upon homo religiosus recreating the hierophany experience in reference to at the sacred site of the axis mundi thus gaining access to sacred time *in illo tempore* (Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane* 70), i.e., in that time as it was experienced at the foundational cosmic event conveyed in myth. In truth Eliade is describing a kind of time travel, from the perspective of the religious man, in which myth and ritual magically transport him back in time: "*by its very nature sacred time is reversible in the sense that, properly speaking, it is a primordial mythical time made present*" (68-69). Furthermore, primordial mythic time is characterized in cosmogonic terms: "Every creation repeats the pre-eminent cosmogonic act: the Creation of the world" (Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return* 18). So in addition

to the centrality of sacred space, sacred time is also patterned on the centrality of the creation of the cosmos, the ultimate foundational event, accessed repeatedly, ritually, and cyclically.

So the *axis mundi* paradigm as developed by Eliade and others describes a success story for a religious institution—successful in that it has integrated its religious experience, myth, and ritual into a unified and central symbol system, which can be accessed universally from multiple religious locations. An interesting ramification of Eliade’s view of ritual as transformative enactment of myth is how such an experience might play out in literary form. To some extent, Tolkien’s views on myth and literature betray a synergy with Eliade’s. For one thing, following previous scholarship on the initiatory quality variously inherent in myth, legend, and tale, Eliade eventually concludes that the tradition and power of the initiation experience—again tied to the repetition of the cosmogony at the center of the world—is preserved in some form even in contemporary storytelling:

The tale continues ‘initiation’ on the level of the imaginary...in the deep psyche initiation scenarios preserve their seriousness and continue to transmit their message...Today we are beginning to realize that what is called “initiation” coexists with the human condition, that every existence is made up of an unbroken series of “ordeals, “deaths,” and “resurrections,” whatever be the terms that modern language uses to express these originally religious experiences. (Eliade, *Myth and Reality* 202)

Tolkien’s Cauldron of Story makes sense in these terms. When an author uses modern language and contemporary idiom to sub-create a compelling protagonist, he or she may draw upon the heroic pattern of “ordeals, “deaths,” and “resurrections” as told from time immemorial. Again, Tolkien’s emphasis is

on the particularity of individual authorship and to what literary effect a given author employs an archetype. Importantly, the initiatory pattern contains precisely what Tolkien identified as essential for successful sub-creative art, namely the consolation of the happy ending or eucatastrophe. That such a story would convey “ordeal” and “death” was for Tolkien prerequisite to the successful rendering of the sudden turn and glimpse of joy manifested in “resurrection.” What Eliade calls “‘initiation’ on the level of the imaginary” is precisely the literary effect that Tolkien argues is preserved by myth, and I have characterized Tolkien’s literature as mythic explicitly because of the power of poetic art to transform the reader—not just the hero of the story—by means of a similar process of initiation. Recall that Tolkien speaks of this experience as opening “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” (Tolkien, “On Fairy Stories” 129), which sounds very similar to Eliade’s description of religious experience as a kind of time travel to *illo tempore* and confirms that what Tolkien was requiring of his particular brand of storytelling was access to sacred.

Beyond these theoretical considerations, Tolkien’s secondary world is riddled with fictional examples of sacred space and time that conform nicely with Eliade’s analysis of the primary world. A salient example from *The Lord of the Rings* is the White Tree of Gondor, which stood at the court of the king in Gondor and which harkened back to the cosmogonic myth of the *Ainulindale*—“Music of the Holy Ones”—as presented in the published form of *The Silmarillion*. In a Frazerian way, the life of this tree is tied to the life of the king and the land, all of

which are defunct in the story at the time of the War of the Ring and all of which are resurrected once the eucatastrophe is achieved. In fact the White Tree of Gondor is the latest in a long line of genetically linked white trees (preserved over the centuries by horticultural tradition and echoing back to a cosmic progenitor, Telperion) that served as an axis mundi and vessel of divine light from the creation story. Thus, the commemoration of each successive tree at the courts of the kings of many lands of Elves and Men references the center of the world and repeats the cosmogony. One caveat is Tolkien's hesitance to portray religious ritual or cultic worship in his fiction—partly to avoid contradicting Christian theology and to preserve the applicability of his tale. Nonetheless, the symbolic cosmography here is clearly patterned on multicultural instances from the primary world and in harmony with Eliade's paradigm.

*Joseph Campbell: Monomyth, Functions of Myth, Shaman-Artist-Poet-Mythmaker*

In addition to Eliade, Joseph Campbell is another theorist well known for his identification of cross-cultural patterns in mythology. I mention Campbell here for three reasons. First, his famous paradigm, the monomyth of the hero's journey, is obviously applicable to key characters in Tolkien's stories and demonstrates the presence of mythic themes. Secondly, Campbell helpfully identifies four functions of myth—the metaphysical-mystical, the cosmological, the sociological, and the psychological (Campbell, *The Masks of God: Creative Mythology* 609-624)—which, in addition to providing a layered and integral approach to the analysis of myth, dovetail nicely with Tolkien's identification of

the three “faces” of fairy-stories: “the Mystical towards the Supernatural; the Magical towards Nature; and the Mirror of scorn and pity towards Man” (Tolkien, “On Fairy-Stories” 125). Lastly, Campbell describes mythmaking as involving shamanic access to the unconscious, and in the contemporary world he identifies artists and poets as serving this function (Campbell, *The Power of Myth* 99). Certainly the idea that today’s poet carries on the function of the traditional mythmaker is well in line with Tolkien’s mythopoetic notions of sub-creation.

Campbell’s monomyth of the hero’s journey describes a process of departure, initiation, and return. Employing concepts from twentieth-century psychologists Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung, Campbell’s hero pattern provides a detailed and coherent blueprint that appears applicable—and in many cases, has been applied—to any protagonist of myth, legend, tale, literature, or film.

Campbell describes the first stage of the hero’s journey, departure, as being initiated by a call to adventure that the hero might at first refuse (Campbell, *Hero with a Thousand Faces* 59). Submitting to his duty and receiving aid from a supernatural guide (69), the hero sets out from ordinary life and encounters challenges, notably “a ‘threshold guardian’ at the entrance to the zone of magnified power,” (77) the defeat of whom formally commemorates the departure into the unknown. Passing this magical threshold, the hero enters into a “sphere of rebirth...symbolized in the worldwide womb image of the belly of the whale” (90). At the second stage, initiation, the hero-soul endures a succession of trials (97), and ultimately encounters the Queen Goddess of the World (109) who is “mother, sister, mistress, bride” and the “incarnation of the promise of perfection”



(111). Recalling Freud, Campbell not only references what is often a mystical marriage between hero and goddess (109) but also follows the hero into atonement with the father, a difficult process of abandonment of attachment to ego (129-130). Beyond these is apotheosis, “the great paradox by which the wall of the pairs of opposites is shattered and the candidate admitted to the vision of God, who when he created man in his own image created him male and female” (170-171). Finally, the hero-soul has gained mystical access to the ultimate boon, a paradise state of immortality or a symbolic object (176), which in the final stage the hero returns with and shares with his people (193).

Many characters in *The Lord of the Rings* demonstrate the applicability of Campbell’s psychological hero pattern. The three chief actors called to adventure upon varying planes of influence are the hobbit Frodo Baggins, the heir to the throne Aragorn son of Arathorn, and the wizard Gandalf. Frodo Baggins, though least among the three in terms of status and power, is closest to being the protagonist of *The Lord of the Rings* if we rule out Middle Earth itself as a character.<sup>1</sup> Much of Campbell’s hero pattern applies in the case of each character. Frodo for one is called from the idyllic setting of the Shire and sets out to destroy his Uncle Bilbo’s magic ring, which unfortunately turned out to be the One Ring of Sauron, the Dark Lord. Frodo immediately encounters trials and

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<sup>1</sup> Timothy R. O’Neill’s *The Individuated Hobbit: Jung, Tolkien and the Archetypes of Middle-earth* makes a compelling case for a Jungian interpretation of Middle-earth itself as corresponding to the archetype of the Self undergoing a process of actualization—which makes considerable sense and supports an integral understanding of the mystical, cosmological, psychological and sociological functions of myth as complimentary layers of the same phenomenon. On a macro level, conscious and unconscious, once estranged, bring neurosis, but confrontation with the Shadow of Mordor brings the earth through the ordeal of individuation to the realization of the whole Self.

threshold guardians, notably the Black Riders or ringwraiths sent by Sauron to find his ring. Certainly Frodo receives supernatural aid, notably from the wizard Gandalf and from the hierophantic Eagles who appear from above when needed most. Frodo enters the belly of the whale when he passes under the Misty Mountains through the Mines of Moria (where Gandalf is lost to death and resurrection in the abyss below the Bridge of Khazad-dûm). In addition, Frodo encounters the goddess in the form of the Elven queen Galadriel, whose gift of a phial of divine light later proves most useful in combating Shelob, the giant she-spider and anima figure. Frodo's atonement with the father centers on Uncle Bilbo, whose ring imposes upon Frodo the burden of existential crisis, irreversible wounds, and the end of the world. His quest is an anti-quest, however, not to acquire a boon but to shake loose from the bondage of desire by surrendering his talisman and thus saving the earth from domination and shadow.

Campbell's hero paradigm helped popularize myth in the 1980s, largely through his *Power of Myth* interviews with Bill Moyers as broadcast on PBS as well through his direct influence on George Lucas's *Star Wars*. Some, notably Robert Segal, have criticized Campbell's comparative emphasis of universal themes across myths of various cultures as neglectful of the contrasting particulars of the stories he references (Segal, *Theorizing about Myth* 137-141). Such criticism is noteworthy and reflects postmodern thought as well as Tolkien's similar concern about over-generalizing thematic material—hence his endorsement of individual invention as of paramount importance. For Campbell's part, he admitted that his method focused on similarities but felt that such a focus

was timely, justified, and necessary in pursuit of a general understanding of the human psyche, with its grammar of symbols and potential for unification across sectarian or political lines (Campbell, *Hero with a Thousand Faces* vii-viii). Chris Seeman observes that Both Campbell and Tolkien were formalistic in their analyses, which is to say that they ultimately identified a thought form that characterizes myth as expressed across various contexts and with use of a particular content (Seeman 52). For Campbell, the form was the adventure of the hero as interpreted through the psychology of the self—the hero transcending the limitations of ego for the good of others. For Tolkien, the form was the *eucatastrophe*, the sudden turn and glimpse of poignant joy—the happy ending that when done effectively accesses a supramundane state of reality. In both cases, Campbell and Tolkien are applauding the harmony of form and content, advocating for the active use of creative will and imagination, and prescribing for contemporary and future mythmakers an individualized ordeal resulting in a transcendence of self (psychologically for Campbell, theologically for Tolkien) that mirrors the plight of the literary protagonist and responds to the social landscape.

Campbell's four functions of myth—the metaphysical-mystical, the cosmological, the sociological, and the psychological (Campbell, *The Masks of God: Creative Mythology* 609-624)—provide a helpful rubric for a layered analysis of myth. Previously discussed theorists have addressed each function. For example, Tylor's view of myth as proto-science supports the function of myth as explaining the surrounding cosmos. Eliade's analysis of the sacred center

also cosmologically orients both myth and ritual, though his paradigm of the hierophany, an encounter with the numinous, also engages the psychological functionality of myth. Frazer's motif of the sacrifice and resurrection of the god/priest/king/land hits upon several or all of these functions of myth, but the sociological implication of this and similar forms of myth-ritualism prevails. Why kill the king after all? The institutionalization of the idea of the life force—as expressed in divinity, ritual practitioners, kingship, and agriculture—ultimately serves as an organizing principle and a means of sustenance for the society as a whole. Of course, Campbell himself addresses each of the four functions that he identifies for myth. Because of his use of Freud and particularly of Jung, the psychological function is most salient in his work. The hero's adventure is a journey of self-actualization, of departing the box of the ego, submerging in the unconscious, confronting the shadow, incorporating the broader Self, and returning to conscious, waking life with a fresh perspective to share with others. Therefore, for Campbell, while myth undertakes communal and collaborative service to society, it does so by means of an individualistic journey undertaken by an elect shamanic hero equal to the task. Beyond this, however, Campbell's underlying thesis is the unification of the cosmological, psychological and sociological—actualized through the mystical function of myth. The unconscious is collective, and the parallel plight of all heroes is to bridge the gap of transcendence and unite with the life force. Robert Segal is critical of Campbell's mysticism as a reductionist agenda for world ecumenism (Segal, *Theorizing about Myth* 135), but even Segal eventually admits the value in such an agenda

for liberating those raised on a “particularistic, literalist, historical, and antimystical approach to the Bible above all” (141).

Furthermore, even a believer like Tolkien appreciated and pursued the mystical function of non-biblical myths and tales. Echoing Campbell’s functions of myth, Tolkien’s three faces of fairy-story demonstrate the presence of “something really ‘higher’” in these stories. Again, they are “the Mystical towards the Supernatural; the Magical towards Nature; and the Mirror of scorn and pity towards Man” (Tolkien, “On Fairy-Stories” 124-125). Taking the last one first, the Mirror of scorn and pity towards man reveals the psycho-social functionality that Tolkien identified in fairy-stories: the necessary confrontation with the self and the resulting prescription for the betterment of society. The Magical towards Nature engages the cosmological exploration and creative manipulation of the environment—what one typically thinks of as fantasy. However, the Mystical towards the Supernatural demonstrates the true potential of fairy-story. The truly supernatural heroes in Tolkien’s stories are not Elves, wizards, or giants, but rather Men, human beings, whose ultimate fate is unknown and whose mortality is a divine gift that frees them from the circle of the world (Tolkien, *Letters* 147). Elves, by contrast—though also Children of God—are bound to the earth, to nature, and are immortal insofar as they last while the earth itself lasts. The events of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* take place just as the age of the Elves is nearing its end and the rise of the age of Men is advancing. Though less in touch with nature than Elves and easily corrupted by evil, some heroic Men hold the potential to access the supernatural for the good of the world.

Eucatastrophe succeeds in Tolkien's work, and for a brief moment a gleam of light enters from outside the frame of the story—i.e., the story is genuinely inspirational—particularly because it is ordinary human beings, without the powers of magical manipulation of nature, who persevere against all odds, access a divine spark within their humanity, and save the world.

And not only is this mysticism borne out in the actions of Tolkien's characters but also—as discussed earlier—in his own act of sub-creating them. Tolkien's fantasist as enchanter, mythmaker, fulfiller of Creation, and illuminator of poignant joy is not far off from Campbell's contemporary poet and artist as the shamanic mythmakers of today. Campbell speaks of poets as interpreters of the symbolic field of metaphor: "The metaphor is the mask of God through which eternity is to be experienced" (Campbell, *The Power of Myth* 60). He also states that "the artist is the one who communicates myth for today. But he has to be an artist that understands mythology and humanity and isn't simply a sociologist with a program for you" (99). Conversely, Tolkien argued that the old elements that we identify as mythic are preserved precisely because of the ancient author's successful use of literary poetic effect (Tolkien, "On Fairy-stories" 129). Therefore, the *mythopoetic* involves the power of creative metaphor to "go past the words themselves," (Campbell, *The Power of Myth* 229) to transcend the ego and gain special access to the sacred otherness.

*Northrop Frye: Literature as the Central Expression of Myth*

In my thesis, I have been approaching the mythic aspects of literary expression, particularly Tolkien's; following Tolkien's theoretical orientation, I have been discussing a certain poetic or literary effect as the *sine qua non* of myth. I have acknowledged some of the diversity of what is meant by myth as sacred story and the status of truth conveyed by myth, either as explanatory narratives about the world or as the poetic insight that only symbolic language can access. While mythology encompasses a broad spectrum of stories across varying cultural contexts—and while typological studies classifying different types of myths aid the unraveling of inheritance and diffusion—I maintain with Tolkien that literary invention is the most fundamental, most interesting, and most procreative determinant of myth.

Influential literary critic Northrop Frye lends some support to the identification of mythology and literature. While acknowledging the contributions of comparative approaches including Eliade's and Campbell's, Frye seeks to go beyond the configurations of myth's patterns: "Every human society possesses a mythology which is inherited, transmitted and diversified by literature" (Frye, *Words with Power* xiii). Again, invention continues its key role in the emanation of myth. For Frye, literature is the most central extension of myth: "Literature...incarnates a mythology in a historical context" (xiii). Literature then is the continuation of mythology and carries with it the residue of religion and ritual, as well as the delivery of truth and knowledge through metaphor. Literature derives its "central structural principles" from myth:

...the principles that give literature its communicating power across the centuries through all ideological changes, Such structural principles are certainly conditioned by social and historical factors and do not transcend them, but they retain a continuity of form that points to an identity of the literary organism distinct from all its adaptations to its social environment. (xiii)

Literature then can serve as a trans-sectarian vehicle of the sacred.

In addition, Frye addresses the imaginative process of the “literary organism” in a way that is reminiscent of Tolkien and of Giambattista Vico’s *verum factum*: “what is true for us is a creation in which we have participated whether we have been in on the making of it or on the responding to it” (82). A particular way of being in on the making of it is through the use of existential or ecstatic metaphor, which involves standing outside oneself—“a state in which the real self, whatever reality is and whatever the self is in this context, enters a different order of things from that of the now dispossessed ego” (82). Frye continues by invoking art forms (acting, for example, which can employ this ecstatic experience of becoming someone or something other than oneself), and he describes this type of experience as opening “all the doors of perception in the psyche” and as enabling a “vision,” a fragmentary and temporary glimpse of something that is “not an object, but something uniting the objective with ourselves” (82-83). Again, we return to mysticism when trying to articulate the creative process of making myth. Like Tolkien’s eucatastrophe, with its sudden turn and glimpse of something other, passing “outside the frame” and rending “the very web of story” (Tolkien, “On Fairy-Stories” 154)—so too does Frye’s ecstatic metaphor provoke a trans-rational vision. As Campbell describes the



journey of the hero-self who transcends the ego and submerges in the unconscious, so too does Frye invoke an experience of subject-object nondualism. While the original impulse of the creative myth-maker is necessarily individualistic, dualistic ordeals with adversaries eventually give way to a mystical union of opposites and the dissolution of the rigid boundaries of the ego.

### *Owen Barfield's Poetic Principle*

A well-known biographical fact about Tolkien is his friendship with C.S. Lewis and their participation—along with several other academics including Owen Barfield, Charles Williams, and Hugo Dyson—in an informal discussion group at Oxford University called the Inklings. A primary purpose of the group was to share works in progress, and many original drafts of *The Lord of the Rings* were recited to this audience with mixed reviews. Barfield was close with Lewis, as was Tolkien, but Tolkien and Barfield themselves were not well acquainted (Flieger, *Splintered Light* 35). However, by all accounts they enjoyed each other's company, and Barfield made a lasting impression on Tolkien's ideas about myth and language (35). Barfield's conception of an ancient semantic unity changed Tolkien's whole outlook on language (35), which is remarkable, given Tolkien's profession as a philologist and his predilection for inventing languages.

Barfield's theory, articulated in his 1928 book, *Poetic Diction: A Study in Meaning*, holds that language, myth, and perception are inseparably bound. Originally language made no distinction between the literal and metaphorical

meanings of words: words were only used literally, and concretely, and there was as yet no metaphor (37-38). Eventually, through the development of human consciousness and language, a process of differentiation took shape—qualities of one thing were abstracted and applied to another by way of metaphor. Subsequent vocabularies grew because new words were needed to isolate the more specific meanings created through this process of abstraction and reapplication. While a given word in the proto stage encapsulated a unified host of meanings within that one word, the abstraction and reapplication process necessitated the need for several words to represent the newly differentiated and distinct meanings. Barfield latches onto a classical example with the Greek word *pneuma* and its Latin counterpart *spiritus*. He explains that the original, undivided, semantically unified meaning of the word encompassed collectively all of the concepts of breath, wind, and “the principle of life within man or animal” (Barfield 80). Only through the process of rationalization and differentiation of meaning did language eventually require separate words for each of these concepts. Contrast with this Max Müller’s view of mythology as a disease of language—as irrational, misused and misapplied metaphor. For Müller, *spiritus* as the principle of life within man or animal is an example of applying mythological meaning to a word whose original concrete meaning was wind or breath (74). For Barfield and for Tolkien, that mythological meaning was inherent in the word from the beginning.

Furthermore, a critical aspect of Barfield’s thought is the operation of two opposing and complimentary principles advancing the development of

consciousness (87). The first principle drives the process of abstraction and differentiation just described. It is prosaic, rational, mindful of difference, and gave rise to the age of reason and modernism. The second principle, however, operating simultaneously, is that of literary metaphor, of poetry. It reunites sundered meanings by intuiting forgotten conceptual relationships.

Mythology is the ghost of concrete meaning. Connections between discrete phenomena, connections which are now apprehended as metaphor, were once perceived as immediate realities. As such the poet strives, by his own efforts, to see them, and to make others see them, again. (92)

The rational and poetic principles are interdependent; they are locked in a dance that evolves our consciousness, and they require balance. With the rise of reason and rationality, we need more poetry. Tolkien was invoking the operation of the rational principle in describing abstractions such as “*light, heavy, grey, yellow, still, swift,*” and he was demonstrating the operation of the poetic principle in conceiving what an enchanter can do with them: “make heavy things light and able to fly, turn grey lead into yellow gold, and the still rock into a swift water” (Tolkien, “On Fairy-Stories” 122). Consequently, poetic fantasy can potentially tap into proto-mythic meaning and recover its vitality, thus gaining a fresh view of otherwise ordinary words and enabling in the reader what Barfield called a “felt change of consciousness” (Barfield 48).

### *Summary of Integrated Analysis of Myth*

Therefore—following Tolkien’s astute theory and innovative practice, and placing these in dialogue with various theorists of myth and literature—I have

adopted an integrated analysis of myth. I have accounted for myth's religious status as sacred truth and recounted how it is bound with ritual practice as both develop and change. I have shown how myth lends itself in qualified ways to cross-cultural motifs such as the identification of the king with god and land, the *hierophantic* repetition at the sacred *axis mundi*, and the hero's psychological journey through departure, initiation, and return. Furthermore, I have claimed literature as the most important extension and contemporary expression of mythology. Literature continues the vestige of myth-ritualism by portraying and facilitating initiation and transformation by engaging the imagination. Most importantly, however, I have acknowledged that the reason that contemporary literature, when done well, is so uniquely qualified to carry out the imaginative functionality of myth is because myth must be literary in the first place. Today's artists and poets are mythmakers, continuing the role played in the past by shamans and mystics. Literary invention and poetic effect—over inheritance and diffusion—are keys to the definition of myth as sacred story that rings true. The ringing true is a transformative experience of enchantment for author and reader: a creative sense of wonder that induces a felt change of consciousness and that mystically reconnects people, things, and words once estranged by rationalization.

### III. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND ANALYSIS OF TOLKIEN'S PROJECT *A Wide Net of influence*

Source criticism of J.R.R. Tolkien's fiction is rather well developed, now 40 years since his death. For the most part, that criticism has understandably emphasized Eurocentric source material—understandably so because of Tolkien's professional scholarship regarding Old and Middle English texts, because of his application of Old Norse material to his patriotic motivation "to restore to the English an epic tradition and present them with a mythology of their own" (Tolkien, *Letters* 231), and because of his well known devotion to Catholicism. Tom Shippey, a leading expert on all things Tolkien, has summarized the self-imposed challenge undertaken by Tolkien in writing *The Lord of the Rings*:

...in that work, Tolkien wanted to express a heroic ethic, set in a pre-Christian world, which he derived from Old English epic and Old Norse edda and saga. But he also wanted to make it sayable in a contemporary idiom, understandable to contemporary readers, and not in contradiction of Christian belief. (Shippey, "Tolkien and Iceland")

Shippey's context here is to demonstrate Tolkien's use of Icelandic material as philologically cognate with Old English and thus an appropriate source for his project to fill the mythic void for England. Tolkien clarified this lack of an authentically English mythology and his grief in early days over what he called "the poverty of my own beloved country" in a letter to Stanley Unwin in 1950:

There was Greek, and Celtic, and Romance, Germanic, Scandinavian, and Finnish (which greatly affected me); but nothing English, save impoverished chap-book stuff. Of course there was and is all the Arthurian world, but powerful as it is, it is imperfectly

naturalized, associated with the soil of Britain but not with English; and 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. (Tolkien, *Letters* 144)

Tolkien’s last point about wanting to exclude from his mythopoetic endeavor the explicit expression of religion is an important one and again recalls his dislike for allegory: “I think that many confuse ‘applicability’ with ‘allegory’; but the one resides in the freedom of the reader, and the other in the purposed domination of the author (I 5).” And it is precisely this freedom of applicability that has made Tolkien’s fiction so accessible and successful for so many people in the English speaking world and beyond.

Tolkien was a European, an Englishman who began with an ethnic focus on the literature and language of his own land, but he was also born outside of England, in South Africa, and struck with wonder at the otherness of foreign languages and cultures. His eclectic taste for language is evidenced by his above-mentioned interest in Finnish—a Uralic language that is certainly not cognate with English—from which he adapted themes from the *Kalevala* as well as linguistic material for his high Elvish language, Quenya. The recovery of a lost myth for England was a very important early emphasis in Tolkien’s mythopoetic project, but that project continued for over six decades of the turbulent twentieth century and incorporated a wide array of source material from the primary world.

## *Beyond Catholicism*

Tolkien held a very personal devotion to Catholicism which was made even more poignant upon the death of his mother when he was twelve years old. Having already lost his father at the age of three, Tolkien later perceived his mother as a martyr to her faith (Carpenter 31): she had converted to Catholicism and was effectively disowned by her family for it. She left her two boys in the care of a Father Francis Morgan of the Birmingham Oratory, exposing them to a high level of Catholic instruction and bestowing a heavy emotional weight upon her choice of faith and theirs. Humphrey Carpenter, Tolkien's official biographer, put it in this way: "It might be said that after she died his religion took the place in his affections that she had previously occupied. The consolation that it provided was emotional as well as spiritual (31)." Nonetheless, with regard to literary myth-making, Tolkien's aforementioned emphasis on applicability over allegory is vital to understanding his literary use of Christian themes. Carpenter later describes the famous evening chat on September 19, 1931, when Tolkien and Hugo Dyson contributed to the conversion of C.S. Lewis to Christianity (147). Tolkien countered Lewis's characterization of myths as lies breathed through silver, and he showed that language making and myth making—though they are human inventions and therefore imperfect—nonetheless fulfill divine truth.

Carpenter's paraphrase is worth quoting:

We have come from God (continued Tolkien), 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 'subcreator' and inventing stories, can Man ascribe to the state of perfection

that he knew before the Fall. Our myths may be misguided, but they steer however shakily toward the true harbour, while materialistic 'progress' leads only to a yawning abyss and the Iron Crown of the power of evil. (147)

Consequently, despite adhering to an underlying theistic and Christian belief system, Tolkien found room in the creative process for humans to participate in the fulfillment of divine truth. In the context of Lewis's conversion, he referenced the poignancy of pagan Norse mythology, a love for which they both shared. Years later—when replying to criticism from Peter Hastings, manager of a Catholic book shop in Oxford—Tolkien defended a line of plot that called for a kind of Elvish reincarnation, stating, “Reincarnation’ may be bad *theology*...but it is an imagination capable of elucidating truth, and a legitimate basis of legends” (Tolkien, *Letters* 189). So the implication of what he perceived as the truth of the Christian myth was the possibility that all myths may one day come true and that the human sub-creative process—rather than getting bogged down in vain allegorical imitation—could and should reach for something new, something other.

#### *Unexpected Eastern Influences Available to Tolkien*

I propose that—beyond the ethnic project of attempting a lost myth for England and beyond the limitations of Christian piety—Tolkien was open to influence from eastern ideas. He was born in 1892, began his first term of study at Oxford in 1911, went to war in 1916, and while recovering from trench fever in 1917 began to compose the legendary material that would become “The



Silmarillion,” the mythological backdrop for his writings about Middle-earth (Carpenter 265). Therefore, while he did not travel much during his lifetime, he was nonetheless part of an intellectual generation in position to inherit the cultural data brought back by nineteenth-century British imperialism and colonialism. In addition to archeological activity, as with the East India Company, English translations of Asian texts were well underway at the end of the nineteenth century, famously with Oxford University Press’s fifty-volume *The Sacred Books of the East* (1879-1910), edited by Max Müller, as well as with the activities of the Pali Text Society in Sri Lanka. While Sanskritic texts were on the other end of the Indo-European spectrum from Tolkien’s Anglo-Saxon and Medieval-English scholarship, his career as an Oxford philologist certainly familiarized him with Müller’s work, whose view of myth as discussed above Tolkien explicitly criticized (Tolkien, “On Fairy-Stories” 121).

Sri Lanka was of course the site of the canonization of the Theravada suttas and an invaluable link for the preservation of Buddhism outside of India. It was also subject to British colonial and imperial activity, as was India. Its great chronicle, the *Mahavamsa*, which was translated for a second time into English in 1912 by Wilhelm Geiger, relays among other things the legend of the Bodhi Tree and its lineage—which I will later compare with Tolkien’s lineage of the White Tree. While it is unlikely—or at any rate impossible to prove—that Tolkien would have had any direct contact with this text, it is not at all impossible that he could have heard something about the Bodhi Tree legend and its importance as a symbol of the preservation of the Buddhist tradition.

In fact there is actually a substantial link between Tolkien's cultural milieu of turn-of-the-century England and the story of Buddha's awakening under the Bodhi Tree—namely, Sir Edwin Arnold. Arnold was a poet and journalist best known for his 1879 publication, *The Light of Asia*, an epic retelling in English of Gautama's life that became considerably popular with the late Victorian-era readership (Wright 68-85). Setting the stage for the climactic scene of the Buddha's enlightenment, the appearance of the Bodhi Tree will give something of the air of Arnold's poetics:

But he arose—made strong with that pure meat—  
And bent his footsteps where a great Tree grew,  
The Bodhi-tree (thenceforward in all years  
Never to fade, and ever to be kept  
In homage of the world), beneath whose leaves  
It was ordained that Truth should come to Buddh:  
Which now the Master knew; wherefore he went  
With measured pace, steadfast, majestic,  
Unto the Tree of Wisdom. Oh, ye Worlds!  
Rejoice! Our Lord wended unto the Tree! (Arnold 100-101)

For many in the English-speaking West this was their first encounter with Buddhism, and Arnold deserves credit for popularizing and bringing attention to the tradition. Like Tolkien, Arnold was Oxford educated and even served for a short time as a schoolmaster at King Edward's School in Birmingham, which Tolkien would later attend in 1900 (Carpenter 264) after Arnold had enjoyed his wave of popularity. In addition to popularizing Buddhism in the West, *The Light of Asia* also inspired the efforts of Sri Lankan nationalist Angarika Dharmapala, who together with Arnold founded the Mahabodhi Society in 1891. The society's goals were to revive Buddhism in India and to restore its holy places, most

notably Bodh Gaya, to their rightful owners. Arnold used his influence as both editor of *The Daily Telegraph* and as a sought-after speaker to bring attention to their cause (Wright 117). Eventually Bodh Gaya was wrested from exclusively Hindu control in 1953 (118), and today it is once again a Buddhist *axis mundi* drawing Buddhists and tourists from around the world who tie scarves to a descendent of the original Bodhi Tree's branches, burn incense, and lay cut flowers and small lamps at its foot (Harpur 21). Thus, Arnold played a significant role not just in arousing sympathy in the West for the Buddhist religion but also in arousing the Buddhist world itself to recognize and reclaim its own inheritance (Wright 119). It is not difficult to imagine Tolkien having heard something of Arnold and his exploits, perhaps in the halls of King Edward's School, especially given the resonance of the Bodhi Tree lineage with that of Tolkien's White Tree.

The source of the Bodhi Tree as a specifically Buddhist object of worship is not only canonical, but in a sense the Buddha himself can be said to have been the first such worshiper: the *Jātakatthakathā* states that he spent the second week after his enlightenment contemplating the tree "with unblinking eyes" (Strong 153). In the *Kalingabodhi jātika*, the Buddha specifically prescribes a "Maha-bodhi-rukka, Great-Wisdom-tree, that has been associated with a Buddha" as the only appropriate cult object to be venerated in the absence of the Buddha himself (Coomaraswamy 4); and in fact, here is told the first instance of a sapling grown from the fruit of the original Bodhi Tree and planted by Ananda at the Jetavana monastery near Śrāvastī for this express purpose (Strong 153).

The earliest evidence of a monument at Bodh Gaya consists of a polished slab with floral design dating probably to the time of Emperor Ashoka (3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE): this is called the *vajrasana*, the diamond throne marking the place upon which the Buddha sat when he attained *nirvana* (Asher 3-4). The *vajrasana* survives today, and can be seen as corresponding to the altar of the previous tree-cult tradition. As for the railing or enclosure, a Bodhi Tree shrine called a *bodhigara* is depicted in a relief from the Barhut Railing, dating to about the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE (which also pictures a *vajrasana* with floral design), and on subsequent reliefs such as on the east gateway of the Great Stupa at Sanchi, dating to c. 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE (Asher 3). Today, similar enclosures surround the pipal trees understood to be descendents of the original Bodhi Tree, including of course the Mahabodhi Tree at Bodh Gaya now. Judging from an Ashokan-style pillar depicted in the Barhut relief, it is reasonable to accept the common attribution of Ashoka as responsible for the earliest known Buddhist shrine at the site, consisting of *vajrasana* and *bodhigara*.

Ashoka Maurya, the famous Buddhist emperor of India and quintessential *chakravartin* figure has a long standing association with the Bodhi Tree. Two biographical texts describe his devotion to the Bodhi Tree: the *Asokāvadāna* and the *Asokarājasūtra* (Rongxi 1). As we are told, his preoccupation with the tree is so intense that it arouses the jealousy of his wife who hires a sorceress to destroy it—which she almost accomplishes (Strong 152). Fortunately, the tree is miraculously revived through a ritual involving milk and later water applied to its

roots—the latter irrigation being performed by the emperor himself in conjunction with offerings of food and robes for the monks (Rongxi 39-49).

The drama is picked up again in the Sri Lankan chronicles, notably the *Mahavamsa* and the *Mahabodhivamsa*. The main thrust of these chronicles is analyzed and summarized admirably in Bardwell L. Smith's *The Ideal Social Order as Portrayed in the Chronicles of Ceylon*, where he shows how they attempt to establish a direct continuity between India and Sri Lanka in terms of (a) the Sangha, for which Ashoka sends his own son Mahinda, along with other monks for the purpose of spreading the Dhamma and ordaining the Sinhalese, (b) the monarchy, as based upon Ashoka's *Dharma-vijaya* (conquest through righteousness), (c) the symbiotic relationship between the Sangha and the monarchy, and (d) an interconnection between sociological and cosmological events in preparation for the ultimate goal of *Nibbāna* (Smith 49). It is difficult to overstate the importance of the Ashoka/Sri Lanka connection to the preservation and spread of Buddhism by way of the redaction of the Pali canon and the continuity of the *sanhga*. And within the Sri Lankan chronicles, which make so much of the island nation's Buddhist lineage from India, the Bodhi Tree figures prominently both symbolically and in fact horticulturally and therefore quite literally.

The story goes that the sister-in-law of the Sinhalese king Devānampiya Tissa wanted to be ordained as a Buddhist nun, and to this end Ashoka sent his daughter Sanghamitta with a quorum of nuns for the purpose of establishing a lineage of nuns on the island (Strong 153). With her, she took the southern

branch of the Bodhi Tree (which miraculously severed itself for Ashoka), traveling by sea and encountering adventure along the way (*nagas* seeking to abduct the sapling, were defeated by Sanghamitta, then were permitted to take it to their underwater realm and venerate it for seven days), until finally the branch was received by King Tissa who waded out neck-deep in the water to receive it (154). Then echoing Smith's analysis above regarding the continuity of the kingship ideal—and especially as regards the tree—the *Mahavamsa* records how Tissa “had taken the great Bodhi-tree upon his head, had lifted it down upon the shore and caused it to be set in a beautiful pavilion, the king of Lañkā worshipped it by (bestowing on it) the kingship of Lanka” (*The Mahavamsa* XIX). The new bodhi tree was then planted at the capital city of Anurādhapura and became the progenitor of bodhi trees at temples all over the island (155). This is the Jaya Sri Maha Bodhi Tree planted in the mid 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE which stands today and is thus the oldest living tree whose planting is recorded in history. The bodhi tree saplings in Sri Lanka—and by extension elsewhere throughout the Buddhist diaspora—offer an important new living metaphor of reproduction, descent, and lineage, in contrast to the division and controlled distribution of relics in *stupas* (Strong 157). The horticultural re-creation of the axis mundi image of the bodhi tree—which today has reached almost every continent—is unique to Buddhism as far as I know. So in speaking of the Buddha's tree of enlightenment, not only does the pilgrim come to the tree, but in fact the tree goes to the pilgrim! And while this is par for the course where the consecration of sacred space and time is concerned—i.e., the repetition of the mythic center of action through the

foundation of temples, shrines, etc., and through ceremonial and calendrical activity in commemoration of foundational events (Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return* 12)—the transplantation of bodhi trees seems unique in that these localized axes are not just vital religious symbols but in fact living organisms. And this makes the connection with the religious founder and his foundational experience all the more palpable and real to the adherent who sits beneath the tree and breathes its oxygen.

As for Tolkien and his fiction, the case of the White Trees is a prime example of how a Buddhist element could have been integrated with others in serving Tolkien's story. Tree symbolism is a widespread fundamental human phenomenon and plays a very large role in Tolkien's literature. The White Trees in particular begin with the cosmic tree Telperion, one of the Two Trees of Valinor, which emit their own light and whose flowerings begin the Count of Time in Tolkien's secondary world (Tolkien, *Silmarillion* 38-39). Just as the Bodhi Tree became not just an object of veneration but a target, the same is true of the Trees of Valinor: they are abducted by the adversary figure in the pantheon, Melkor, with assistance from Ungoliant, the progenitor of spiders, who devours the light of the trees and leaves in her wake "an Unlight, in which all things seemed to be no more, and which eyes could not pierce, for it was void" (74-76). However, the Valar (i.e., the "powers" or gods) persevere in spite of the discord caused by their brethren Melkor. From the last fruit of Laurelin, the golden tree, is born the sun, and from the last flower of Telperion, the silver or white tree, is born the moon (98-105). Additionally, the vala Yavanna, who is something like a

vegetation goddess and who was instrumental in creating the Two Trees, had made for the Elves of the city of Tirion “a tree like to a lesser image of Telperion, save that it did not give light of its own being; Galithilion it was named in the Sindarin tongue” (59). And it is from Galithilion that the White Tree lineage of middle earth begins: it had many seedlings, one of which was planted in Tol Eressëa, the island of the Elves off the coast of the blessed realm of Valinor (59). This scion of Galithilion was named Celeborn, which later became the progenitor of Nimloth, the White Tree of Numenor, the island granted to Men further east from Eressëa (263). It is here in Numenor where the drama of the white tree lineage comes to a climactic turning point. The Downfall of Numenor is difficult to summarize thoroughly in this space, but suffice it to say that the hubris of these Men leads them to reject their allotted mortality and to challenge the Valar to disastrous ends. The island endures an Atlantis-style deluge, and all are lost save a few that had been faithful: Elendil, his two sons Isildur and Anarion, and their people. Escaping in nine ships, they flee the sinking island and proceed to colonize and rule continental Middle-earth, yet further to the east. At first their leadership in the new land is ethically conducted in line with the sacred tradition of the Valar and Elves, and this is symbolized by the first White Tree of Gondor planted in the court of the king, which had grown from a fruit of Nimloth that Isildur had smuggled and brought over the sea from Numenor.

Thus, the White Tree lineage—from the illuminated Telperion to its image in Galathilion to Celeborn to Nimloth to the White Trees of Gondor—provides a link from the Valar through the Elves to Men and demonstrates a Frazerian



connection between king, land, and divinity (see Nikakis, for example). The medieval *Travels of Sir John Mandeville* are a cited source for the withered-then-renewed White Tree of Gondor as depicted in *The Lord of the Rings*, and legends of Alexander the Great show a precedent for Laurelin and Telperion as trees of the sun and moon (Cohen 100-101). The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil from *Genesis*, the Roman court, and the northern pagan veneration of trees offer other clues, but only the legend of the bodhi trees offers the actual horticultural preservation of a lineage of trees across the sea amid high adventure that then take root in a new land, thus establishing a lifeline to a sacred cultural tradition and to an ethical kingship ideal.

Others have already conducted Buddhist readings of *The Lord of the Rings*—notably David R. Loy and Linda Goodhew's *The Dharma of Dragons and Daemons*, where they identify Buddhist themes in several examples of modern fantasy. Also, Bhikku Punnadhammo offers an insightful online essay entitled *A Buddhist Reading of J.R.R. Tolkien: Middle Path and Middle Earth*. Neither study cites the comparison with the Bodhi Tree in suggesting that Tolkien could have incorporated such explicitly Buddhist material: that is my originally derived hypothesis. I continue to search for like-minded theories or alternative explanations for the resemblance between the horticultural lineages described above. What these other studies do provide is a tellingly Buddhist resonance at the heart of the matter of Middle-earth—namely, the psychodrama of desire, its embodiment in the One Ring of Sauron, the Dark Lord, and the bodhisattva-like anti-quest of Frodo and the Fellowship to let go of that desire: to destroy the Ring

where it was forged in the Cracks of Doom in Mordor. Loy and Goodhew identify the applicability of *The Lord of the Rings* to a socially engaged Buddhist perspective (27) and elucidate the morally balanced causation, or “karma,” at work in the story (29). The most obvious example of karma in Middle-earth—which also highlights the importance of compassion in both Tolkien’s literature and in Buddhism—is introduced early in the narrative and foreshadows its climax. When first learning of the burden he has inherited with this One Ring, Frodo laments of Gollum, “What a pity that Bilbo did not stab that vile creature, when he had the chance!” Gandalf’s reply is telling:

“Pity? It was Pity that stayed his hand. Pity, and Mercy: not to strike without need. And he has been rewarded, Frodo. Be sure that he took so little hurt from the evil, and escaped in the end, because he began his ownership of the Ring so. With Pity...Many that live deserve death. And some that die deserve life. Can you give it to them? Then do not be too eager to deal out death in judgment. For even the very wise cannot see all ends. I have not much hope that Gollum can be cured before he dies, but there is a chance of it. And he is bound up with the fate of the Ring. My heart tells me that he has some part to play yet, for good or ill, before the end; and when that comes, the Pity of Bilbo may rule the fate of many—yours not the least.” (Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* I 68-69)

And of course, this is precisely what happens when Frodo fails in his final task of renouncing the Ring at Mount Doom: it is only Gollum’s last-minute theft of the Ring and deranged stupor that seals the peace of the world. Nonetheless, Frodo is owed some bodhisattva-like credit for resisting as long as he did and for learning compassion. There is clearly some kind of karma or fate at work, and the moral emphasis is on the choices of the individual psyche.

Whenever speaking about the One Ring and its entrapment of desire, it is important to discuss the one character who is immune to its effects—namely Tom Bombadil, whom the hobbits encounter early in their journey. His status outside this psychodrama of desire and Tolkien's intention that he be an enigma (Tolkien, *Letters* 174) have made the nature of Tom Bombadil a favorite topic of debate among fans and scholars of Tolkien's fiction (see, for example, Hargrove and Jensen). The One Ring has no effect on Tom; Frodo relinquishes it to Tom without the usual greedy hesitation, Tom puts it on and does not disappear; in fact he even makes *it* disappear (Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* I 144). Frodo himself is at a loss to classify Tom's identity and quizzes his wife, Goldberry, the River-daughter:

“Fair lady!” said Frodo again after a while. “Tell me, if my asking does not seem foolish, who is Tom Bombadil?”

“He is,” said Goldberry, staying her swift movements and smiling. Frodo looked at her questioningly. “He is, as you have seen him,” She said in answer to his look. “He is Master of wood, water, and hill.”

“Then all this strange land belongs to him?”

“No indeed!” she answered, and her smile faded. “That would indeed be a burden,” she added in a low voice, as if to herself. “The trees and the grasses and all things growing or living in the land belong each to themselves. Tom Bombadil is the Master. No one has ever caught old Tom walking in the forest, wading in the water, leaping on the hill-tops under light and shadow. He has no fear. Tom Bombadil is master.” (I 135)

Tolkien vehemently rejects the interpretation that this means that Tom is God, “We need not go into the sublimities of ‘I am that I am’ – which is quite different from *he is*,” and he further clarifies Tom status: “He is *master* in a peculiar way: he has no fear, and no desire of possession or domination at all” (Tolkien, *Letters*

192). I believe Bhikkhu Punnadhammo is on the right track when he says that Bombadil “may be taken as a kind of enlightened being” (Punnadhammo 11). Also, Patrick Curry makes a comparison to Buddhism during his discussion of Tolkien’s emphasis on enchantment, the realization of imagined wonder, over against the utilitarian techno-magic of modernism. Curry is discussing the challenge of nonattachment to enchantment, which is ephemeral, and quotes the Buddha imploring Ananda not to grieve at his passing: “It is the nature of things that we must be divided, separated and parted from all that is beloved and dear” (Curry, *Enchantment in Tolkien and Middle-earth*). Tom Bombadil is not the Buddha (anyway, that would be the kind of one-for-one allegory that Tolkien so disliked); but Tom’s importance is huge in relaying certain comments that Tolkien wanted to make about a “vow of poverty” and renouncing control (Tolkien, *Letters* 179), as well as an embodiment of real or pure natural science, the non-utilitarian desire for knowledge of other things “*because they are ‘other’*...and entirely unconcerned with ‘doing’ anything with that knowledge: Zoology and Botany not Cattle-breeding or Agriculture” (192). There is some resonance here with Buddhist phenomenology that Tolkien may or may not have known about and integrated, intentionally or unintentionally, into this very important character of Tom Bombadil. But certainly his immunity to the Ring and his status outside the trappings of desire make him an applicable analogue for the present discussion.

I want to propose one other possibility for Tolkien’s exposure to Buddhist ideas and how they might be reflected in his fiction. I am speaking of the conspicuous fact that from the 11th century the Buddha was actually venerated

as a Christian saint in the guise of Josaphat from the medieval bestseller *Barlaam and Josaphat* (Lang x). Josaphat is a Latin rendering of Bodhisattva by way of Sogdian, Persian, Arabic, Syriac, Georgian, and Greek versions (ix-xxxiv). In the 19th century it became obvious that his story is clearly derived from the life story of the Buddha (the prince encounters the four sights and leaves the worldly life for a path of asceticism), and subsequent discoveries of manuscripts have pieced together much of the east-to-west transmission into Europe (ix-xxxiv). Now, Tolkien was a learned Catholic, trained in the classics, a Medievalist scholar, and rather pedantic about knowing the details of the transmission of a text. If this story was so influential on medieval literature, he would have known of it. And actually, Shakespeare lifted the parable of the caskets from this story and used it in *The Merchant of Venice*, in the process immortalizing the tagline: "All that glitters is not gold," meaning basically don't judge a book by its cover, or there's more to life than riches. Now, recall that when Frodo arrives at Bree, Gandalf is not there to meet him but has left a letter asking him to trust in his stead the anonymous ranger, Strider. As a post script Gandalf quotes what we later learn is a verse of Bilbo's:

All that is gold does not glitter,  
Not all those who wander are lost;  
The old that is strong does not wither,  
Deep roots are not touched by the frost.  
From the ashes a fire shall be woken,  
A light from the shadows shall spring;  
Renewed shall be blade that was broken,  
The crownless again shall be king. (Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*  
I 182)

This is not exactly a smoking gun for a direct influence of Buddhism upon Tolkien, but it does show a thematic literary lineage back to the story of the Buddha and echoes the tree and king imagery discussed earlier. Also, the analogue of Tom Bombadil exemplifies certain bodhisattva characteristics also exhibited to some degree in other important characters such as Frodo, Aragorn, and Gandalf. Taken together these add to my case for an indirect influence. I have shown how ideas about Buddhism were readily available to a man of Tolkien's place and time, but proving a direct influence is beside the point of identifying the applicability—both of Tolkien's literature to a Buddhist-minded audience and of Buddhist themes to Tolkien and to his general readership. Kipling's east-west dichotomy of "never the twain shall meet" is obsolete. They met long ago through the imperial exploits of Alexander and Ashoka and through the intercontinental exchange of goods and culture by way of the Silk Road and Spice Route. In his own century, Tolkien was enmeshed in the globalization that resulted from colonialism and the paradigm-shifting shock and trauma of two World Wars. While he was ethnically, academically, and theologically situated in the West, his creative mythopoetic process was complex and integrative; and his literature's legacy is nothing if not the recovery of diverse ancient wisdom and the call for thoughtful contemporary action in face of the great challenges of hubris and desire.

An eastern/Buddhistic reading of Tolkien highlights the value of reducing the ego in service to a broader understanding of the world and others, as well as a broader appreciation and openness to the transcendent and to trans-rational

poetics. Some would point to eastern traditions as inherently more mystical or nondual than their western counterparts, the former emphasizing the immanence of the sacred and the latter transcendence. Others would argue that eastern/western is a false dichotomy for some of the reasons I have listed above. Nonetheless, I am most fascinated with the fact that the western-style transcendent paradigm presents the human condition as a differentiated state of exile from the sacred but with a golden opportunity for reunification. Bombadil is reminiscent of Buddha because he embodies un-fallen Adam. Sauron, who is of course the Lord of the Rings, is sick with desire for domination. Hayden Head shows how Rene Girard's model of imitative desire presents the modus operandi of hubris—essentially that all desire is born of rivalry, an object is desired because it is possessed by an “Other.” The desirer comes to see himself as inferior and desires the essence of the other, ironically sacrificing his own being in the process and succumbing to an ontological sickness (Head 137). Head shows how this takes hold of Satan, then Eve, then Adam in a chain reaction—then shows similar operations in Tolkien's fiction with Melkor, Sauron, and Saruman, etc. And the Ring of course is the talisman that draws one into rivalry with Sauron, thus the ironic sacrifice of one's being through a kind of self-absorption and lack of sensitivity to and respect for the differences of others. Most importantly, Head shows Tom Bombadil's immunity to imitative desire, whose mastery is in refusing to master and upon whom the Ring has no effect.

#### IV. TOLKIEN'S MYTHOPOEIA AND MODERNISM

As we have seen, Tolkien's views on myth and mythopoeia, or mythmaking, do not exist in a theoretical vacuum but are operative in Tolkien's linguistic and literary creative process. While he was drawing various mythic materials from the "Cauldron of Story" and was a medievalist academic, he was nonetheless a man living his life during the twentieth century, and his literary invention was very much engaged with the issues of his time. Tolkien's anti-modernism and Catholicism is often naively misinterpreted as a straight-forward classicist worldview. The truth is that Tolkien is more modern and in fact even postmodern than many give him credit for. Patchen Mortimer refutes the opinion that Tolkien was an isolated and anachronistic twentieth-century author removed from his own time. Instead, Mortimer highlights the primacy of the individual and the canonization of the artist for art's sake as modernist sentiments compliant with Tolkien's project, which was "as grand and avante-garde as those of Wagner or the Futurists, and his works are as suffused with the spirit of the age as any by Eliot, Joyce, or Hemingway" (Mortimer 113). Furthermore, Tolkien's work "translated and readapted medieval themes in relation to twentieth-century experience" (Chance and Siewers 1), and his medievalism as a response to modernism elicited postmodern connections: "looking to the past for a vision of more 'organic' alternatives to modern institutions and systems of political and ethical value" (2). In particular, notions of historicity and textuality in Tolkien's work bridge the modern with the medieval in a way that can be described as postmodern—"resisting and subverting categorizations in its characterizations,



themes, and genre of narrative” (12). In recovering values from the past, Tolkien confronts the culture wars of his day and offers a better alternative for the future.

Verlyn Flieger confirms that Tolkien was writing with a background in medievalism but writing to his own twentieth century (“A Postmodern Medievalist?” 17). In support of this, she points to his complex and eclectic approach in assembling the history and cultures of Middle-earth, rather than the stereotypical and unhistorically blended “King-Arthurish” Middle Ages that had become clichéd even in Tolkien’s time (20). Furthermore, in contrast to the misidentification of Tolkien as an anachronistic writer of medieval romance is the fact that the quest of *The Lord of the Rings* is actually an anti-quest—Frodo is trying to get rid of something rather than to get it—and what romance there is in the story is tangential at best (21). Also, broadly speaking, Tolkien used two prose styles throughout the story: one which is high and epic, conventionally medieval but with other influences as well, and another which is low, vernacular, common and much more prevalent in the story than the high epic style (21-22). Of course, the hobbits are the speakers of this vernacular style, and their presence mediates for contemporary readers the elements of high medieval fantasy.

All of this is getting at the more modern or postmodern aspects of Tolkien’s work, but Flieger really drives the point home with reference to his narrative tone. This she identifies as expressly postmodern in the way that it questions the strategies of representation, effectively deconstructing itself. There is a conversation between Sam and Frodo on the stairs of Cirith Ungol when Gollum has scurried off and they have a brief respite from their ordeal. They

begin to kick around the self-reflexive idea that they are characters in a story and that someday people will tell tales about them, maybe even read about them out of “a great big book with red and black letters, years and years afterwards.” Sam goes on as only he can, and the idea cheers them up and us too as we read out of our book with red and black letters. The self reference is very subtly handled by Tolkien so that the illusion of the storyline is not shattered—which is not an easy thing to do. Somehow, instead, we really are two places at once, within the story *in medias res*, and outside of it post-publication—Flieger calls this a kind of postmodern indeterminacy, drawing an analogue to the quantum physics of Werner Heisenberg (24-25). Thus, many of Tolkien’s story elements draw from traditional mythology and medieval fantasy, and the background of his story is high, mythic, and cosmological. Nonetheless, the foreground of his story takes us not just to the Cracks of Doom on the anti-quest to unmake the One Ring of the Dark Lord of desire, and not just to the quaint, stoic, hopeful soul of the gardener Samwise Gamgee—but in fact Tolkien’s tale takes us nowhere other than where we sit with book in hand: outside the frame, indeed! Therefore, the examples that his heroes set, about the dangers of power and exploitation, are meant to hit home for us in our modern time and place. And while he is clearly looking back to recover a more organic outlook in response to modernist greed, he is doing so with a narrative innovation that is nothing if not postmodern.

## *Fantasy and Rationality*

I have claimed that Escape is one of the main functions of fairy-stories, and since I do not disapprove of them, it is plain that I do not accept the tone of scorn or pity with which 'Escape' is now so often used: a tone for which the uses of the word outside literary criticism give no warrant at all. In what the misusers of Escape are fond of calling Real Life, Escape is evidently as a rule very practical, and may even be heroic. In real life it is difficult to blame it, unless it fails; in criticism it would seem to be the worse the better it succeeds. Evidently we are faced with a misuse of words, and also by a confusion of thought. Why should a man be scorned if, finding himself in a prison, he tries to get out and go home? Or if, when he cannot do so, he thinks and talks about other topics than jailers and prison walls? The world outside has not become less real because the prisoner cannot see it. In using Escape in this way the critics have chosen the wrong word, and what is more, they are confusing, not always by sincere error, the Escape of the Prisoner with the Flight of the Deserter. (Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories" 148)

Clearly Tolkien was feeling the need to defend his genre against a modernist critique that dismissed fantasy as the escapist desertion of reality. Here he suggests that escape can be justified in the modern world when, for example, the mechanisms of industrialization encroach upon and entrap those aspects of life that have enduring value. Furthermore, fantasy is very much a rational activity (139). It must be so in order to be effective. Again, when Tolkien refers to the fantasist as a sub-creator, he is not only taking seriously the theology of humans being made in the divine image of a maker but also demanding from the fantasist the requisite coherence and skill to incarnate his secondary world with "the inner consistency of reality" (138). In order for the fantasy to command or induce secondary belief (139)—for it to be true while the

reader is inside of it—the fantasist must use as his raw materials real life, the stuff of the primary world.

But Tolkien took offense to the modernist adherents of his day who equated real life solely with the products of industry and technology:

The notion that motor-cars are more 'alive' than, say, centaurs or dragons is curious; that they are more 'real' than, say, horses is pathetically absurd. How real, how startlingly alive is a factory chimney compared with an elm tree: poor obsolete thing, insubstantial dream of an escapist! (149)

Let no one claim that Tolkien was incapable of sarcasm. But even in these examples, presented to make a point in an analytical essay, we can sense from him the poetic effect of mythic literature. While centaurs and dragons may be distant from our experience of reality, horses are closer to home, also available to fantasy, but no less fictional. To experience an elm tree as “startlingly alive” is to get what Tolkien is truly all about—not just to imagine an elm tree but to feel the life force stretching out for sun through its leaves and branches. One of Tolkien’s literary goals was to recover a fresh view of words that we think we know and have ceased to consider. Similarly, a philosophical or ethical concern of his was the conservation of the endangered, startlingly alive, and inherently valuable elements of the natural world. He was an environmentalist before that label took on popular meaning. In both cases of conservationism, linguistic and environmental, Tolkien’s tool for affecting change is literature as the prevailing extension and expression of myth; and as has been shown above in discussing the views he shared with Owen Barfield, that literary expression is inherently tied to rationality.

Again, a critical aspect of Barfield's thought is the operation of two opposing and complimentary principles—the rational principle that drives the process of abstraction and differentiation and the poetic principle that employs literary-mythic metaphor to reunite sundered meanings and intuit forgotten conceptual relationships. These two principles are interdependently bound opposites, locked in a dance, manifested from an ancient semantic unity that has been diversified and differentiated, and evolved our consciousness through the age of reason and modernism. Again, successful fantasy requires the rationality of the primary world to be effective. Also, however, with the modernist rise of reason and rationality, for the sake of balance the poetic principle must reciprocate with literature, myth, fantasy, metaphor, etc. In a prosaic world, poetic fantasy is needed to recapture the vitality of proto-mythic meaning and hence to facilitate *eucatastrophe* and a felt change of consciousness.

### *Enchantment vs. Magic*

Patrick Curry has offered helpful insight on Tolkien's encounter with modernism, which Curry defines as follows:

Basically, a 'world-view' that began in late seventeenth-century Europe, became self-conscious in the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, and was exported all over the world, with supreme self-confidence, in the nineteenth. It culminated in the massive attempts at material and social engineering of our own day. Modernity is thus characterized by the combination of modern science, a global capitalist economy, and the political power of the nation-state. (Curry, *Defending Middle-earth* 21-22)

Additionally, Curry notes the similar symbolism—that of iron—employed by Tolkien and Max Weber to describe the modernist assumption that everything in the world is ultimately calculable. Quoting Tolkien, Curry distinguishes between magic as “the exercise of power and domination, using the will, in order to bring about change in the primary world,” and enchantment—which “produces a Secondary World into which both designer and spectator can enter...artistic in desire and purpose...the realization, independent of the conceiving mind, of imagined wonder” (Qtd. in Curry, “Iron Crown, Iron Cage” 1-2). Modernism asserts the centrality of will as a monistic, well-ordered machine, knowable by means of some master calculus we are to strive toward. Weber described a “disenchantment of the world” brought about by the dualistic split between the material and the psycho-spiritual—as in Cartesian and Platonic philosophy (Curry, “Enchantment and Tolkien” 99). Enchantment ignores this split and partakes of both: it is ineffable yet embodied, non-utilitarian yet participatory, partaking temporarily of the unity of the pre-linguistic. Therefore, inspired by Tolkien, Curry prescribes the non-utilitarian appreciation of natural wonder, pluralism and relativism, an end to the modernist secular war on wonder and an admission of a spiritual dimension (for example, by way of popular animism, pantheism, panentheism, and Buddhist non-theism). “We need the Earth...it does not need us;” we should give up the modernist dream of mastery and live life as nature’s art—pursuing the art of living with nature (Curry, “Magic vs. Enchantment” 412). Enchantment recognizes a more organic plurality of nature

and offers a glimpse of something other by means of art, education, and the kind of mythic literary effect employed in Tolkien's work.

*Tom Bombadil: Mastery through Non-Mastery*

Above, I referenced the character of Tom Bombadil as an analogue for a Buddhist-like enlightened being because of his status outside the psychodrama of desire as conveyed in *The Lord of the Rings*. Again, Tolkien described Tom's purpose in making a comment about a "vow of poverty" and renouncing control (Tolkien, *Letters* 179), as well as an embodiment of real or pure natural science, the non-utilitarian desire for knowledge of other things "*because they are 'other'*...and entirely unconcerned with 'doing' anything with that knowledge: Zoology and Botany not Cattle-breeding or Agriculture" (192).

Tolkien intended Bombadil to be an enigma, and because of the clearly heightened import and uniqueness of Bombadil and of the experience of the hobbits in his presence, many have speculated and debated as to his nature and status within the context of the broader cosmology of Middle-earth. Gene Hargrove's "Who is Tom Bombadil" considers the issue and determines Bombadil to be best identified with the Aule—the pagan-style god associated with the element of Earth—walking incarnate through the Old Forest in disguise. Steuard Jensen's "What is Tom Bombadil" is a more detailed examination of the inter-textual theories of Bombadil's so called secret identity. Jensen counters Hargrove's theory and settles tentatively on identifying Bombadil either as one of the Maiar—the lesser gods of the pantheon—or a nature spirit.

While I find these arguments interesting, I prefer interpretations of Tom Bombadil that speak less to his cosmological status in the secondary world and more to the commentary Tolkien was trying to make with the character, mainly because of Tolkien's recorded statements on the matter: He describes Bombadil both as a comment and as an invented character: he is therefore in a way both inside and outside of the story. "I kept him in, and as he was, because he represents certain things otherwise left out" (192). Tom's function in *The Lord of the Rings* is significant specifically because it transcends the narrative plot.<sup>2</sup> Because he stands outside the dominion of the One Ring, his function is to point to something other. "He is *master* in a peculiar way: he has no fear, and no desire of possession or domination at all. He merely knows and understands about such things as concern him in his natural little realm" (192). He exemplifies mastery through non-mastery. Recall again Frodo's inquiry to Goldberry about Tom's status or relationship to the Old Forest. The living things there belong each to themselves.

In addition to the fact that Tom Bombadil serves as a comment about renouncing domination, he epitomizes the effect of enchantment upon the hobbits, Sam, Frodo, Merry, and Pippin, as well as upon the reader. Appropriately, the mechanism he uses for his enchantment is his voice through song and story, i.e., chanting. In fact, when his voice is first heard in the story, Tolkien plainly narrates that "Frodo and Sam stood as if enchanted" (I 130). To

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<sup>2</sup> Because the episode with Tom Bombadil was not deemed essential to the narrative of the hobbits and the ring, it was cut from the film adaptations of *The Lord of the Rings*. While this is understandable given the medium, it is regrettable and a lost opportunity to broaden the perspective of the films.



free Merry and Pippin from the grips of an animate willow tree, Tom again is chanting: “You let them out again, Old Man Willow!’ He said. ‘What be you a-thinking of? You should not be waking. Eat earth! Dig deep! Drink water! Go to sleep! Bombadil is talking!’” (I 131). And when Master Bombadil is talking, the forest be a-listening. He has an enchanter’s power to spellbind its living things. Once guests in his home, the hobbits were especially susceptible:

When they caught his word again they found that he had now wandered into strange regions beyond their memory and beyond their waking thought, into times when the world was wider, and the sea flowed straight to the western Shore; and still on back Tom went singing out into ancient starlight, when only the Elf-sires were awake. Then suddenly he stopped, and they saw that he nodded as if he was falling asleep. The hobbits sat still before him, enchanted; and it seemed as if, under the spell of his words, the wind had gone, and the clouds had dried up, and the day had been withdrawn, and darkness had come from East and West, and all the sky was filled with the light of white stars. (I 142)

The imagery is the stuff of the primary world, and in the enchanted state even we sometimes briefly forget that we are inside a secondary world. We are in “Other Time,” *in illo tempore*, and we are in fact reversing time, traveling back to “ancient starlight,” and repeating the cosmogony. Tom’s enchantment sub-creates from the *Ainulindale*, the Music of the Holy Ones, which is the creation myth from *The Silmarillion*. In the *Ainulindale*, Ilúvatar, i.e., God, propounds to the Ainur, the Holy Ones who are the offspring of his thought, themes of music, which they perform, thus formulating the blueprint of Creation which is then set in motion (Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* 15-22). Tom’s enchantment employs sacred time to tap into that music.

However, the effect of his enchantment is not only looking to the past but also to the present and future. While in the house of Tom Bombadil, Frodo has some strange dreams. In one case he is granted a vision of what we later realize to be Gandalf's escape from Orthanc (Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* I 138), probably happening in that moment. On another occasion in Tom's house, Frodo dreams of his future. At the very end of the novel, several hundreds of pages since any mention of tangential Tom Bombadil, Frodo arrives finally in Valinor, the Blessed Realm. Though he was a mortal, and his ultimate fate must lie elsewhere, Frodo was granted special access to the Blessed Realm to mitigate his burden of bearing the Ring in Middle-earth.

Then Frodo kissed Merry and Pippin, and last of all Sam, and went aboard; and the sails were drawn up, and the wind blew, and slowly the ship slipped away down the long grey firth; and the light of the glass of Galadriel that Frodo bore glimmered and was lost. And the ship went out into the High Sea and passed on into the West, until at last on a night of rain Frodo smelled a sweet fragrance on the air and heard the sound of singing that came over the water. And then it seemed to him that as in his dream in the house of Bombadil, the grey rain-curtain turned all to silver glass and was rolled back, and he beheld white shores and beyond them a far green country under a swift sunrise. (VI 310)

In the end, Tom Bombadil embodies the entire argument of this thesis. Tolkien drew elements of the character from the Cauldron of Story, from existing myth and history: I have shown how even Buddhist sensibilities could have indirectly influenced Tolkien's creative process. Nonetheless, despite any and all influences, Bombadil is ultimately Tolkien's "invention" (Tolkien, *Letters* 178) and is tailored for an important purpose in *The Lord of the Rings*. The experience of the hobbits in Tom's presence—and by extension the experience of the reader—

is one of enchantment and time suspended: the realization independent from conceptualization, of imagined wonder. Furthermore that experience is trans-rational, mythic, poetic, sacred, transformative, and representative of a worldview involving a renunciation of the domination of will. It is the reduction of ego, the letting go of self, and the non-utilitarian rediscovery of the otherness of phenomena in the world as they appear.

## V. CONCLUSION: TOLKIEN THE MYSTIC

“...For you have come, and that was all the purpose of my message. And here you will stay, Gandalf the Grey, and rest from journeys. For I am Saruman the Wise, Saruman Ring-maker, Saruman of Many Colours!”

‘I looked then and saw that his robes, which had seemed white, were not so, but were woven of all colours, and if he moved they shimmered and changed hue so that the eye was bewildered.

“I liked white better,” I said

“White!” he sneered. “It serves as a beginning. White cloth may be dyed. The white page can be overwritten; and the white light can be broken.”

“In which case it is no longer white,” said I. “And he that breaks a thing to find out what it is has left the path of wisdom.” (I 272)

The above dialogue, of course, recounts the confrontation between our chief mentor-guide-wizard Gandalf the Grey and Saruman, the head of his order who has at this point in the story become seduced and ensnared by Sauron and his ring. The symbolism of white light broken into many colors reinforces the theme of differentiation emanating from an undivided whole—from a nondualistic emptiness or singularity to a dualistic plurality of phenomena—a theme discussed earlier in connection to Barfield’s treatment of rationalization and bifurcated language stemming from an ancient semantic unity. Campbell called it “the breaking of the one into the manifold” and appropriately invoked the cosmologies of the Eddic giant Ymir and the Babylonian monster Tiamat, both of whose broken bodies provided the building blocks of demiurge and creation in their respective myths—not to mention the implications of the Fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* 281-288). They ate from the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil and became aware. In Tolkien’s *The Silmarillion*, we can trace the refraction of

primordial light from the one to the manifold, as the light is subsequently localized in the Lamps of the Valar, the Two Trees of Valinor and the Wells of Varda, the Stars, the Sun and the Moon, and finally the Silmarils—made by the Elf Fëanor to house the light of the Two Trees. Coveting possession of the Silmarils was the driving force behind the Elvish politics of the First Age, and it sundered their relations. But the story is not without some redemption.

There is no turning back from rationalization and knowledge of good and evil, but that is why I refer to the literary effect of myth as trans-rational rather than, say, pre-rational, as Freud might have described it. Primordial exile and increasing complexity offer an opportunity for mystical reunification through mythmaking. Recalling Campbell's thesis of the unification of the cosmological, psychological and sociological, actualized through the mystical function of myth, I see Tolkien in this light, functioning as a mystic.

The modern hero, the modern individual who dares to heed the call and seek the mansion of that presence with whom it is our whole destiny to be atoned, cannot, indeed must not, wait for his community to cast off its slough of pride, fear, rationalized avarice, and sanctified misunderstanding. "Live," Nietzsche says, "as though the day were here." It is not society that is to guide and save the creative hero, but precisely the reverse. And so every one of us shares the supreme ordeal—carries the cross of the redeemer—not in the bright moments of his tribe's great victories, but in the silences of his personal despair. (Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* 391)

Today's hero-shamans are the artist-poets and literary fantasist; they are mythmakers and mystics. By mysticism, I mean communion of self with the divine, and that is precisely what Tolkien was doing with his creative writing. The poet employs metaphor to reconnect sundered ancient meanings. Eärendil

achieves a measure of redemption and reunification by pleading on behalf of Elves and Men and returning a Silmaril with its spark of divine light to the heavens. Gandalf the Grey, having fallen in battle with the Balrog at Khazad-dûm, undergoes ordeal, death, and resurrection, and through a process of apotheosis is sent back as Gandalf the White—the reunification of the light unbroken. And Bombadil's enchantment epitomizes mythopoeia and sub-creation—incantation in rhythm and harmony with divine melody through the reduction of ego in service to something other. The “Mystical towards the Supernatural” means that there is access to something outside the frame. The sub-creator must open himself to the unknown corners of Truth—not just outside the box: the borders of the box dissolve.

Tolkien's breadth and depth of knowledge about mythology and his technical skill with linguistics made him a very unique kind of fiction writer, but his true genius was not achieved solely through inheriting knowledge or perfecting the analysis of language. His genius lay in the particularity of his individual authorship, in his ability not just to develop characters through patient craftsmanship but to discover them all of the sudden brooding mysteriously in the shadows of an inn smoking a pipe—and to wonder where they came from. Like a hero in a story, he achieved his quest by being receptive to something outside of ego, something transcendent and trans-rational that integrates self with God and transforms consciousness.

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