

The Divine Alchemy of J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Silmarillion*

David C. Priester, Jr.
Gray, GA

B.A., English and Philosophy, Vanderbilt University, 2017

A Thesis presented to the Graduate Faculty
of the University of Virginia in Candidacy for the Degree of
Master of Arts

Department of English

University of Virginia
May, 2020

Abstract

J. R. R. Tolkien's *Silmarillion* demonstrates a philosophy of creative imagination that is expressed in argumentative form in Tolkien's essay "On Fairy Stories." Fully appreciating the imaginative architecture of Tolkien's fantastic cosmos requires considering his creative work in literary and theological dimensions simultaneously. Creative writing becomes a kind of spiritual activity through which the mind participates in a spiritual or theological order of reality. Through archetypal patterns Tolkien's fantasy expresses particular ways of encountering divine presence in the world. The imagination serves as a faculty of spiritual perception. Tolkien's creative ethic resonates with the theological aesthetics of Hans Urs von Balthasar, a consideration of which helps to illuminate the relationship of theology and imaginative literature in *The Silmarillion*. Creative endeavors may be seen as analogous to the works of alchemists pursuing the philosopher's stone through the transfiguration of matter. The Silmarils symbolize the ideal fruits of creative activity and are analogous to the philosopher's stone.

The Divine Alchemy of J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Silmarillion*

Where shall we begin our study of J. R. R. Tolkien's *Silmarillion*? The beginning seems like a very good place to start: "There was Eru, the One, who in Arda is called Ilúvatar; and he made first the Ainur, the Holy Ones, that were the offspring of his thought" (3). We begin with the Creator, with his first creatures, and with thought. The Ainur who descend into the created world at the end of the *Ainulindalë* become the Valar, who are the Powers of Arda, "and men have often called them gods" (15). The Valar shaped the world out of chaos and they continue to watch over it and guide it from a distance, though their interventions used to be more direct, before the Breaking of the World that was brought about by the treachery of Men. Roberto Calasso writes in *Literature and the Gods* that the gods manifest primarily as mental events, but "contrary to the modern illusion, it is the psychic powers that are fragments of the gods, not the gods that are fragments of the psychic powers" (169). More than merely rhetorical flourishes or abstract allegories of philosophical or psychological concepts, the invocation of the gods may encompass all of these things and yet reach beyond.

The psychopomp Hermès, god of writing and travel, discloses to us the truth that there is more to being than what can be comprehended in the natural sciences alone, and he beckons us to venture into a spiritual realm where meaning is actual, potent, and alive. In *Real Presences*, George Steiner contends that there is in the encounter with the work of art "the presence of a realness, of a 'substantiation'" (4). He says that the "authentic experience of understanding...is one of responding responsibility" (8). The gods are to be understood as real presences in literature, essential to the generation and preservation of meaning. They personify the transcendence Steiner believes is necessary to meaning, messengers of the Godhead which makes it so "that [our] grammar lives and generates worlds" (4). They are archetypes of being,

not unlike the sefiroth of the Kabbalah, primal forms that ground poetry, language, and even thought, splendid suns of the psychical cosmos pouring forth life-inspiring light.

Many of the basic patterns of the association of ideas in Tolkien that are at the core of my argument may be found in Verlyn Flieger's *Splintered Light*, and these fundamental patterns form the starting point for my argument. Tom Shippey has provided in *The Road to Middle Earth* and *The Author of the Century* cogent analyses of Tolkien's method of philological invention, but he underestimates the importance of Christian theology and spirituality to Tolkien's mythos, not to mention the relevance of Tolkien's mythos to Christian theology and spirituality. What remains to me, beyond general expansion upon and extrapolation of these patterns of associations, ultimately resolves into three interrelated ideas: how the concept of the archetype illuminates Tolkien's mythos, how presence operates in *The Silmarillion* and *The Lord of the Rings*, and how Tolkien's philosophy of human creativity, which he calls "subcreation," as theorized in his essay "On Fairy Stories" and as demonstrated in *The Silmarillion* is relevant to the discourse of theological aesthetics.

The Silmarillion revolves around the story of the Silmarils, three sacred jewels of incredible beauty around which the history of the world revolves. The main part of the story, the Quenta Silmarillion, is the story of the Silmarils and is mostly concerned with the events of the First Age, the time from the rising of the sun through the downfall of the Dark Lord Morgoth and the destruction of Beleriand. There are two short sections coming before the Quenta Silmarillion, which are the Ainulindalë, which describes the Creation of the World by Ilúvatar and His choir of celestial intelligences, called the Ainur, and the Valaquenta, which describes the Ainur who descended into the Creation to become its rulers, the Valar, along with their lesser attendants, the Maiar. The rebel Ainu Melkor is later named Morgoth by the Elves, the name being first used by

Fëanor. In the beginning, Melkor broke with the harmony of Ilúvatar in order to enhance his own glory at the expense of Ilúvatar's grand design, but Ilúvatar countered Melkor's dissonant theme with additional themes of his own which subverted the corrupting designs of Melkor into an extension of the original Music, and after the Music reaches its End, Ilúvatar foretells that nothing Melkor does can escape the ultimate design of Ilúvatar, for there can be nothing that does not have its ultimate root in Ilúvatar. After Melkor tries to twist the Creation to his ends and fails thanks to the defense of the Valar, he is imprisoned for a long time, and in that time the Elves come to the land of Valinor, which is the country of the Valar, and there they build a paradisaical civilization, and their greatest craftsman is Fëanor, whose ultimate achievement is the creation of the Silmarils. Following the *Quenta Silmarillion* is the *Akallabêth*, which describes the human kingdom of Númenor from its beginning to its downfall. Finally, there is a brief epilogue that describes the activities of Sauron during the Second Age, including his forging of the Rings of Power, his wars with the Elves and the Númenoreans, and his defeat by the Last Alliance, and a glance forward to the events of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* wherein the final defeat of Sauron and the destruction of the One Ring are finally achieved.

Auerbach's celebrated analysis of the medieval *figura* is relevant to Tolkien's art, but Tolkien's implicit involvement with theological aesthetics and his belated canonical position relative to the medieval corpus he studied as a scholar of language extend and transform the *figura* into something more. The figuration of intellectual truth is insufficient to explain what Tolkien is pursuing. Something like a spiritual or religious phenomenology is required, an inner vision capable of tracing religious archetypes and theological patterns. His essay "On Fairy Stories" gives us the clearest statement of his philosophy of art, insofar as it can be conceptualized in theoretical form.

There are similar veins of phenomenological thought found in Heidegger and Tolkien. The former's resistance to abstract theoretical concepts may therefore be taken as a hint to how to read Tolkien's thought. Tolkien remarks that he "cordially dislikes allegory" in his foreword to the second edition of *The Lord of the Rings* (xvii). Shippey correctly notes that this should not be taken as a total rejection of allegory, for Tolkien himself explicitly makes use of allegory in other contexts, and the more nuanced medieval theories of allegory, such as elaborated in the Letter to Can Grande, may be applied to Tolkien's fantasies. Tolkien himself favored what he called "varied applicability" (xvii). It is a certain more modern and reductive form of thought, where allegory is a kind of scientific procedure for encoding and then extracting useful meanings from a text that may be set aside after the lesson has been imparted, that Tolkien disdains. The concrete form is to be respected. Before a character may be read allegorically, he must be read as a character. The notion of symbol therefore may be more appropriate than allegory. Another useful concept is that of the icon. The iconoclasm of certain ideological movements, such as Protestant extremists during the Reformation, runs against the Catholic adoration of the manifest form. Chesterton gives a defense of the Catholic love of things and art by associating the void with the devil and writing that artists like Giotto and Fra Angelico

...felt (very rightly) that representing Him as a rather quaint old man with a gold crown and a white beard, like a king of the elves, was less profane than resisting the impulse to express Him in some way. That is why the Christian world is full of gaudy pictures... The trend of good is always towards Incarnation. (65)

Creation is good, from the perspective of Christian orthodoxy. The Fall distorted Creation, so that the living body is now a kind of undeath, but not without hope of reclamation, and so the Christian artist – contra Nietzsche – pursues the sculpting of admirable forms so that the light of grace may enter into Creation where the destructive Satanic principle would seek to twist and to obscure all forms and meanings. For Tolkien, creative writing is a sacred vocation, acting in imitation of the Divine Creator who called Creation into being in the first place and appointed human beings His heirs, if they would accept His gift. It is part of the perpetual struggle against evil, revealing the beauty of being and reaffirming the existence of meaning, virtue, and hope. The symbolism of light encompasses all of these things.

St. Bonaventure begins his *Journey of the Mind into God* by declaring: “At the outset I invoke the Eternal Father, the First Principle from whom all illuminations flow down as from the ‘Father of Lights’ from whom is ‘every good present and every perfect gift’ (James 1:17)” (163). This idea of light or illumination flowing like living water from the Godhead is essential to Tolkien’s mythology. This joyously cascading lightflow is simultaneously music as well: light is musical, and music is illuminating. John Gardner observes in his review of *The Silmarillion* for the *New York Review of Books* in 1977, “In the work of Boethius and the scholastic philosophers, as in Dante and Chaucer, musical harmony is the first principle of cosmic balance, and the melody of individuals—the expression of individual will—is the standard figure for the play of free will within the overall design of Providence.” Many critics and scholars have commented on Tolkien’s visionary synthesis of the medieval and the modern.

Gardner’s review is ambivalent, ultimately appreciative of the “eccentric heroism of Tolkien’s attempt,” and in conclusion he tellingly asks the question *why* anyone would bother going to so much trouble over such a dubious enterprise, after making it clear he finds many of

Tolkien's sensibilities "silly" and places little value on his scholarship. It is also evident that Gardner, though a much better critic of Tolkien than many others of the usual highbrow, elitist, modern snobs, still is rooted in that same school of thought. We may dismiss at least for now the question of taste, for Tolkien was himself aware that he did not share the sensibilities of fashionable critics, observing that it is not surprising a medievalist who does not care much for modern literature should have different tastes than modern literary critics who are always eager to keep up with the spirit of the times as articulated in catchphrases like "personal expression" or "art for art's sake" and that the modern dislike of "archaism" is at least partially rooted in ignorance (*The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien* #171), and focus on the more productive question of vision. It is a central aim of this essay to show the *why* of mythopoetic synthesis. Tolkien justifies such "eccentric" efforts as *The Silmarillion* in his essay "On Fairy Stories," along with the pursuit of fantasy in general. There is also a letter in which Tolkien expresses the view that, though history from a Christian perspective must appear as an inevitable, slow defeat, there are still glimmers of hope, and in legend such glimmers come into greater focus (*Letters* #195, 15 December 1956). For Tolkien, escapism done well is a mode of transcendence. He is, in certain important ways, not so far from T. S. Eliot, who writes of the virtue of a kind of escape in "Tradition and the Individual Talent," or even Baudelaire and the Symbolists, who shared an interest in the symbolism of light and music, especially twilight, and the Decadent valorization of artifice, mediated via modernism, likewise finds an echo in the elaborate aesthetic artifices of Tolkien's cosmic fantasies. Thus, as Shippey has argued in *J. R. R. Tolkien: Author of the Century*, Tolkien is in fact critically relevant to literary modernism, in addition to having virtues that go beyond technicalities of literary history.

Tolkien's literary vision is theocratic, which explains in part why so many critics find him a strange anachronism. In *The Western Canon*, Harold Bloom, drawing on Vico's *New Science* as well as Joyce's adaptation of the Viconian scheme of history in *Finnegans Wake*, divides western literary history into four major phases: Theocratic, Aristocratic, Democratic, and Chaotic. The exemplary work of theocratic poetry is Homer's *Iliad*. Vico himself cites as exemplifying the theocratic ideal Zeus's description of himself holding up the world and all the gods by a golden thread:

Out of the zenith hang a golden line
 And put your weight on it, all gods and goddesses.
 You will not budge me earthward out of heaven,
 Cannot budge the all-highest, mighty Zeus,
 No matter how you try.

But let my hand
 Once close to pull that cable – up you come,
 And with you earth itself comes, and the sea.
 By one end tied around Olympos' top
 I could let all the world swing in mid-heaven!
 That is how far I overwhelm you all,
 Both gods and men. (VIII.20-30)

Such a sublime image is the zenith of the theocratic aesthetic. Bloom, as a deeply secular and Romantic critic, dreads the prophesied ricorso to a new theocratic age, and it is unsurprising that he dislikes an anarcho-theocrat like Tolkien¹. Tolkien's theocratic vision is not pagan, however, but Christian. There is hope for human beings in such a new theocracy, for the divine and the human converge at its heart. This convergence is not fully realized in Tolkien's canon, for he saw himself writing a mythic prehistory that would necessarily operate under a vaguely Old Testament system, where the ultimate God is remote and only knowable through merciful intermediaries, but the Incarnation is in various ways foreshadowed, particularly in the Valar themselves, in Gandalf and the Istari, and in the line of the kings of Númenor, who are descended not only from both elves and men but also from the Maiar, who are kin to the Valar. The *Quenta Silmarillion* ends with a dark hint of the possibility of a future Redeemer by way of negation, stating that such an event is not known, yet implying that it remains a possibility (306).

There is a second difference to this reinvention of theocracy: Homer's gods are characterized by contrast as almighty immortals who ineluctably dominate the nasty, brutish, and short lives of pitiful mortals. Nietzsche understands this aesthetic as "beyond good and evil." Tolkien affirms the reverse of Nietzsche's immoralism, that good and evil are above the unrestricted exercise of power and desire. He observes that one of the concerns of religion and something of religion which fantasy may show is "the right to power (as distinct from its possession)" ("On Fairy Stories" 51). Melkor becomes evil precisely because of this inordinate lust for power, and the chief representative of that consuming drive, Ungoliant, is not herself the arch-villain, for she is so unstable she destroys herself after her partnership with Morgoth is

¹ Tolkien expresses sympathy for philosophical anarchism in a letter to Christopher Tolkien (29 November 1943) (*Letters* #52) commenting on the insidious quality of capitalizing the names of institutions like "State" and "Government," and remarking that at least absolute monarchy has the virtue of being ruled by a single human person rather than an impersonal machine.

ended, echoing the Augustinian principle that pure evil cannot exist, as evil is derivative of and dependent upon good (*The City of God* XIII.2), a view that Tolkien explicitly affirms in a note on Auden's review of *The Return of the King*: "In my story I do not deal in Absolute Evil. I do not think there is such a thing, since that is Zero... Satan fell. In my myth Morgoth fell before the Creation of the physical world" (*Letters* #183).

The Valar, on the other hand, exercise the noble virtue of restraint. Their hesitancy to combat Morgoth is not cold indifference or callous selfishness, but rather they fear to cause another tumult such as there was before the Children of Ilúvatar came onto the scene, in the primordial eons when the world was broken and remade by the conflicts between the forces of good and evil (*The Silmarillion* 29 – 30), and when the Valar do decide, partly in response to the courageous plea of Eärendil, who crossed the sea and risked his life to beseech the aid of the Valar on behalf of the few who remained in Beleriand not under the Shadow, to intervene directly and to smite Morgoth at last, most of Beleriand is destroyed (297-303). It is also the case that the Valar warned the Noldor before the latter departed from Valinor that the rash counsels of Fëanor would inevitably lead to grief and that while the Noldor were free to leave Valinor as they had chosen to come, the Valar did not promise any aid for troubles they encountered over the sea (92). The Valar are thoughtful judges, recognizers of difference, and wise sages. They understand that the destiny of the world goes beyond even their control, and that it is not their place to dictate the totality of the destinies of all the Children of Ilúvatar, and so they do not take upon themselves the burden of forcing everything under the stars to conform to their immediate designs, and such is one of the distinguishing traits of Morgoth, who is the demon of heartless force, and from that force comes life-extinguishing and uncreative darkness.

A supernatural radiance transcends the world of his mythological vision. For this light the mind is like a prism. The hidden colors of initial gift of inspiration are unveiled. Ezra Pound speaks of colors of the mind that he can only describe as gods. This is essentially correct. The concrete, personal, archetypal gods of *The Silmarillion* are the “Powers of the World.” On a fundamental level, they are responsible for the world being as it is. They are the world’s caretakers, and the virtues of the world are the traces of their beings, which are the expressions of the thought of Ilúvatar. They are the primal forms of leitmotifs that recur throughout the history of Tolkien’s Middle-Earth.

The highest of the Valar, Manwë and his consort Varda, are associated with sound and with starlight, respectively. These two archetypes rule over all in the elven cosmogony that we receive in *The Silmarillion*. They rule from atop the holy mountain Taniquetil (*The Silmarillion* 16), which stands as the archetypal Sacred Mountain recognized in many mythologies, called Zion, Himinbjorg, or Olympus in traditions most relevant to Tolkien, and in other traditions examined by Mircea Eliade may be recognized in culturally iconic mountains such as Fuji, Tabor, and Meru. Eliade writes that the Sacred Mountain participates in the symbolism of the Center, as that point where heaven and earth meet (12 – 13). As a towering mountain, it is also a challenge and a warning, signifying the distance between the realm of the gods and the realm of mortals. The Meneltarma is a high flat-topped mountain in the land of Númenor where the righteous kings would go to worship Eru Ilúvatar, and in the dark days of Númenor the profane kings avoided it (*The Silmarillion* 312, 319, 322, 326). It is literally at the center of the land of Númenor, which itself sits roughly midway between Middle-Earth and Valinor, though slightly closer to Valinor (311 – 312). The Meneltarma is a repetition or recollection of Taniquetil as Taniquetil is a repetition of the Sacred Mountain that is one of the themes found in the pattern of Creation.

Ulmo, the lord of the waters, is also associated with music, and it is said that in his waters there is a clearer echo of the primordial music from whence the world was created than in any other element in the world (*The Silmarillion* 8, 17). Fire, also, is a recurring motif, from Aulë the Smith to Gandalf who traveled about Middle-Earth in the Third Age kindling the hearts of the virtuous to resist the Enemy. Fate and Dream are represented by Mandos and Lórien, respectively. Yavanna is the patron Vala of growing things and the natural world generally. These archetypal beings are not merely representatives of their respective elements, nor do they simply embody them, but they also are the chords from whence their respective themes are elaborated, bringing forth the reality of their elements out of the primordial chaos in accordance with the design of Ilúvatar, who is the ultimate source of all things, even those things which are in some sense freely chosen by his creatures. The gods are primal forms of being. Through their efforts and their self-expressions, the mind of the Supreme God is realized in actuality.

The Word is the secret fire of Creation. Each of the classical elements – fire, air, water, and earth – has divine associations in Tolkien’s cosmos and is given special consideration, but fire is the element most closely associated with creative potency and with Ilúvatar Himself. When facing the Balrog in Moria, Gandalf declares, “I am a servant of the Secret Fire, wielder of the flame of Anor” (*The Lord of the Rings* 322). The word “anor” is the Sindarin word for “Sun” (Salo 239). It is unclear precisely what Gandalf means here by “flame of Anor,” if it is meant to refer to something literal besides the solar symbolism, but the essence of the sentence establishes Gandalf as a lightbearer standing against the Balrog of Morgoth, the fallen seeker of fire. Gandalf also calls the Balrog “flame of Udun,” which refers to one of Morgoth’s ancient strongholds in the north of the world. Tolkien describes their conflict, each sentence appearing in its own line to heighten the dramatic effect:

From out of the shadow a red sword leaped flaming.

Glamdring glittered white in answer. (322)

The red sword is the Balrog's, Glamdring is Gandalf's, a weapon forged by Elves in the distant past. White, it may be worth noting, is the color Gandalf is destined to take on after he falls fighting the Balrog. The dual aspects of fire perceived in material human history are separated, as wheat from chaff, the good from the evil: Gandalf the servant of the life-giving sun, the cooking fire that provides warmth and nourishment, and Morgoth is the ravenous, untamed fire, sowing pain and destruction and death. Gandalf came to Middle-Earth to oppose Sauron, the chief servant of Morgoth, who is the ultimate perversion of fire, a fire that gives off not light but darkness. Gandalf opposes "the fire that devours and wastes with the fire that kindles, and succours in wanhope and distress" (*Unfinished Tales* 391). He restores the fire to its proper role as a source of illumination and life.

This passage associates Gandalf not only with the Sun but also with the Flame Imperishable, and it seems to me there may well be more than an abstract thematic link between the flame of Anor and the Secret Fire. He serves the Secret Fire but wields the flame of Anor: perhaps the power of Anor, the Sun, that which gives light to the world, is one manifestation of the Secret Fire, but in microcosm, just as Gandalf is a diminutive form of the Maia Olórin, who put aside much of his ancient knowledge and power in order to dwell in Middle-earth as a Man, albeit an immortal one with some supernatural abilities (*Unfinished Tales* 395). *The Silmarillion* describes Olórin as "[w]isest of the Maiar" and a dweller in Lórien (22), the garden of Irmo, Vala of dreams and visions, who is himself often called Lórien. In the *Unfinished Tales* there is an

account which expands upon the very brief account given in the epilogue of *The Silmarillion* wherein Tolkien notes that in later years of Middle-Earth some people came to associate Gandalf with Manwë and even believe him to be an incarnation of Manwë, but Tolkien himself says that it is more reasonable that Manwë sent Olórin as an emissary to aid the people of Middle-Earth against Sauron since in the battle against Morgoth, who was greater than Sauron, at the end of the First Age Manwë did not descend from Taniquetil and instead sent his herald Eonwë in his place. Olórin's name contains the element *olor*, which may be translated as "dream," though it should be understood to refer to more than the transient dreams of night-time and includes both memory and imagination in its senses (*Unfinished Tales* 395 – 396). The association on the one hand with Manwë, "Lord of the Breath of Arda," and with Lórien the master of dreams and visions on the other, helps us to see how Gandalf works as an image of the archetypal Savior. *The Silmarillion* says that Olórin "was a friend to all the Children of Ilúvatar, and took pity on their sorrows; and those who listened to him awoke from despair and put away the imaginations of darkness" (22). Gandalf, as an emissary of the Valar, who were born of the thought of Ilúvatar, the Creator, brings hope and guidance to the peoples of Middle-Earth as a spirit who represents the inner light of the inspired imagination.

One might also recall the famous allegory of the cave in Plato's Republic, in which the Sun stands for the Source of Being. The Secret Fire is therefore the ultimate Form of which the Sun is derivative, and so Gandalf, as a limited being, draws upon a particular facet of the Secret Fire, that which is understood in the symbol of the Sun. Gandalf is the most overtly Christ-like figure in *The Lord of the Rings*, as an embodiment of a higher power who has put aside his rightful power and authority to take on a lesser form for the purpose of humbly helping the peoples of Middle-earth against the forces of the Enemy. In Moria, he falls, and he is believed lost, but he is

“sent back,” no longer as Gandalf the Grey, but as Gandalf the White, a step closer to his holy form as one of the Maiar.

It is his vain pursuit of this fire that marks Melkor’s character in the *Ainulindale* as the arrogant thief of fire who does not understand the depths of what his shallow desires drive him to pursue, that destiny is not his to command however he would. The way Tolkien speaks of this fire echoes the Gospel of John, specifically the famous opening lines. John writes of the divine *Logos*:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.

(KJV John 1:1 – 5)

And so Melkor, doomed by his hubris to fall from grace and become a creature of darkness, reflecting the darkness of his heart that usurped the true source of his being in the fire of Ilúvatar, seeking alone in the outer darkness, “found not the Fire, for it is with Ilúvatar” (*The Silmarillion* 4). Note the shift in tenses: Melkor’s search was a particular action that came to completion, but the Fire *is* with Ilúvatar. It is the Fire that actualizes the Creation, for Ilúvatar declares, “Let these things Be! And I will send forth into the Void the Flame Imperishable, and it shall be at the heart of the World, and the World shall Be...” (9). This seems paradoxical, if one thinks of Ilúvatar as a being separate from the world, dwelling in unimaginable Timeless Halls beyond Creation, for the Fire is with Ilúvatar, yet it is also at the heart of Creation. This paradox hints at Ilúvatar’s

transcendence in an otherwise anthropomorphic mythological account of the Creation of the World.

The account of the Creation in Milton's *Paradise Lost* is relevant here, for *The Silmarillion* is among other things a response to and revision of Milton's epic poem, another purpose of the work to answer Gardner's question. The core of Milton's work is the Fall and the problem of theodicy, and Milton declares that he intends to "justify the ways of God to Man." It is the Son who is responsible for the Creation in Milton's *Paradise Lost*:

...the Son

On his great expedition now appeared,
 Girt with omnipotence, with radiance crowned
 Of majesty divine, sapience and love
 Immense, and all his father in him shone.
 About his chariot numberless were poured
 Cherub and seraph, potentates and thrones,
 And virtues, winged spirits, and chariots winged,
 From the armoury of God, where stand of old
 Myriads between two brazen mountains lodged
 Against a solemn day, harnessed at hand,
 Celestial equipage; and now came forth
 Spontaneous, for within them spirit lived,
 Attendant on their Lord: heaven opened wide
 Her ever during gates, harmonious sound

On golden hinges moving, to let forth
The king of glory in his powerful word
And spirit coming to create new worlds...

Let there be Light, said God, and forthwith light
Ethereal, first of things, quintessence pure
Sprung from the deep... (VII.192 – 209; 243 – 245)

The Son, the Word of God, is the true hero of Creation, which one sees in Milton's use of the epic tradition's trope of heroic arms, magnified to a sublime and otherworldly degree, and he is crowned with "radiance" and shining with the simultaneous presence of the Father, as he goes forth to create light, "Ethereal, first of things, quintessence pure."

Before Raphael relates the story of Creation to Adam, however, he admonishes the first man:

Yet what thou canst attain, which best may serve
To glorify the maker, and infer
Thee also happier, shall not be withheld
Thy hearing, such commission from above
I have received, to answer thy desire
Of knowledge within bounds; beyond abstain
To ask, nor let thine own inventions hope
Things not revealed, which the invisible king,

Only omniscient, hath suppressed in night,
 To none communicable in earth or heaven:
 Enough is left besides to search and know. (VII.115 – 125).

The beginning of Melkor's fall is precisely the violation of the Creator's "night," that realm of sacred mysteries. He is another overreacher, a gifted and powerful being who nonetheless strives to redefine destiny through sheer power. Prometheus, Loki, Lucifer – all three thieves are associated with fire or light. Prometheus aided Zeus against the Titans but then stole fire from heaven to give to humans against the will of Zeus. A sympathetic figure, especially from a modern standpoint, he has been valorized by such poets as Lord Byron and Percy Shelley, but Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein, or, The Modern Prometheus* explores the dark side of this tragic figure. After the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with their industrialized inhumanities, reflected in Saruman's profane ambitions and the unholy empire he tries and fails to make out of Isengard, all in the name of ideals like "Progress," one can see the insight of Mary Shelley's interpretation, why Prometheus must be punished for his dangerous short-sightedness, despite its superficial nobility².

Fëanor forgets that his creation is derivative. It is not to be doubted that he is justified in claiming that there is something of himself in the jewels (84), for they are his life's work, his magnum opus, just as the Trees were Yavanna's greatest creation and could never be replaced (83), and just as even Sauron's Ring bears a piece of its master within it, so that as long as it exists, Sauron cannot be fully destroyed. Fëanor is a subcreator, however, so it is wrong for him

² One should not mistake Victor Frankenstein for a Satanic figure, however; he is a tragic hero, not a Satanic villain, though one should note how Milton examines how the latter can pretend to be the former, but Frankenstein's naivete gives rise to something like a Satanic villain; the parallel figure in Tolkien's work is Fëanor, rather than Melkor, though their situations are sufficiently different that hasty judgments will go astray.

to treat the gems as belonging to himself alone, for the light of the gems was drawn from the Trees, and they were blessed by Varda (70). Aule acknowledges that for Fëanor to give up the gems is a weighty matter (84), yet Fëanor, like Frankenstein, trusts too much in his own arbitrary will, thinking he may do with them whatever he pleases, as if he created them from nothing, rather than treating them, and others, with the respect due to their natures.

Loki, a Norse fire-god, is a blood-brother to Odin and aided the gods of Asgard on many occasions, but malcontent and irreverent, an abuser of his gifts and a mocker, he orchestrates the murder of Baldur, the Shining God, and so he is condemned to suffer until Ragnarok, when he will return with an army of the enemies of the gods, and he and Heimdall will extinguish one another, as his dark fire meets the white flame of Heimdall (Sturluson 73). From a Christian perspective such as Tolkien's, Lucifer, the "Light-bearer," is the original archetype of which the other myths are variations. He is essentially a usurper, but Milton explores how through craftiness and exploitation of naivete such a figure may appear a romantic champion, as indeed many Romantic interpreters did mistake him to be. Melkor in *The Silmarillion* is said to be as Manwë's brother, save even more powerful (16), and he is also closely related to Aulë, lord of fire and craftsmanship, so that he repeats many of the relationships found in the figure of Loki. As Elrond observes at the council in Rivendell where the fate of the Ruling Ring is to be decided, "nothing is evil in the beginning" (*The Lord of the Rings* 261), and the great evil of Morgoth came from the corruption of the magnificent Ainu Melkor, who was once very close to Ilúvatar and "had a share in all the gifts of his brethren" (*The Silmarillion* 4).

Fëanor's name, the one by which he is remembered and that was given him by his mother, Míriel, means "Spirit of Fire," though he was called formally "Curufinwë" (*The Silmarillion* 64),

which affixes the prefix “*curu*,” meaning “skilled” (432), to the name of his father, *Finwë*³. It is said that he “grew swiftly, as if a secret fire were kindled in him” (65). Upon his death, it is said that “so fiery was his spirit that as it sped his body fell to ash, and was borne away like smoke” (122). He is “of all the Noldor, then or after, the most subtle in mind and the most skilled in hand” (65). Thus, he is another figure manifesting the creative fire of being. He could have been another champion of the light, but his pride and his possessiveness and his smoldering anger prevent the realization of his virtuous potential, and he turns his back on Valinor and the light of grace to pursue self-aggrandizement and bloody revenge at all costs. Such is the risk of the power of being: whoever possesses the potential to effect great things and dramatic changes may do so either for good or for ill. From that dynamic spark of living being ultimately deriving from the Secret Fire, some ultimate good will come, but the bearer of that spark may choose to participate either willingly or unwillingly in this production of good.

Words are also associated with fire, for the Noldor who learn from *Aulë* are also lovers of language. *Fëanor* is the inventor of the elven runes adopted by the Eldar for use from then on (*The Silmarillion* 65). When Frodo and his companions in *The Lord of the Rings* encounter the Ringwraiths at Weathertop, Aragorn counsels the use of fire (185), while Frodo in a desperate moment calls on the name of *Elbereth* (191), another name for *Varda*, and it is this invocation, Aragorn suggests, that hurts the wraith more than Frodo’s sword, which can at most pierce the wraith’s cloak, not able to harm the Witch-King himself (193). At Rivendell, the Elves recite ancient verses and tell stories around the hearthfire in the aptly-named Hall of Fire, wherein a fire burns year-round (224). The hearthfire itself is a central symbol of Rivendell, also called the Last Homely House, “a perfect house, whether you like food or sleep or story-telling or singing,

³ *Curunir*, another name for Saruman the White, a Wizard in the Third Age who is corrupted by his pride and his desire for power, means “Man of Craft” (*Unfinished Tales* 390) or “one of cunning devices” (*The Silmarillion* 389)

or just sitting and thinking best, or a pleasant mixture of them all” (219). As Bilbo and Frodo walk away from that gathering, Bilbo observes that the Elves will sing a hymn to Elbereth as well as other songs of the Blessed Realm many times that night (232). Gandalf names Rivendell as one of the places of power which would withstand the coming storm of darkness for a time even as most of the world around it succumbed to Sauron’s darkness, should no one remain to stand against the Dark Lord (217).

Just so, in the legends preserved the elves, a light that resists darkness is preserved, passed down from generation to generation from the original encounter of the elves with the Valar and the blessed years they spent in Valinor, a virtue of legendry recognized by Tolkien and reflected in the lineage of the White Trees found in Númenor and Gondor: from Telperion Yavanna made in its image Galathilion, the white tree of Tirion, the elven holy city upon the hill of Túna in the lands of Aman; from Galathilion came the seed of Celeborn, the white tree of Tol Eressea (*The Silmarillion* 59), the island upon which Ulmo ferried the elves across the sea from Middle-Earth to Valinor and where some of the elves chose to remain for love of the sea and Osse, a Maia vassal of Ulmo (56-58); from Celeborn, Nimloth, the sacred tree of Númenor (314); from Nimloth, Isildur took a fruit and eventually planted it in Gondor, in the city of Minas Ithil (349), and after the fall of Minas Ithil and the death of his brother, Anárion, he planted a seedling in Minas Anor, later called Minas Tirith, in memory of his brother (351 – 352). It is worth noting that “On Fairy Stories” was originally published together with the short story “Leaf by Niggle” in the collection *Tree and Leaf*.

Fëanor is something of an Elvish Adam. He stands midway between Aule of the Valar and the fallen Morgoth. Fëanor’s primacy as an elf of the Noldor is not based on age, as he is in fact second generation, but he is rather the greatest craftsman and the most godlike of all the Noldor,

and so he stands out before all of them, and it is through him that ages of strife are visited upon the Noldorin Exiles. One of the main sources of pain and loss for the Elves over the course of the First Age is in fact the oath taken by Fëanor and his heirs never to rest until all three Silmarils have been returned to the House of Fëanor (*The Silmarillion* 90). This oath brings ruin upon Beleriand and undoes all of Fëanor's sons by the end of the Quenta Silmarillion.

Fëanor's speech to the elves after the desecration of the Trees echoes the speeches of Satan to Beelzebub and then to the assembled demons in Pandaemonium in Milton's *Paradise Lost*. After Morgoth's theft of the Silmarils, Fëanor calls an assembly of the Noldor in their holy city. Fëanor is not the Satan of this story, and indeed his vow of enmity is primarily against Morgoth, who is the Satanic demon of *The Silmarillion*, but he has been poisoned by Morgoth's darkness, and he has, in his own way, succumbed to temptation by the Enemy of God, thereby increasing the power of evil over the history of the world:

Long he spoke, and ever he urged the Noldor follow him and by their own prowess to win freedom and great realms in the lands of the East, before it was too late; for he echoed the lies of Melkor, that the Valar had cozened them and would hold them captive so that Men might rule Middle-earth... 'Fair shall the end be,' he cried, 'though long and hard should be the road! Say farewell to bondage! But say farewell also to ease! Say farewell to the weak! Say farewell to your treasures! More still shall we make. Journey light: but bring with you your swords! For we will go further than Orome, endure longer than Tulkas: we will never turn back from pursuit. After Morgoth to the ends of the earth! War shall he have and hatred undying. But when we have conquered and regained the

Silmarils, then we and we alone shall be lords of the unsullied Light, and masters of the bliss and beauty of Arda. No other race shall oust us! (*The Silmarillion* 89 – 90)

There is an echo of nobility in Fëanor's speech, which is particularly evident to someone like Tolkien who appreciated the bleak heroism of ancient Scandinavian and Old English literature. Fëanor goes too far, though, and he crosses into a vaguely proto-Nietzschean territory that also echoes the demagoguery of Milton's Satan. In the first book of *Paradise Lost*, Satan comes to himself drifting like a floating island upon the infernal lake of fire near Beelzebub, to whom he addresses this speech:

Is this the region, this the soil, the clime,
 Said then the lost archangel, this the seat
 That we must change for heaven, this mournful gloom
 For that celestial light? Be it so, since he
 Who now is sovereign can dispose and bid
 What shall be right: furthest from him is best
 Whom reason hath equalled, force hath made supreme
 Above his equals. Farewell, happy fields
 Where joy forever dwells: hail horrors, hail
 Infernal world, and thou profoundest hell
 Receive thy new possessor: one who brings
 A mind not to be changed by place or time.
 The mind is its own place, and in itself

Can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven.
 What matter where, if I be still the same,
 And what I should be, all but less than he
 Whom thunder hath made greater? Here at least
 We shall be free; the almighty hath not built
 Here for his envy, will not drive us hence:
 Here we may reign secure, and in my choice
 To reign is worth ambition though in hell:
 Better to reign in hell, than serve in heaven.
 But wherefore let we then our faithful friends,
 The associates and copartners of our loss
 Lie thus astonished on the oblivious pool,
 And call them not to share with us their part
 In this unhappy mansion, or once more
 With rallied arms to try what may be yet
 Regained in heaven, or what more lost in hell? (I.242 – 270)

There is an appeal to freedom, a call to arms, a farewell to peace and contentment, a celebration of ambition, and a promise of virtually limitless power to change the world to fit the designs of the speaker. It is the rallying cry of a mad genius extolling the power of its supposedly indomitable will for glory, power, and possession.

Even Manwë acknowledges that there will be long remembered great deeds and genuine grandeur of spirit in the tragical history ensuing from Fëanor's rebellion: "Thus even as Eru

spoke to us shall beauty not before conceived be brought into Eä, and evil yet be good to have been,” but the taciturn Mandos reminds Manwë, and us, that though good may proceed from evil, evil remains evil (*The Silmarillion* 109 – 110). Augustine compares the function of evil in God’s plan for the unfolding of Creation to the existence of antitheses in rhetoric:

For God would never have created any men, much less any angels, whose future wickedness He foreknew, unless He had equally known to what uses He would put them on behalf of the good, thereby adorning the course of the ages like a most beautiful poem set off with antitheses. For what are called antitheses are among the most elegant figures of speech... Just as the opposition of contraries bestows beauty upon language, then, so is the beauty of this world enhanced by the opposition of contraries, composed, as it were, by an eloquence not of words, but of things. (*The City of God* XI.18)

The Silmarillion observes that the “marring” of Fëanor is one of the greatest crimes attributed to Morgoth. While they still have being, according to Augustinian logic present in both Milton and Tolkien, Satan, Morgoth, and Fëanor are capable of bringing about some good, directly or indirectly, for being ultimately springs from the Supreme Good. Evil is merely the corruption, or marring, of the goodness of being (*The City of God* XII.2). The evils of Fëanor’s deeds, and of deeds to which his rashness gives rise, are evil, and as perversion of being it is essentially that which should not be, yet in its conflict with the goodness of being manifested in history, it may provoke responses from the good of new forms of being, new expressions of the light of Ilúvatar. In choosing evil, the wicked give up their claim to this goodness, which belongs rightfully to those who choose to serve or to participate in the Good. Those who are committed to evil

therefore become instruments of God's wrath, as it is said in the Bible (Romans 9:22), or their accomplishments are lost to them and taken up by the music of the divine symphony, as it is said in the Ainulindale (5). After the fallen angels erect Pandaemonium, Satan addresses the assembly thus:

Powers and dominions, deities of heaven,
For since no deep within her gulf can hold
Immortal vigor, though oppresed and fallen,
I give not heaven for lost. From this descent
Celestial virtues rising, will appear
More glorious and more dread than from no fall,
And trust themselves to fear no second fate:
Me though just right, and the fixed laws of heaven
Did first create your leader, next free choice,
With what besides, in counsel or in fight,
Hath bin achieved of merit, yet this loss
Thus far at least recovered, hath much more
Established in a safe unenvied throne
Yielded with full consent. The happier state
In heaven, which follows dignity, might draw
Envy from each inferior; but who here
Will envy whom the highest place exposes
Foremost to stand against the thunderer's aim

Your bulwark, and condemns to greatest share
 Of endless pain? where there is then no good
 For which to strive, no strife can grow up there
 From faction; for none sure will claim in hell
 Precedence, none, whose portion is so small
 Of present pain, that with ambitious mind
 Will covet more. With this advantage then
 To union, and firm faith, and firm accord,
 More than can be in heaven, we now return
 To claim our just inheritance of old,
 Surer to prosper than prosperity
 Could have assured us... (II.11 – 40)

The petty, covetous, resentful nature of the Enemy of Good is a recurring theme in *Paradise Lost*, obscured at first, admittedly, by Satan's rhetorical power, but over time, the hollowness of his illusions becomes more and more obvious to the reader, until God transfigures him and his fellow demons into writhing serpents. The joke is ultimately on Satan. Likewise, in *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Silmarillion*, evil is understood as small-minded. In his review of *The Return of the King*, W. H. Auden interprets *The Lord of the Rings* to show how the heroes of Good are able to overcome Sauron through greater flexibility of imagination ("At the End of the Quest, Victory"). This by itself seems to me overly simplistic, but it is on the right track. The heroes can, as Auden remarks, imagine evil and therefore fear it, whereas Sauron apparently struggles to imagine what actual virtue might be capable of, and so not until far too late does he realize that

the heroes do not mean to wield the Ring for themselves, but rather to destroy it utterly. In *The Silmarillion*, evil tends to bring punishment down upon itself through its twisted and corrupting nature. For example, Morgoth's evil deprives him of the ability to appear as beautiful as the other Valar (77 – 78), who are capable of manifesting physically in accordance with their thoughts (11). His form is further twisted and blackened, as piece of once-living wood thrown into a fire, by his very possession of the objects he most desires, the Silmarils, which torment him ceaselessly as long as he wears them in his crown, which from pride he will not take from his head, "though its weight became a deadly weariness" (86 – 88). Like Milton's Satan, rather than serve in heaven and reap eternal delights, transcendent peace, and infinite beauty, he would be diminished into the hollow image of a ruler, a perverse mockery of righteous authority, until he is merely a shadow.

Tolkien contrasts Aulë and Melkor much as he contrasts Manwë and Melkor, but Aulë is said to be even closer in nature to Melkor than Manwë (*The Silmarillion* 18). Aulë and Melkor are both primarily associated with fire and earth, and they are makers, desiring invention after the creative genius of Ilúvatar in whose image they themselves are made, but Aulë is sufficiently humble to recognize Ilúvatar's authority and to cooperate with the other Valar in the harmonious creation of the world according to the primordial Music, whereas Melkor is selfish, disobedient, and arrogant, always eager to disrupt and to tear down what others have built, if he cannot claim it for himself, which leads to the first of many wars when Melkor tries to claim Arda as his kingdom, descending "in power and majesty greater than any other of the Valar, as a mountain that wades in the sea and has its head above the clouds and is clad in ice and crowned with smoke and fire; and the light of the eyes of Melkor was like a flame that withers with heat and pierces with a deadly cold" (*The Silmarillion* 10 – 12). Aulë makes the Dwarves against the

design of Ilúvatar, who willed that no races should walk the earth before the Children of Ilúvatar, but he is unable to endow them with souls of their own, and when Ilúvatar challenges him on his presumption, Aulë repents in shame and submits his work to the will of Ilúvatar, offering the apology that he was inspired by the work of his heavenly father to imitate the creation of living beings, and in response to this show of obedience and good faith, Ilúvatar declares that there is a place in Arda for the Dwarves, and they shall have their own souls, but the time of their coming must be after Elves and Men (37 – 39).

Curunir, the Maia who becomes Saruman, was associated with Aulë, according to the account of the Istari published in the *Unfinished Tales* (393). Saruman recapitulates Melkor's fall as well as that of Sauron, who also was a Maia in the service of Aulë at one time, counting too much on his own ingenuity and power, and he gives another hollow rhetorical display, like Fëanor and like Milton's Satan, to Gandalf and his allies in *The Two Towers*, though critics might understandably jump to a comparison with Hitler first, the core insight being the illusory quality of earthly politics, the essential false promise upon which the earthly city is founded, from an essentially Augustinian point of view – and Tolkien is very much in the tradition of Augustine, as a devout Roman Catholic and a Christian intellectual influenced by classical authors. Like Augustine, also, he is a Christian thinker who wishes to salvage what can be saved from the pagan world, without submitting to the secular world in which he finds himself, for the service of a truth, a good, or a wisdom that goes beyond the narrow limits of this world.

A common criticism of the sort of work written by the Inklings, especially that of Tolkien, to which Lewis and Tolkien both responded in essays, is the charge of escapism. Tolkien not only calls into question the extent to which this charge is accurate but even shows quite sensibly how escapism may not be such a bad thing after all. Lewis credits Tolkien with the insight that it

is in the interest of the “jailers” of society to discourage escapism in the first place (“On Science Fiction” 66 – 67). Tolkien gives the example of a prisoner of war, for whom escape is not only desirable personally but would in fact be a boon to his allies (“On Fairy Stories” 79), an example that resonates with Lewis’s famous declaration in *Mere Christianity* that the world is enemy-occupied territory, and the Incarnation marks the beginning of the Light’s invasion and reconquest of the Darkness.

A work of art is a tower that one ascends to see beyond the mundane, to gaze across the mysterious ocean encircling the small island of our reality. This is the basis of Tolkien’s criticism of the unliterary mode of literary criticism in the modern history of the study of *Beowulf* in an essay where he acknowledges the internal legitimacy of historical and archaeological pursuits but makes the point that it is ridiculous to think that one understands a tower a man has built to see the sea by analyzing the stones from which it is built (“Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics” 6 – 9). They are a part of the tower, true, but the tower has a teleological cause as well that is an important and irreducible aspect of its being. The tower does something. Just so, the work of art is a work, not simply a collection or mixture of words and images and ideas. It exists like a lighthouse, a tower overlooking the churning dark chaos of world history and calling the wayfarers home. From its heights also one may see a short way into another world that is illuminated with the tower’s brilliance, and it calls spirits of that other world into our world. Literature is fundamentally related to religion.

William Blake proclaims in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, “If the doors of perception were cleansed, every thing would appear as it is: infinite. For man has closed himself up till he sees all things though narrow chinks of his cavern.” The Inklings were Romantics in their own way, less hysterical and more seriously philosophical than Blake, but we may find shared

intuitions about the nature of perception and hidden realities. There is an echo of Blake's declaration that "All deities reside in the human breast" in Tolkien's discussion of mythology in "On Fairy Stories," where he objects to the explanation of myth as a kind of allegory for natural processes, claiming rather that pagan myths are rather naturalized representations of the Supernatural, channeled by Man: "The gods may derive their color and beauty from the high splendours of nature, but it was Man who obtained these for them, abstracted them from sun and moon and cloud; their personality they get direct from him; the shadow or flicker of divinity that is upon them they receive through him from the invisible world, the Supernatural" (50). Roberto Calasso writes that great authors describe in literature "the only landscape where they felt alive: a sort of second reality that opens out beyond the cracks of that other reality where everyone has agreed on the conventions that make the world machine go round" (177).

What are known as archetypes constitute an important way in which the light from "beyond" manifests in our reality. The archetypes are windows, stained glass windows that tell stories with light and color and form. In defining the psychology of archetypes in *Psychology and Alchemy*, Jung notes that the ultimate origin of archetypes is metaphysical, and therefore science as such must be agnostic, and his psychoanalysis supposedly treats the archetypes as primary imprints of whatever it is that is beyond them. A theological aesthetics need not shy away from metaphysical considerations in a study of archetypes, however. Calasso boldly claims that great literature is inevitably metaphysical, for in peering through the cracks in mundane reality, literature strives to map another reality, something beyond that which is merely empirical (177). The archetypes communicate ineffable truths through their appearances in blazes of intellectual or imaginative light, imprints of higher realities like the angelic figures of Pseudo-Dionysius' celestial hierarchies, of which he writes:

It is therefore lawful to portray Celestial Beings in forms drawn from even the lowest of material things which are not discordant since they, too, having originated from That which is truly beautiful, have throughout the whole of their bodily constitution some vestiges of Intellectual Beauty, and through these we may be led to immaterial Archetypes; the similitudes being taken, as has been said, dissimilarly, and the same things being defined, not in the same way, but harmoniously and fittingly, in the case both of intellectual and sensible natures. (*The Celestial Hierarchy*)

On a fundamental level, Tolkien shares this medieval and mystical view of symbolism. The gods are archetypes. Jung's attempt at constructing a science of archetypes for practical psychoanalytic use plus the tendency towards allegorical interpretation by many critics may mislead one into interpreting archetypes as mere allegories, akin to the reductive "nature myth" hypothesis Tolkien discounts. Jung does not assume that the archetypes are reducible to a naturalistic explanation, in fact, which is why his archetypal analytical psychology is necessary for him. The dimension of the unconscious is beyond conscious analysis, and so allegories of unconscious operations are needed, which from the perspective of science remain agnostic about metaphysics. The discourse of psychoanalysis, however, for multiple reasons, including its origins in Freud, inevitably obscures that which is most important from a mythopoeic perspective about the myths under consideration. Jung's analysis of the symbolism of alchemy, however, goes beyond the moralistic uses of modern empirical psychoanalysts. He unearths (or constructs) an entire mythological framework for interpreting the occult writings of arcane alchemists before the Enlightenment banished such pursuits to the condemned domain of the irrational. The

allegorical interpretations and applications of a mythic narrative do not exhaust the substance of that narrative. The operation of that narrative on a mythic level is what concerns us. We are interested in how that myth expresses the ineffable realm of the unseen world beyond the mundane. Another explanation, a more literary explanation, is needed to understand the phenomenon of the myth as myth.

Thor, for example, is more than a mere personification of thunder, though he is in part that also. He is not simply a “primitive” attempt at a theory of the material causes of thunder. He is a story of thunder, and he is a story of a person, and he is a story of divinity. Tolkien grants that the relationship between mythology and religion is unclear, and that they may be considered as different concepts, but he also says that the two are historically intertwined so that they should be understood as intimately related. One may speak properly enough of the stories and personages and symbols of a religion as its mythology, for that is what the word means, and that is one way in which the word is used in practice. Such a loose definition is adequate for understanding Tolkien’s discussion of mythology here. Mythology, as Tolkien understands it in relation to religion, has the capacity to reveal something of religious truth, but it is not identical with religion. Our main concern here is mythological discourse. Myths are something more than natural, more than allegory. Thor reveals something about thunder. He reveals something about the relationship between human beings and thunder. He is the spirit or the genius that is encountered in the experience of a thunderstorm, as well as the experience of confronting a hero of the people, of leadership and wrath and strength. As Tolkien writes, “there was a distant growl of thunder in the hills every time a story-teller heard a farmer in a rage” (51). Roberto Calasso writes that “there was a time when the gods were not just a literary cliché, but an event, a sudden apparition, an encounter with bandits perhaps, or the sighting of a ship” (4). The mythic writer

“must fight to win them back” (3). From a literature detailing such experiences and other encounters with divine spirits transcending natural phenomena – Odin in darkness, Horus in the majesty and authority of kings, Poseidon in the sea loved and feared by ancient mariners – and from reflections thereupon, a religion might be established, but Tolkien’s concern, and therefore our concern, is primarily with the literature.

Just so, the spirits of the mythology elaborated in *The Silmarillion* as the pantheon of Valinor are encountered in moments throughout *The Silmarillion* and *The Lord of the Rings*. Wherever there is beautiful starlight inspiring hope, wherever there is a queenly figure of grace, there is Varda. Wherever there is a wise king, there is Manwë. In *The Lord of the Rings*, various characters, from Frodo to Gandalf, periodically glimpse the kingly authority hidden beneath Aragorn’s rough exterior persona as the Ranger called Strider. Even Gandalf defers to him eventually, and uniquely among the characters in *The Lord of the Rings* he possesses the right to use the *palantír*, which is one reason he is able to use the stone reclaimed from Saruman without the catastrophic consequences that ensued from experiments with the *palantíri* by Saruman and Denethor. Wherever there are dreams, there is Lórien, and he also present in the havens of the elves and in gardens. Lothlorien in particular bears further examination in its relation to the Vala Lórien, for the name Lórien originally referred to the gardens in which the Vala Irmo dwells in Valinor, but the Elves came to call him by the name of his estate, which represented his power over creation. In the serene Lothlorien of Middle-Earth, the Fellowship finds rest and renewal, and Frodo and Sam are granted visions through the Mirror of Galadriel. Time flows differently there, so that even mortal Men experience the passage of time in a way similar to Elves, and what seems like only a few days turns out to be a month. Wherever there is pity, there is Nienna, with whom Olórin, who became the Wizard Gandalf, studied in ancient times. It was pity that

prevented Bilbo from killing Gollum in *The Hobbit*, and so Gollum is alive to seize the Ring from Frodo and fall into the fires of Mount Doom so that the Ring is finally, serendipitously, destroyed. Wherever there is strength of arms and courage and camaraderie, there is Tulkas, the laughing warrior. Boromir is his representative in the Fellowship, the Man of Gondor, loyal and brave, laying down his life in the attempt to save his friends, the Hobbits Merry and Pippin. Wherever there is skill in craft, wherever there is practical knowledge, and wherever there is beautiful artistry, there is Aule, who is the father of the Dwarves. Wherever there is natural beauty and natural life, wherever there is agriculture, and wherever there are trees, there is Yavanna. She is in the arcadian countryside of the Shire, and she is in the mysterious and dangerous Fangorn. The Ents are her children. Wherever there is refreshing water, wherever there is the sound of a singing brook or the call of the ocean waves, there is Ulmo. The tsunami that bears Elendil and his heirs to Middle-Earth out of the ruin of Númenor is Ulmo, and the musical brook next to which the Fellowship rests on the edge of Lothlorien and where Legolas sings of Nimrodel is also of Ulmo, and the road from the twilight of Middle-Earth to the earthly paradise of Valinor is also of Ulmo.

These are some of the “real presences” the reader of Tolkien’s fantasy encounters. As Tolkien says in “On Fairy Stories,” anyone can write the words “green” and “sun” together, but it takes an enchanter to convey someone into a world where such a thing is real (70). This is, one might go so far as to say, the ultimate ambition of the author: to bring forth a new reality. Harold Bloom writes that poetry begins, consciously or not, with a rebellion against nature – that is, nature in the modern or realistic sense, the indifferent machinery of the universe, the subhuman order of “death’s necessity” – and the ultimate enemy the poet desires to conquer is death (*The Anxiety of Influence* 10). Tolkien writes that one virtue of fantasy is its ability to satisfy, through

the imagination, the ancient desire to escape from death. One of the major themes of his fiction explores contrasting methods for overcoming the threat of death. Tolkien understands that merely extending life indefinitely, as the Ring does, is not a true escape from death. It is a hollow mockery of eternal life. As a Christian, Tolkien believes that death must be accepted temporarily in order to be transcended eternally. A taste of this transcendence may be had through the fantastic encounter with the archetypal being, a presence that manifests through non-identical repetition across spaces and times. The narrative form in which this authentic transcendence of Death is revealed Tolkien terms *eucatastrophe*:

In its fairy-tale – or otherworld – setting, it is a sudden and miraculous grace: never to be counted on to recur. It does not deny the existence of *dyscatastrophe*, of sorrow and failure... it denies (in the face of much evidence, if you will) universal final defeat and in so far is *evangelium*, giving a fleeting glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief. (86)

The poet is an alchemist of sorts, striving to transfigure the raw matter of his natural, mortal life into a work of art that will endure and in which others may perceive a meaningful secondary reality. In his *Psychology and Alchemy*, Jung interprets alchemy as a mirror of the soul, or an imitation of the divine activity of redeeming His fallen creature Man. From the base substance lead is made the shining and valuable metal gold, a process that is simply a microcosm of the true pursuit of alchemy, which is the philosopher's stone, which symbolizes the redemption of matter. For Tolkien, the art of subcreation foreshadows the New Earth that he believes will become the primary reality of the saved. Immortality is not complete without the transcendent joy that shines forth in the epiphany of the eucatastrophe.

This is akin to the transcendence that Steiner takes to be the root of meaning. Steiner admits that post-structuralist critiques of classical conceptions of the presence of meaning are technically well-founded, nonetheless the nihilism that post-structuralism is sometimes taken to support is an anathema to him. One senses in Steiner the same essential insight expressed by John Milbank, that the death of God leaves inevitably to the death of Man. The counternarrative to this transcendentalism is expressed by Nietzsche in “On Truth and Lies in the Extramoral Sense,” in which it is argued that truth is nothing more than “a mobile army of metaphor, metonymy, and anthropomorphism.” Knowledge is an empty fabrication, a product of the struggle for survival in an indifferent and meaningless universe, “red in tooth and claw,” to use Tennyson’s phrase, and eventually the seething dark chaos beneath the illusion of reality will swallow everything up again:

Once upon a time, in some out of the way corner of that universe which is dispersed into numberless twinkling solar systems, there was a star upon which clever beasts invented knowing. That was the most arrogant and mendacious minute of “world history,” but nevertheless, it was only a minute. After nature had drawn a few breaths, the star cooled and congealed, and the clever beasts had to die... There were eternities during which [the human intellect] did not exist. And when it is all over with for the human intellect, nothing will have happened. For this intellect has no additional mission which would lead it beyond human life. (Nietzsche 1171 – 1172)

Steiner suggests at the beginning of *Real Presences* that something like this is the dominant view in modern society. People refer to ideas like truth, the soul, and divinity by way of metaphors

whose historical and material and finite origins have been forgotten, thereby producing the illusion of greater meaning. Taught to distrust imagination and view romance as a kind of pathology, the light of the spiritual world is obscured.

Yeats was another imaginative critic of modernity who lamented the deficiency of joy that transcended death in contemporary literature. As Yeats writes, the trinity of “Freedom, God, Immortality” is replaced by contingency, accident, and decadence (256). Those three principles upon which Yeats would found literature are alive in Tolkien’s fantasy. It takes the poet or storyteller to show forth the presence of these transcendentals, which cannot flourish in an age of materialism and skepticism. Against the dogmatic realism that refused to have anything to do with the “beyond,” the Inklings produced their own romantic and spiritual literature that sought to recover that invisible Otherworld in which the adventuring imagination discovers the substance of meaning.

Before Nietzsche articulated his dark fable of nihilism, Kierkegaard posited in *Fear and Trembling* that such a view of life could lead to naught but despair (15). Against this threat of despair, fortunately, humanity has, by the grace of God, “the hero and the poet or orator.” We might say, in terms closer to those of Tolkien’s “On Fairy Stories,” that we have the hero and the storyteller. Kierkegaard presents these two roles in *Fear and Trembling* as interdependent active and passive principles: the hero acts, the poet recollects, and neither would mean anything without the other. Tolkien understands storytelling to be a vital aspect of human nature throughout history, going so far as to suggest reversing Müller’s infamous claim that “mythology is a disease of language” to say rather that “languages... are a disease of mythology” (“On Fairy Stories” 48). In Heideggerian terms, the work of the storyteller done well reveals something

about the meaning of being. Stories communicate meaning in ways that purely formal languages cannot.

One may, hypothetically speaking, with sophisticated erudition assemble a systematic comparative literature across historical time and geographical space to demonstrate wide-ranging parallelisms, shared symbolic roots, and common moral lessons, without even resorting to crude allegorical decryption in the sense of treating a story as a cipher to be solved for the moral so that the story can then be set aside. One may establish an institution where students can analyze texts to learn various perspectives on reality as recorded by historical authors and then discuss such perspectives with the expectation of learning something useful from them. One may do these things and more with access to all of the world's archives in order to develop theoretical truths that seem to approximate observed reality fairly efficiently and thereby predict what behaviors the sum total of human discourse has calculated are most productive for certain presumed ends, yet in this grand science of humanity there remains a central lack of substance, an aporia that will cause the whole scientific system to crash and burn when challenged by a sufficiently courageous intellect and flexible imagination. Nietzsche realized that the sciences can only produce temporal, contingent truths, not Truth, and so all the Duchesses of Wonderland who diligently extract the morals from this and from that may appear wise to their particular factions by approximating paradigms of thought and behavior that tend to produce the right sorts of feelings, but behind the functional allegories of the public morality or political philosophy of the present moment there remains an absence of presence that threatens to undermine meaning itself. The humanist scholar can speak persuasively at best in such a scenario. The ground upon which normative or universal or essential claims may be made has been washed away by the floods of human history.

The task of a mythmaker like Tolkien, then, must be to salvage the ground of communication from the abyss of absence. This is neither a matter of mere assertion nor of logical demonstration. It is a narrative or poetic or artistic task of presentation: to produce in the present a phenomenon that illuminates the world with a light that is revealed to have been always already possible, latent but obscured in the blood and the mire of empirical history. It is a matter of perception and communion. The double valence of the etymology of “invention” may be relevant here. The word “invent” is commonly used to describe making something new, but the Latin root can mean literally “to come upon, to find.” It is this latter sense that best expresses the spirit of Tolkien’s creative work, which exemplifies the art of mythopoetic synthesis. Tolkien himself in describing his writing process for W. H. Auden said that he sometimes he felt that he was not so much building characters and a world out of his own imagination as he was discovering a world and characters that already existed (*The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien* #163, June 7, 1955). Shippey explores the philological dimension of this mode of invention in Tolkien’s work in *The Road to Middle-Earth*. Matthew R. Bardowell explores in an article the way in which this sort of creative ethic reflects ideas found in the Finnish *Kalevala*, such as in the conflict between the ancient Väinämöinen and the youthful upstart Joukahainen. Väinämöinen demands that Joukahainen prove himself by singing of eternal things when Joukahainen claims to be superior in wisdom, but Joukahainen can only speak of temporal things or pretend to speak of eternal things, and so Joukahainen is no match for the song of Väinämöinen (Lönnrot 25 – 31).

Roberto Calasso observes that the encounter with the divine is not so fleeting and obscure when a people has a liturgy (3). There is something of the ritual inherent in reading: the reader imaginatively reenacts the events described in the text and in so doing may be said to participate

in the legacy of the story that is being told. Heidegger writes in *The Origin of the Work of Art*, taking as an icon of the work of art a Greek temple, that the “temple-work...fits together and at the same time gathers around itself the unity of those paths and relations in which birth and death, disaster and blessing, victory and disgrace, endurance and decline acquire the shape of destiny for human being” (41). The presence of the god in the temple is not seen as an external object but is perceived through the imagination in the situation of the temple that reveals the presence of the god in its particular delineation of the unseen being. Augustine writes of the miracles of Christ:

For He did not merely do miracles for the miracles' sake; but in order that the things which He did should inspire wonder in those who saw them, and convey truth to them who understand. As he who sees letters in an excellently written manuscript, and knows not how to read, praises indeed the transcriber's hand, and admires the beauty of the characters; but what those characters mean or signify he does not know; and by the sight of his eyes he is a praiser of the work, but in his mind has no comprehension of it; whereas another man both praises the work, and is capable of understanding it; such an one, I mean, who is not only able to see what is common to all, but who can read also; which he who has never learned cannot. So they who saw Christ's miracles, and understood not what they meant, and what they in a manner conveyed to those who had understanding, wondered only at the miracles themselves; whereas others both wondered at the miracles, and attained to the meaning of them. (“Sermon XLVIII”)

This analogy of reading the signs to understand the spiritual meanings of physical appearances exemplifies the phenomenal excess of the aesthetic that overflows mere appearance into a realm of mental or spiritual perception. It is still a matter of perception, however, not of mere calculation. The phenomenon is not merely a code to be “broken” in order to extract a rational, positive meaning. The phenomenal form of the work, whether an ornate temple or a beautiful manuscript, illuminates in a particular way the meaning of the work which would not be available without the appearance of the work itself as such. “By means of the temple, the god is present in the temple,” writes Heidegger (40). The god is not the same as the image of the god, but in the image the god may be seen by those whose minds are open to the experience of the god.

How does this inner perception of the truth that is beauty and the beauty that is truth occur in the work of art? How is the invisible world of the meaning of being present in the text? How does the reader perceive the unseen reality that is on the other side of the text? We are dealing with a dimension of being akin to Plato’s intelligible world. The disclosed aesthetic truth is not propositional. The wings of reason, as Beatrice tells Dante, are weak. The narrative of the text, or the appearance of the work of art, in its narration, in its appearing, in the happening in the experience of the reader, ideally blazes forth with some unveiled aspect or form or pattern of being. The Roman Catholic theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar writes:

The appearance of the form, as revelation of the depths, is an indissoluble union of two things. It is the real presence of the depths, of the whole of reality, and it is a real pointing beyond itself to these depths... We ‘behold’ the form; but, if we really behold it, it is not as a detached form, rather in its unity with the depths that make their appearance

in it. We see form as the splendor, as the glory of Being. We are ‘enraptured’ by our contemplation of these depths and are ‘transported’ to them. But, so long as we are dealing with the beautiful, this never happens in such a way that we leave the (horizontal) form behind us in order to plunge (vertically) into the naked depths. (*Seeing the Form* 118 – 119)

What are “the depths” in Tolkien’s cosmos? The *Silmarillion* speaks of the “Deep of Time” within which the realm of Arda is established and of the “Timeless Halls” beyond Eä. Von Balthasar glosses the depths as “the whole of reality.” What is the form of being that is perceived in the depths of *The Silmarillion*? Is it not the symphony of lights? The form of forms is embodied in the Silmarils, the greatest artifice of the greatest artists of all the Children of Ilúvatar. The whole of reality is symbolized in these three jewels.

The jewel is the central symbol of Tolkien’s art. The philosopher’s stone produced by the imaginative alchemy of the artist is a gemstone that channels the light of being into a visible resplendence. The Silmarils are, of course, the apex of Tolkien’s gemstone symbolism. Fëanor, the apex of the creative fire of the Noldor, also introduced the art of gemcrafting to the elves (*The Silmarillion* 65 – 66). It would not be out of place to consider as well the Arkenstone of *The Hobbit*, called the Heart of the Mountain, and the *palantíri*, also called the Lost Seeing Stones in the time of *The Lord of the Rings*, which were perhaps also crafted by Fëanor, marvelous orbs with the ability to communicate and to scry over long distances (*The Lord of the Rings* 583). One may also recall Walter Pater’s words that the goal of aesthetic existence is to burn with a “hard, gemlike flame” (236), from which phrase one may then turn to gaze upon the figure of Fëanor, the greatest gemsmith of the Noldor, whose tragic story brought about sublime antitheses of

good and evil and participated in the historical unfolding of creation to the greater glory of the Creator. The gem is an image of both the heart and the mind. The philosopher's stone gives the elixir of life, and there is a classical equivalence between light and life that is very much active in Tolkien's cosmos. In "Sailing to Byzantium," Yeats seeks the "artifice of eternity." This pursuit is also that of alchemy. It is also the pursuit at the heart of *The Silmarillion*. What else could be so perfect an image of that artifice as the Silmarils? Yet they are an artifice of eternity, not eternity itself; they give form to the light of eternity in the world, which is the light of eternal life, but they are not the infinite itself, rather icons through which the light of heaven flows. More than passively refracting a light from elsewhere, however, the Silmarils are said to be alive and to give their own light: "even in the darkness of the deepest treasury the Silmarils of their own radiance shone like the stars of Varda; and yet, as were they indeed living things, they rejoiced in light and received it and gave it back in hues more marvelous than before" (*The Silmarillion* 69 – 70). Thus do the Silmarils reveal something of the nature of life itself and of the relationships among life, art, and eternity.

Beatrice is Dante's jewel, the particular form in which the Light comes to him and which draws him inward. Because Dante repents of his wickedness, he is granted the sight of Beatrice unveiled, and he is allowed entry into Paradise, but first he must endure purgation by fire, both literal and metaphorical (*Purgatorio* XXVII, XXX – XXXI). The Silmarils are blessed by Varda, so that they burn whomsoever touches them and is unworthy. They burn the hands of Morgoth and torment him when he sets them in the crown upon his brow (*The Silmarillion* 86 – 88), and the Silmaril that Beren takes from the crown of Morgoth burns Carcharoth, the hellhound of Morgoth who guards the gates of Angband as Cerberus guards the gateway to Hades, from within when it bites off the hand of Beren in which he was carrying the holy jewel (214 – 215).

Beatrice tells Dante, explaining as far as is possible divine justice, “The Godly Goodness that has banished every / envy from Its own Self, burns in Itself; / and sparkling so, It shows eternal beauties...” (*Paradiso* VII.64 – 66). Do these lines not describe aptly the form or pattern that one perceives in the Silmarils? There is also an obvious parallel also between Galadriel and Beatrice. Both are, for one thing, Marian figures, to some extent, though neither is reducible to a straight allegory of St. Mary. They are vessels of holiness in whose queenly countenances one sees the light of an otherworldly dawn. Galadriel is wise and beautiful, and she is first encountered by the Fellowship in the Edenic land of Lothlorien, where she offers Frodo the opportunity to look into the Mirror and see possibilities past, present, and future (*The Lord of the Rings* 354). She is also one of the guardians of the Elven Rings (355 – 356). Her gift to Frodo is “the light of Eärendil’s star” (367). It is from her also that the Fellowship receives *lembas*, the miraculous elven waybread, a wafer of which is sufficient to nourish a man through a day’s journey. Gimli compares it favorably to the honey cakes of the Beornings, who are apparently famous for their bakers (360 – 361). *Lembas* may be seen to prefigure the “bread of life” that Christ proclaims in the New Testament. It is therefore also associated with the elixir of life produced by the philosopher’s stone. *Lembas* is, one might well say, the bread of light in *The Lord of the Rings*. It sustains the Fellowship on their sacred Quest to vanquish the Dark Lord Sauron. Arwen, who is the granddaughter of Galadriel, and Aragorn are associated with emerald, and Galadriel gives to Aragorn “a great sone of a clear green, set in a silver brooch that was wrought in the likeness of an eagle with outspread wings” (365 – 366). One of Aragorn’s names is Elessar, which means “Elfstone.” These precious stones symbolize the crystallization of light.

The Sampo is identified by Shippey (*The Road to Middle-Earth* 275) and others (see Himes) as a likely source of inspiration for the story of the Silmarils, and Tolkien wrote of the impact

that his experience with the *Kalevala* as a young man had upon his imagination (*The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien* #163, June 7, 1955). Lönnrot's *Kalevala* never provides a clear definition of the Sampo, and Shippey remarks that nothing "could be more provocative to Tolkien than a word without a referent, except perhaps an ancient poem written off by modern scholars as hopelessly irrational" (*The Road to Middle-Earth* 275-276). Both artifacts participate in both cosmogonic and alchemical symbolism. The Silmarils contain the light of the Trees of Valinor, and ultimately the Silmarils come to rest in Earth, Sea, and Sky. They are the ultimate achievement of the art of Fëanor, and Yavanna says that they have the power to restore life to the Trees. They also have the power to burn anyone tainted by evil. They are holy relics of Valinor, and the history of the First Age of Middle-Earth is bound up with their fate. The Sampo is a mysterious object/device/artifact that is essential to the flourishing of human civilization. Lönnrot's readers discover of the Sampo that

On the one side there's a corn mill

On the second a salt mill

A money mill on the third.

And then the new Sampo ground

And the bright-lid rocked;

Ground a binful at twilight –

One binful to eat

Another it ground to sell

And a third to store at home. (116)

Note that there are three sides to the Sampo, as there are three Silmarils. The number three has theological and folkloric associations as well. The Silmarils are of the same substance and are not distinguished from one another save for where they appear historically. This is another way in which divinity is reflected in the Silmarils. Patterns of reflection work on many different levels, some of which may be deeper than others, but they all fit together in expressing or pointing towards of tracing a greater pattern, the constitutive logic of the existence of the thing itself.

Forged by Ilmarinen, a sky god, the Sampo is identified by some scholars as a world-axis in the form of a windmill around which the sky pivots as it grinds out life-nourishing grain (Himes 79). Ilmarinen boasts of his ability:

I'll be

Able to forge the Sampo

Beat out the bright-lid

From a swan's quill-tip

A barren cow's milk

A small barley grain

A summer ewe's down

Because I have forged the sky

Beaten out the lid of heaven

With nothing to start off from

With not a shred ready made. (112 – 113)

Such a marvelous work is comparable to the royal art of the alchemist who pursues the substance of substances as well as to the fateful craft of Fëanor, who captured the light of the Trees of Valinor in gems made of a mysterious substance whose nature will never be known by anyone apart from Fëanor until the end of the world. The artist, or subcreator, performs such feats also. The light of the unseen supernal is made visible in the compositions of the poets. The artist holds up a mirror not to the accidents of everyday reality that conceals the glory of being itself but to the otherworld in which something of the meaning of being shines through the phenomena.

The multifarious nature of the enigmatic Sampo is like that of the philosopher's stone. The stone is a paradoxical substance, symbolizing the unity of opposites. It is eternity manifested in a nutshell, matter purged of the nightmare with which the very ground is cursed on account of Original Sin (Genesis 3:17). It is the crystallization of the form of matter, the apotheosis of physical being. Carl Jung brings together many important alchemical texts in his study *Psychology and Alchemy* that attest to the analogy of the philosopher's stone to Christ and the alchemical work to the work of redemption from sin and death. Jung's sources also attest to the mysterious nature of the stone that is represented in so many ways as to be seen as a symbol of the all-in-all. It is symbolized, among other things, by the figure Mercurius, invoking the messenger of the gods, the psychopomp who guides lost souls to the afterlife and who points Odysseus to the miraculous herb moly:

Mercurius stands at the beginning and end... he is the *prima materia*... as dragon he devours himself and as dragon he dies, to rise again as the *lapis*. He is the play of colors... and the division into four elements... He is metallic yet liquid, matter yet spirit, cold yet fiery, poison yet healing draught – a symbol uniting all opposites (294 – 295)

The mention of a being who “stands at the beginning and the end” clearly calls to mind the famous verse from Revelation in which Jesus declares through his angel to John: “I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last” (KJV 22:13; cf. 1:8-11). Christ is the paradoxical hypostatic union of God and Man, both fully God and fully Man, without contradicting or compromising His divine nature. The Silmarils, though created together, are ultimately associated with distinct elements, and one of them is born aloft by Eärendil as a new star in the heavens. As Shippey observes, Tolkien sees in the figure of Eärendil a type of Christ as intercessor (*The Road to Middle-Earth* 280), and his bearing the holy jewel into the sky as a sign of hope for the Children of Ilúvatar likewise associates him with the Light of the World whose birth was heralded by a star.

The cut gemstone is analogous. It is a refinement of a stone into something like pure form and color. All distortions obscuring the potential radiance of the substance have been purged, ideally speaking. The hidden beauty of nature is made fully manifest through the artifice of man. This is the fundamental alchemy of art. It is a science not of the worldly senses but of the spiritual senses, such as the “eyes of faith”⁴ that allow the believer to recognize the Almighty Father in the human person of Jesus Christ. Tolkien’s highest aspiration for art is to participate in the form of *evangelium*, of the sharing of the Gospel, which is the redemption of the soul from sin, life beyond death, and transcendent joy.

The source of all being is the Former of forms, and throughout the whole of being, the entirety of the depths of the Creation, traces of the Creator’s grandeur are present for those with eyes to see or with ears to hear, not with the senses of the flesh, so to speak, but the spiritual or

⁴ Von Balthasar 175, discussing Pierre Rousselot’s *The Eyes of Faith*.

imaginative senses. This is what it means for Tolkien to champion a fundamentally theocratic aesthetic: the primary rule structuring the matrix of reality is understood to be the creative will of God. The Silmarils are concrete, artistic images of living souls, luminous entities that shape the fate of the world and bear something of the maker's spirit within them. They burn with an inner light as the Creation is ignited by the Fire Imperishable, which is, as I have argued, the divine Logos, the Word of God and Light of the World. The work of art that is symbolized in the Silmarils proportionally reflects that invisible light into the humanly perceptible realm. Discerning this inner light of being and revealing it to the world is the religious task of the artist, whose work exhibits the same fundamental pattern as the alchemist, who seeks the substance of substances, the true gold, the elixir of life, or the philosopher's stone. Tolkien's fantasy kindles an inward fire to illuminate the inner life of the human spirit.

Works Cited

Alighieri, Dante. *The Divine Comedy*. Trans. Allen Mandelbaum. Everyman's Library edition.

New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995.

Auden, W. H. "At the End of the Quest, Victory." *New York Times*, 22 Jan. 1956,

http://tolkiengateway.net/wiki/At_the_End_of_the_Quest,_Victory. Tolkien Gateway.

Augustine. "Sermon XLVIII." *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, edited by Philip Schaff, vol. 6, Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1887.

---. *The City of God against the Pagans*. Edited by R. W. Dyson, Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Bardowell, Matthew R. "J. R. R. Tolkien's Creative Ethic and Its Finnish Analogues." *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, vol. 20, no. 1, 2009, pp. 91-108.

Blake, William. "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell." *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, edited by David V. Erdman and Harold Bloom, Newly rev. ed, Anchor Books, 1982, pp. 33-45.

Bloom, Harold. *The Anxiety of Influence*. Second Edition, Oxford University Press, 1997.

---. *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages*. New York: Riverhead Books, 1994.

Bonaventure. "The Mind's Journey into God." *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism*, edited by Bernard McGinn, Modern Library, 2006, pp. 162-71.

Chesterton, G. K. "The Mystagogue." *In Defense of Sanity: The Best Essays of G.K. Chesterton*, edited by Dale Ahlquist, Ignatius Press, 2011, pp. 65-68.

Eliade, Mircea. *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Cosmos and History*. Translated by Willard R. Trask, Princeton University Press, 2005.

- Flieger, Verlyn. *Splintered Light: Logos and Language in Tolkien's World*. Revised Edition, Kent State University Press, 2002.
- Heidegger, Martin. "The Origin of the Work of Art." Trans. Albert Hofstadter. *Poetry, Language, Thought*. Trans. Albert Hofstadter. New York: HarperCollins, 1971. 17–86.
- Himes, Jonathan B. "What J. R. R. Tolkien Really Did with the Sampo?" *Mythlore: A Journal of J. R. R. Tolkien, C. S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature*, vol. 22, no. 4, 2000, pp. 69–85.
- Homer. *The Iliad*. Translated by Robert Fitzgerald, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004.
- Jung, Carl. *Psychology and Alchemy*. Translated by Hull, Princeton University Press.
- Kierkegaard, Søren. *Fear and Trembling; Repetition*. Translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton University Press.
- Lewis, C. S. "On Science Fiction." *Of Other Worlds: Essays and Stories*, Harvest, Harcourt, 1975, pp. 59–73.
- Lönnrot, Elias. *The Kalevala: An Epic Poem after Oral Tradition*. Translated by Keith Bosley, Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Milbank, J. "Radical Orthodoxy and Protestantism Today: John Milbank in Conversation." *Acta Theologica*, vol. 25, 2017. DOI.org (Crossref), doi:[10.18820/23099089/actat.v37i1S.2](https://doi.org/10.18820/23099089/actat.v37i1S.2).
- Milton, John. *Paradise Lost*. Edited by Stephen Orgel and Jonathan Goldberg, Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm. "On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense." *The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present*, edited by Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg, translated by Daniel Breazeale, 2nd ed, Bedford/St. Martin's, 2001, pp. 1171–79.

- Orchard, Andy, editor. *The Elder Edda: A Book of Viking Lore*. Penguin Books, 2011.
- Pater, Walter. *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*. London: Macmillan, 1912.
- HathiTrust.org. <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc2.ark:/13960/t0gt5r27p>. Accessed 28 April 2020.
- Pseudo-Dionysius. *The Celestial Hierarchy*. Edited by Arthur Versluis, Translated by Anonymous, <http://www.esoteric.msu.edu/VolumeII/CelestialHierarchy.html>. Esoterica, Vol. II. Accessed 24 Apr. 2020.
- Salo, David. *A Gateway to Sindarin*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2007.
- Shippey, Tom. *J. R. R. Tolkien: Author of the Century*. Houghton Mifflin Company, 2002.
- . *The Road to Middle-Earth*. Revised and Expanded, HarperCollins, 2005.
- Steiner, George. *Real Presences*. Paperback ed, Univ. of Chicago Press, 1991.
- Sturluson, Snorri. *The Prose Edda: Norse Mythology*. Translated by Jesse L. Byock, Penguin, 2005.
- Tolkien, J. R. R. "On Fairy Stories." *The Tolkien Reader*, Ballantine Books, Del Rey, 1966, pp. 33–99.
- . *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien: A Selection*. Edited by Humphrey Carpenter and Christopher Tolkien, 1st Houghton Mifflin pbk. ed, Houghton Mifflin Co, 2000.
- . *The Lord of the Rings*. HarperCollins, 1994.
- . *The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays*. Edited by Christopher Tolkien, HarperCollins, 2006.
- . *The Silmarillion*. Edited by Christopher Tolkien, Ballantine Books, 2002.
- . *Unfinished Tales of Númenor and Middle-Earth*. Edited by Christopher Tolkien, New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2001.

Von Balthasar, Hans Urs. *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics, Volume I: Seeing the Form*. Edited by Joseph Fessio and John Riches, Translated by Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis, vol. 1, T. & T. Clark, 1982.

Yeats, W. B. *Yeats's Poetry, Drama, and Prose*. Edited by James Pethica, W. W. Norton & Company, 2000.