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Creation and Sub-Creation:

Divine and Human Authorship in the Works of J.R.R. Tolkien

Gerard Hynes

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the School of English, Trinity College, University of Dublin

September 2013
Declaration

This thesis has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at this or any other university. It is entirely the candidate's own work. The candidate agrees that the library may lend or copy this thesis upon request. This permission covers only single copies made for study purposes subject to normal conditions of acknowledgement.
J.R.R. Tolkien spent the greater part of his adult life constructing an imaginary world; its cosmology, history, legends, and languages. He described this process as 'sub-creation', a definition embodying the connection Tolkien saw between human creativity and the divine act of creation. God creates the primary world and human artists within it, who then engage in sub-creation, which both changes the primary world and makes secondary, fictional worlds. All acts of human artistic creativity derive from, and imitate, divine creativity. This concept is central to Tolkien’s understanding of the role, ability, and limitations of artistic creativity. He incorporated it into both the themes and structures of his works: sub-creating a world that was itself both a work of art and a meditation on the dependent, collaborative nature of art.

The thesis begins by defining the sub-creation, before tracing the linguistic and philosophical history of the concept, as well as outlining some of the problems posed by a term which is both literary and theological in content. Thereafter, it traces Tolkien’s use of the metaphor of sub-creation under four broad headings: cosmogony and cosmology, providence and freedom, focalisation and subjectivity, and creativity and evil.

Chapter One outlines the philological concept of asterisk-reality, a lost past reconstructed from its surviving traces, and applies this concept to Tolkien’s creation myth. It traces Tolkien’s attempts to relate the god-figure, angelic beings, and act of creation of his mythology to the mythological, philosophical, and theological traditions of the primary world. The difficulty of relating his sub-created world to the primary world, both scientifically and textually, forced him to make radical revisions, and ultimately to abandon the concept of an asterisk-cosmogony.
Chapter Two examines the connections Tolkien drew between the relation of an author to their work and that of the Creator to the Creation. It draws out some of the implications of Tolkien's understanding of authorial control and character freedom and relates this to the providential scheme of Tolkien's world. The mechanics of providence, compulsion, and free will in *The Silmarillion* and *The Lord of the Rings* are examined before addressing Tolkien's attempts to relate the providential narrative of his world to the Christian narrative he saw operating in the primary world.

Chapter Three discusses how Tolkien's concern to reproduce in his sub-creation the essentially ecocentric view he had of the primary world led him to offer the perspectives of non-human subjects. It traces Tolkien's redefinition of anthropocentric literary devices as anthropomorphism, personification, and the pathetic fallacy, locating him in a literary tradition of depicting sentience and subjectivity in the non-human and even inanimate world.

Chapter Four draws out the implications of Tolkien's myth of the origin of evil in an act of artistic rebellion. By connecting evil with artistic creativity, Tolkien acknowledged the dangers inherent in the sub-creative impulse, its potential for possessiveness, myopia, and even destructiveness. This chapter traces the archetypal fall of Tolkien's most ambitious sub-creator, from the desire to create, to the desire to control the created world, to the desire to destroy.
Acknowledgements

I have been truly fortunate in my supervisor Dr Helen Conrad-O’Briain and wish to thank her for constant advice, patience, books, and good sense.

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Finally I am truly grateful to my family for support of every kind.
Conventions and Abbreviations

Abbreviations for Tolkien’s works are those of Tolkien Studies. Citations of The Lord of the Rings are to book, chapter, and page number. Following Tolkien Studies, the ‘Silmarillion’ refers to the body of texts composed during Tolkien’s lifetime while The Silmarillion refers to the posthumous volume published by Christopher Tolkien in 1977. The dating of all Tolkien’s drafts and published works is based on the Scull and Hammond J.R.R. Tolkien Companion and Guide, checked against Christopher Tolkien’s dating. Tolkien altered character and place names repeatedly; references will be to the name used at the date of the text version in question. The Letters are listed by pagination, not number. For editions used see bibliography.

FR The Fellowship of the Ring (1954)
H The Hobbit (1937)
Jewels The War of the Jewels (1994)
Lays The Lays of Beleriand (1985)
Lost Road The Lost Road and Other Writings (1987)
Lost Tales I The Book of Lost Tales, Part One (1983)
Lost Tales II The Book of Lost Tales, Part Two (1984)
MC The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays (1983)
Morgoth Morgoth’s Ring (1993)
OFS Tolkien on Fairy-stories (2008)
Peoples The Peoples of Middle-earth (1996)
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<td><em>The Silmarillion</em> (1977)</td>
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<td><em>The Legend of Sigurd and Gudrún</em> (2009)</td>
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**Other abbreviations**

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<tr>
<td>CCSL</td>
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<td>Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England</td>
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<td>CSEL</td>
<td>Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum (Vienna, 1866–)</td>
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<td>ÍF</td>
<td>Íslensk Fornrit</td>
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<td>EETS</td>
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<td>LCL</td>
<td>Loeb Classical Library</td>
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<td>OED</td>
<td>Oxford English Dictionary</td>
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<td>SC</td>
<td>Sources Chrétienne (Paris, 1942–)</td>
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<td>SBVS</td>
<td>Saga-Book of the Viking Society</td>
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Introduction

Definitions of Authorship: Creation and Sub-creation

Four decades after J.R.R. Tolkien’s death his legacy appears secure. *The Lord of the Rings* is possibly both the best selling and most influential literary work of the twentieth century.¹ The fantasy genre, ubiquitous in print, film, and online culture, was defined by the popular success of paperback *The Lord of the Rings* in the 1960s.² Tolkien, however, would not have understood this commercial success as central to his literary aims and aspirations. The work of his heart was not *The Lord of the Rings* but the ‘Silmarillion’. Begun during the First World War, he was still working on it in the last months of his life six decades later. His other works were drawn into it, whether, like *The Hobbit* they had been intended to be detached,³ or like *Roverandom* and *The Fall of Arthur*, they had been originally conceived as entirely separate.⁴ The ‘Silmarillion’ became, in Mark Wolf’s terms, a *transquel*; a narrative sequence which subsumes other narratives into a more or


² Fantasy as a literary classification arguably crystallised with the publication of the Ballantine Adult Fantasy series in 65 volumes from 1969–74. This was explicitly an attempt by Tolkien’s American publishers to build on the success of *The Lord of the Rings*.


less unified whole. Taking into account all the material published by Christopher Tolkien as *The History of Middle-earth*, the ‘Silmarillion’ contains myths, fairy-tales, poetry, dream visions, time travel stories, annals, debates, cartographies, genealogies, etymologies; all positioned inside the world they simultaneously constructed. The ‘Silmarillion’ is a library rather than a book.

When Tolkien felt required to give an explanation for his literary activities he offered different answers to different audiences at different times. In his youth he felt he, and his friends in the TCBS, had a duty to their country to champion moral and aesthetic reform. As Tolkien’s friend G.B. Smith put it, perhaps more strongly than Tolkien would have, their role was ‘to re-establish sanity, cleanliness, and the love of real and true beauty in everyone’s breast.’ Tolkien’s method was expressed by the line: ‘the fairies came to teach men song and holiness’. The fairy tradition he was then reinventing was conceived in expressly national terms. In the frame narrative of *The Book of Lost Tales* (c.1919), Tolkien’s Anglo-Saxon seafarer Eriol brings knowledge of the fairies from Tol Eressëa, Elvenhome itself, to give England an older and more accurate fairy-lore than its Celtic neighbours with their more extensive folklore. In the early ‘Story of Eriol’s Life’ Tolkien boasts: ‘Thus it is through Eriol and his sons the *Engle* (i.e. the English) have the true tradition of the fairies, of whom the *Íras* and the *Wéalas* (the Irish and Welsh) tell garbled things.’ As Tolkien explained to Milton Waldman in an explanation cum justification of his legendarium:

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I was from early days grieved by the poverty of my own beloved country: it had no stories of its own (bound up with its tongue and soil), not of the quality that I sought [...]. I had a mind to make a body of more or less connected legend, ranging from the large and cosmogonic, to the level of romantic fairy-story [...] which I could dedicate simply to: to [sic] England; to my country.\footnote{J.R.R. Tolkien, \textit{The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien}, ed. Humphrey Carpenter and Christopher Tolkien (London: HarperCollins, 1995), p. 144.}

He admitted however that by then, 1951, his crest had ‘long since fallen’. While his work may have begun with ambitions to give his country a purer national tradition, it absorbed other concerns and interests, and developed in other directions.

At other times Tolkien offered other, more humble, reasons for his writing. In the foreword to the second edition of \textit{The Lord of the Rings}, he claimed the prime motive for writing it was ‘the desire of the tale-teller to try his hand at a really long story that would hold the attention of his readers, amuse them, delight them, and at times maybe excite them or deeply move them.’\footnote{J.R.R. Tolkien, \textit{The Lord of the Rings: 50th Anniversary Edition} (London: HarperCollins, 2004), p. xxiii.} Tolkien was at heart a story-teller and scholar, not a polemicist. His literary and linguistic inventions primarily existed for the pleasure they gave him and any audience with whom he might share them.\footnote{This foreword was written in part to counter allegorical readings of the work.} This is not to say his writing did not address some of his most fundamental social and moral concerns. As Tolkien told Henry Resnick in an interview, Arda expressed his love for the physical world: ‘If you really want to know what Middle-earth is based on, it’s my wonder and
delight in the earth as it is, particularly the natural earth.'\textsuperscript{12} Another topic Tolkien repeatedly returned to when discussing the main theme of *The Lord of the Rings* was ‘Death and Immortality’ (*Letters* 246; cf. 236, 267, 284).\textsuperscript{13} Mortality, and its elucidation through contrast with Elven immortality, was a perennial concern from *The Book of Lost Tales* (c.1919) to ‘The Monsters and the Critics’ (1936) to *Leaf by Niggle* (1938–9), and to the last revisions of the ‘Silmarillion’ (1973). On at least two occasions Tolkien related mortality to what he termed ‘the problem of the relation of Art (and Sub-creation) and Primary Reality’ (*Letters* 145; cf. 188). Taken simply, this connects mortality with the love, often unsatisfied, of the artist for the world and the possessiveness of the artist towards their work. By equating the two, however, Tolkien also suggests creation and sub-creation are as important to his thought as mortality:

Since the whole matter from beginning to end is mainly concerned with the relation of Creation to making and sub-creation (and subsidiarily with the related matter of ‘mortality’), it must be clear that references to these things are not casual, but fundamental. (*Letters* 188)

As already stated, these comments are occasional and always related to their time and audience. For a fuller account of Tolkien’s understanding of his work we must turn to his essay ‘On Fairy-stories’.'\textsuperscript{14}

Tolkien theorised more fully about the nature of his work in this essay. His second most reprinted essay after ‘The Monsters and the Critics’, ‘On Fairy-stories’ has become the key point of reference for Tolkien’s thought and overall literary aims. Verlyn Flieger

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\textsuperscript{13} Tolkien’s capitalization.

\textsuperscript{14} There is not space here to develop Tolkien’s claim that his work was ‘fundamentally linguistic in inspiration’ (*Letters* 219) and Arda a world created in which his invented languages might live. Taken too literally, this claim does not match the chronology of Tolkien’s literary and linguistic inventions which were concurrent. See Tom Shippey, *The Road to Middle-earth*, rev. ed. (London: HarperCollins, 2005), pp 22–31.
and Douglas A. Anderson call it 'the theoretical basis for his fiction', 'his most explicit analysis of his own art',\(^1\) and 'a benchmark and a point from which [...] he was able to look both backwards and forwards at the practise of his craft' (OFS 16).\(^2\) It has also become an essential text in fantasy criticism. Whatever it became, it was not originally intended as a comment on Tolkien’s own literary goals or techniques. First delivered as an Andrew Lang Lecture at the University of St Andrews on 8 March 1939 on the topic of 'fairy-stories', it ranged much wider and entered into debate with Max Muller, Andrew Lang, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge on the origins, audience, and technique of fairy-stories and fantasy. Like 'The Monsters and the Critics', it can be read as having a defence of fantasy at its core; its seriousness and artistic value.\(^3\) 'On Fairy-stories' goes beyond 'The Monsters and the Critics', however, in analysing the technique of writing fantasy and its intended effects upon its audience. Its published version further developed the meaning of a number of terms – Faërie, sub-creation, secondary world, inner consistency of reality, Faërian drama – which are essential to a study of Tolkien's mature work. Tolkien acknowledged the importance of the essay, describing The Lord of the Rings itself as 'a practical demonstration of the views that I expressed' in 'On Fairy-stories' (Letters 310). It is safe to assume this influence continued in the post-Lord of the Rings revisions of the 'Silmarillion', when it had to be brought into line with The Lord of the Rings (Letters 359–60, 403–4, etc.). For the purpose of the following work the most important effect of 'On Fairy-stories' is the concept of 'sub-creation'.


\(^{2}\) That an essay should receive a critical edition speaks to the regard in which it is held.

Tolkien invented the terms ‘sub-creator’ and ‘sub-creation’ out of dissatisfaction with the critical terminology available to him to discuss the techniques and effects of fantasy: primarily those of Coleridge. In *Biographia Literaria* Coleridge had used the terms ‘willing suspension of disbelief’ and ‘poetic faith’ to describe the hoped-for audience reaction to the ‘supernatural’ or ‘romantic’ elements in the *Lyrical Ballads*. Tolkien believed this placed excessive emphasis on the audience rather than authorial skill:

> What really happens is that the story-maker proves a successful ‘sub-creator’. He makes a Secondary World which your mind can enter. Inside it, what he relates is ‘true’: it accords with the laws of that world. You therefore believe it, while you are, as it were, inside. [... ] suspension of disbelief is a substitute for the genuine thing. (OFS 52)

Though arising out of a disagreement with Coleridge, sub-creation involved not an outright rejection of Coleridge’s thought and terminology, but a development of them. Sub-creation is a more loaded term than its near synonym in science fiction, ‘world building’. It implies creation of a secondary and derivative nature, dependent upon a primary Creator and act of creation. In this regard it may be connected to Coleridge’s concepts of primary and secondary imagination. Coleridge defined primary imagination as ‘the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM.’ Primary imagination is the subliminal arrangement of sense experience into perception and understanding, while secondary imagination is the

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19 As such, Tolkien’s theory is inherently theistic.

20 Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, p. 175.
specifically artistic use of imagination to re-create the world for artistic ends. 'Sub-creation', by defining itself against 'Creation', contains both the idea that human creativity is a reflection of divine creativity – as Aulë tells Ilúvatar 'the making of things is in my heart from my own making by thee' (S 38) – and the idea that artistic creations, particularly secondary worlds, are founded upon and made from the primary Creation. This connection between divine creation and artistic sub-creation has earlier roots, however, and it is to these roots we must turn.

The analogy between divine and human creativity is ancient. For all Plato's criticism of poets and rhapsodes, he recognised a connection between them and the divine. For him, they were moved by a divine power rather than relying primarily on their own skills. Furthermore, he implied in the *Timaeus* that the demiurge was like a human craftsman; they both look to the eternal, unchanging forms for the pattern from which they will make. The Bible provided images to support this connection: e.g. God as potter (Ps 2:9; Is 29:16; Rom 9:21) or God measuring the heavens (Ps 104:2; Job 9:8; Is 40:22).

Thomas Aquinas compared God to an architect when discussing the possibility of Platonic 'Ideas' in the divine mind:

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21 Ibid., p. 410; see also Michael Milburn, 'Coleridge's Definition of Imagination and Tolkien's Definition(s) of Faery', *Tolkien Studies*, 7 (2010), pp 55–66.


[T]he form of the house already exists in the mind of the architect. This can be called the idea of the house; because the architect intends to make the house to the pattern of the form which he has conceived in his mind. Now since the world is not made by chance, but is made by God acting as an intellectual agent [...] there must be in the divine mind a form, to the likeness of which the world is made; and that is what we mean by an Idea.25

While Aquinas considered an architect an appropriate analogy of God as Creator, he insisted the likeness was not exact. There was a qualitative difference between divine creation and human creation. Distinguishing creation from the products of nature or art, he stressed that the works of nature and humanity presuppose God’s creation and make use of it, but are not equivalent to it.26 The difference may be clarified by tracing the etymology of the verb ‘create’.

The OED derives the verb ‘create’ from classical Latin creāt-, past participle stem of creāre, ‘to procreate, (of males) to beget, (of females) to give birth, (of God, Nature etc.) to bring into being, to produce, to bring about, cause, to appoint.’27 It ultimately derives from the proto-Indo-European stem *ker- ‘to grow’ (cf. cereal), hence ‘to cause to grow’.28 In classical Latin a creātor could be so named for creating the world, founding a

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25 ‘sicut similitudo domus praeexistit in mente aedificatoris. Et haec potest dici idea domus: quia artifex intendit domum assimilare formae quam mente concepit. Quia igitur mundus non est casu factus, sed est factus a Deo per intellectum agente [...] necesse est quod in mente divina sit forma, ad cujus similitudinem mundus est factus; et in hoc constit ratio Ideae.’ Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, ed. Thomas Gilby, 61 Vols (London: Blackfriars, Eyre and Spottiswode, 1964–74), 1a.15.1. All translations are from this edition.

26 Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, 1a.45.8.


city, fathering a child, or appointing an official. The closest Old English equivalent to creārē is scieppan ‘to shape, form; to create’ from proto-Germanic *skapjan from proto-Indo-European *(s)kep ‘to cut, scrape, hack’. This gives us Scieppend ‘the Creator’ and gesceaf ‘creation’. Scieppan also gives us the rare and possibly poetic term handgesceaf (found in Genesis B 455) for a work wrought by hand. As with creārē, there was an implicit connection between divine and human creativity. This is understandable given that analogues for God’s activity must be drawn from observation of human activity.

Though Scippend survived into Middle English, the OED records that by the sixteenth century sceop (by then spelled shope), though still used of God’s act of creation, had the weaker sense of ‘to shape, form’ and by the seventeenth century no longer...
distinguished divine, as opposed to human, creation.35 While *sceippan* lost its connection to God, ‘create’ entered English almost entirely restricted to references to God. The first recorded use of ‘creator’ in English is from the life of St Thomas Becket in the *Early South-English Legendary* (early 14th century), ‘heo bad him þane wei gon [...] / For-to serui is creatour’.36 Interestingly, this is a work with which Tolkien would have been familiar.37 The verb ‘create’ also appeared in the fourteenth century, first recorded in Chaucer’s *Parson’s Tale*, ‘And al be it so that God hath creat alle thynges in right ordre’.38 ‘Create’ could be used of human agents only with the restricted meaning of ‘to invest (a person) with a particular function or character, or with a title of nobility’ or ‘to bring into legal or official existence’; e.g. ‘creating’ a duke or a council.39 Human and divine creativity would be reconnected in English only in the sixteenth century.

Erwin Panofsky traced this identification, and questioning, of a connection between God and the human artist. In fragments from c.1512, Albrecht Dürer claimed kings once rewarded artistic talent, considering it ‘a creative thing like unto God. For a good painter is inwardly full of figures, and if it were possible that he live forever, he would have from the inner ideas, of which Plato writes, always something new to pour out in his works.’40 For

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37 See Shippey, *The Road to Middle-earth*, pp 270–1, 327, 394.
39 *OED*, create, v. Def, 2.a and 2.b.
Federico Zuccari (1540–1609), the idea in the artist’s mind is ‘a spark of the divine mind’.

This grants the artist an almost god-like ability:

[B]ecause of his goodness and to show in a small replica the excellence of His divine art, having created man in his image and likeness with respect to the soul [...] almost a second God, He wished to grant him the ability to form in himself an inner intellectual Design [...] so that with this Design, almost imitating God and vying with Nature, he could produce an infinite number of artificial things resembling natural ones, and by means of painting and sculpture make new Paradises visible upon Earth.

By sharing in God’s ability to know the Platonic ‘Ideas’, the artist can give them physical form in works of art just as God does in the creation of nature. This does not mean the Renaissance artist would simply equate themselves with God. Leonardo da Vinci, though he called the artist ‘lord and god’ of the world he forms in paint or marble, deliberately avoided the terms *creare* and *creazione* in favour of *generare* and *generazione*. The artist could be seen as like God but to actually equate the artist with God would be, theologically, almost unthinkable, and dangerous. This tension between the similarity of human and divine creativity, and their radical differences, remained whenever the analogy was used.

The classic comparison of God and poet in English is Sir Philip Sidney’s *Apology for Poetry* (published 1595). Building up to his famous claim that poets produce ‘another

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41 Ibid., p. 86.
42 Quoted in ibid., pp 87–8.
43 Erwin Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art* (New York and London: Harper and Row, 1972), p. 188 n.3. Of course even these terms have quasi-divine implications, especially given the doctrinal expression ‘begotten, not made’.
nature’, Sidney traced the etymologies of the terms for poet in Welsh, Latin, and Greek, connecting poets to both prophecy and craftsmanship. Sidney claims all other arts are subject to Nature – measuring it, recording it, learning from it – while poetry is unique in going beyond nature:

Only the poet, disdaining to be tied to any such subjection, lifted up with the vigour of his own invention, doth grow in effect into another nature, in making things either better than Nature bringeth forth, or, quite anew, forms such as never were in Nature [...]. Nature never set forth the earth in so rich tapestry as divers poets have done [...]. Her world is brazen, the poets only deliver a golden.

Sidney counters the claim poetry is ‘wholly imaginative’, i.e. exists only in the imagination, or merely imitative of Nature, by describing how the poet makes manifest an ‘Idea’ or ‘fore-conceit of the work’, not itself dependent on Nature. Sidney then pre-empts criticism of this comparison of human ‘wit’ and Nature’s efficacy by assigning honour to ‘the heavenly Maker of that maker’. Here the latter ‘maker’ is Nature, not the human poet. God creates Nature which then produces rivers, trees, flowers etc. through a secondary creative power. Poets can go beyond Nature because their ‘wit’ gives them knowledge of perfection, the perfection Creation would have had when God first made it. Nature, as a result of the Fall, does not make the perfection of original Creation, hence Sidney calls it ‘second nature’. This claim magnifies rather than humbles the poet. In

46 Ibid., pp 99–100.
47 Ibid., p.101
48 Ibid.
49 Ibid., p. 159 n.16.
50 Ibid., p. 101.
poetry 'with the force of a divine breath he bringeth things forth far surpassing her [Nature's] doings.' Following Sidney's description of the poet working from the Platonic 'Ideas' in his previous paragraph, this claim brings the poet close to God's creative powers, while Nature reproduces creation on a debased level. Sidney does not explicitly equate the poet with God and in this respect is more cautious than his contemporaries, Joseph Justus Scaliger or George Puttenham, who used the term 'create'. The equation of human poet and divine Creator, carefully phrased, was clearly current in Elizabethan thought.

The idea poets create worlds would become a critical commonplace in English letters. John Donne, Sir William Temple, and Alexander Pope mention it in passing as if it were a commonly accepted notion. M.H. Abrams, however, identified a change in the concept in the eighteenth century, especially in the writing of Joseph Addison. In *The Spectator* (No. 419) Addison claimed in those kinds of writing called 'the Faerie way of Writing' by Dryden, the poet 'quite loses sight of nature, and entertains his reader's imagination with the characters and actions of such persons as have many of them no existence, but what he bestows on them.' The audience is led 'into a new creation' for 'poetry addresses itself to the imagination, as it has not only the whole circle of nature for

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51 Ibid.
its province, but makes new worlds of its own. Poetry 'has something in it like creation. It bestows a kind of existence [...]. It makes additions to nature, and gives a greater variety to God's works.' While Sidney's 'golden world' is, implicitly, our world returned to its original perfection and wonder, Addison's is a second world 'valid in itself, and only analogous to the one we owe to God.' As Abrams views it, critics coming after Addison drew a radical conclusion from the analogy of poet and Creator: 'the poem of the marvellous is a second creation, and therefore not a replica nor even a reasonable facsimile of this world, but its own world, *sui generis*, subject only to its own laws, whose existence (it is suggested) is an end in itself.' This brief historical survey raises two issues Tolkien addressed in 'On Fairy-stories': what is the source of the analogy of human maker and divine Creator and how independent is the world made by the poet from the primary world in which the poet dwells.

The writers above were anxious about how far the analogy could be taken. Poetry is 'like' an act of creation, the poet is 'almost' God. To actually equate the poet with God would have been theologically dangerous, let alone intellectually arrogant. Tolkien was similarly concerned not to push the analogy from metaphor to open identification. His position is codified in the term he chose for artistic invention: *sub*-creation. Artistic creation is not only a limited repetition of God's act of creation but is always defined against and dependent upon that act. Human creativity is not only derivative of divine creativity but arises from our own creation by God. '[W]e make in our measure and in our derivative mode, because we are made: and not only made, but made in the image and

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56 Ibid., pp 74, 76.
57 *The Spectator* No. 421 in ibid., pp 82–6 at 84. Cf. Tolkien: 'in Fantasy he may actually assist in the effoliation and multiple enrichment of creation' (*OFS* 79).
59 Ibid., p. 278.
likeness of a Maker' (OFS 66). The degree of connection between the world created by poets and the real world in which the poet exists is also a question inherent in the analogy. While some critics have claimed Tolkien's account of 'secondary worlds' makes them completely autonomous from the everyday 'primary world', Tolkien's position is actually more nuanced. He argues fantasy could be considered a higher form of art than more realistic literature as the 'inner consistency of reality' is more difficult to achieve 'the more unlike are the images and the rearrangements of primary material to the actual arrangements of the Primary World' (OFS 60). This comes shortly after the curious sentence 'That the images [in fantasy] are of things not in the primary world (if that is possible) is a virtue not a vice' (OFS 60, emphasis added). Tolkien questions whether 'fantastic' creations can be considered to be not already present in potentia in the primary world.

In 'On Fairy-stories' Tolkien treats fantastical things as 'rearrangements' of the primary world. Green faces, blue moons, red dragonfire are built from realignments of the categories of the everyday world. 'The mind that could have thought of light, heavy, grey, yellow, still, swift, also conceived of magic that would make heavy things light and able to fly, turn grey lead into yellow gold, and still rock into swift water' (OFS 41). Furthermore, Tolkien claimed sub-creative fantasy could heighten human appreciation of the real world. 'For the story-maker who allows himself to be “free with Nature” can be her lover not her slave' (OFS 69). The problem of the relation of sub-creation to primary reality involved relating the sub-creator to the Creator and the sub-creation to Creation. These interrelated

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60 E.g. Michael Saler, As If: Modern Enchantment and the Literary History of Virtual Reality (Oxford: OUP, 2012), p. 156. The complicated connections between Tolkien's legendarium and the primary world will be discussed below.
concerns are addressed in brief in ‘On Fairy-stories’ and the poem *Mythopoeia*. The primary task of this thesis will be to discover how thoroughly the metaphor of sub-creation shaped Tolkien’s own sub-creation, his legendarium.

This search necessarily involves addressing Tolkien’s approach to, and use of, theology; an area which has been both stimulating and controversial in Tolkien scholarship. Tolkien identified his Catholicism as one of the most important facts about him (*Letters* 288) and religious approaches to Tolkien’s works have elucidated several aspects of his writings. But such approaches have certain dangers. The first is simply identifying Tolkien as a Christian apologist. This has arisen in part from his friendship with C.S. Lewis. Attempts have been made to turn the Inklings into an apologetic movement, the ‘Oxford Christians’. Tolkien lent some credibility to this idea by referring, when provoked, to *The Lord of the Rings* as ‘a fundamentally Catholic and religious work’ (*Letters* 172), though in the same letter he disavowed any overarching plan to the work and stressed the lack of religious references. Christian interpretations are not intrinsically invalid but always run the risk of smoothing out complications, offering only reductive interpretations, often assuming a monolithic orthodoxy. Bradley Birzer has refined the image of Tolkien as apologist by identifying him – along with C.S. Lewis,

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63 For example, Peter Kreeft, *The Philosophy of Tolkien: The Worldview behind The Lord of the Rings* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005) where Kreeft equates Lewis and Tolkien, going so far as to invent a ‘Tolkien-Lewis monster’ along the lines of G.B. Shaw’s ‘Chesterbelloc monster’, p. 12.

64 The term was invented by Charles Moorman in *The Precincts of Felicity: The Augustinian City of the Oxford Christians* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 1966); see also Diana Pavlac Glyer, *The Company They Keep: C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien as Writers in Community* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2007) for a more objective account of the group.
Christopher Dawson and others — as a ‘Christian humanist’, though this does not fundamentally alter the claim Tolkien was writing with an apologetic intent. Any reading of Tolkien as a Christian apologist, of whatever sort, faces the problem of his ‘cordial dislike’ of allegory (FR, Foreword, xxiv) and his claim the Incarnation was an infinitely greater thing than anything about which he would write (Letters 237). It pained Tolkien that early reviewers criticised The Lord of the Rings for its lack of religion (Letters 220) but his letters imply he was hurt by the inaccurate claim rather than by having the main point of his work misunderstood. One of the most attentive and cautious theological readings of Tolkien rejects the label of apologist: ‘Tolkien the Catholic is confident that the sacramental and missional life of the church will convey the Gospel to the world without the assistance of his own art.’ Tolkien’s repeated denial of apologetic intentions should be accepted.

Michael Drout and Hilary Wynne in their overview of Tolkien criticism 1982–2000 highlight a number of other problems facing theological interpretations of Tolkien. They write: ‘[C]ritics have taken Tolkien’s use of figures of good and evil as an excuse for many an amateur philosophical or theological excursus.’ Commenting on certain evangelically inspired works on Tolkien, Bradley Birzer writes, ‘With books such as these, it should surprise no one that many scholars and fans fear that Christians have attempted to co-opt

66 In the same letter he denies any religious intent to the work.
68 This is not to drain his works of ethical or theological importance.
Tolkien’s works and create a hagiographic image of Tolkien as many of C.S. Lewis’s fans have done to Lewis. Such an approach subordinates what Tolkien actually wrote to the ideological purpose it can be made to serve. This is not confined to theological interpretations of Tolkien: political readings have equally interpreted Tolkien primarily as an apologist for reactionary values. Matthew Dickerson and Jonathan Evans, who do not entirely avoid subordinating Tolkien to their own sermons, caution ‘In drawing implications for our world, we need to be careful to preserve Tolkien’s fiction as fiction and to avoid treating it as a set of intellectual propositions.’ Tolkien trusted his readers to find ‘applicability’ in his work, even applications Tolkien himself would never have considered (FR, Foreword, xxiv), but certain studies through reductive applications of Tolkien’s works push him towards the simplicity of allegory.

Theological readings of Tolkien cannot claim a Christian (often Catholic) interpretation as the best, possibly the only, reading, as does Joseph Pearce who, in reference to Tolkien’s insistence on his Catholicism, insisted: ‘It is, therefore, not merely erroneous but patently perverse to see Tolkien’s epic as anything other than a specifically Christian myth.’ It is understandable Christians would wish to stress Tolkien’s Christianity but they cannot appropriate the entire meaning of the text. With such caveats in mind, this thesis explores Tolkien’s use of the metaphor of sub-creation under four

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broad headings: (1) cosmogony and cosmology, (2) freedom and providence, (3) focalisation and subjectivity, and (4) creativity and evil.

In any study of Tolkien's idea of sub-creation attention must be focused on Tolkien's own creation myth, the *Ainulindalë*. This text has received substantial critical attention: it has been read in light of the book of Genesis, Platonic and Neo-platonic philosophy, the *Kalevala*, the *Völuspá*, classical mythology, the 'music of the spheres', the biblical exegesis of St Augustine, the metaphysics of Thomas Aquinas, and modern musical theory. Yet the text has not been exhausted; at least partly because it is multi-formed. Tolkien reworked it throughout his life, leaving a series of drafts with an essential unity but a number of radical changes. There is a direct manuscript tradition from *The Music of the Ainur* (c.1919) to the *Ainulindalë* of the published *Silmarillion* (1977). Each draft was written on, or after having read, the previous

80 John William Houghton, 'Augustine in the cottage of lost play: the *Ainulindalë* as asterisk cosmogony' in Jane Chance (ed.), *Tolkien the Medievalist*, pp 171–82.
draft. This allows Tolkien's developing ideas about divine creativity and creaturely sub-creativity to be traced from their earliest forms. John William Houghton has called the *Ainulindalë* an 'asterisk cosmogony'; an imagined creation myth designed to fit among recorded creation myths. Houghton primarily uses this metaphor to show how a medieval audience could have reconciled the *Ainulindalë* with Genesis but the metaphor can be developed further. The connections can be read from real creation myths backwards to the *Ainulindalë*, so the relationship of work to sources is reversed. Tom Shippey has demonstrated how Tolkien used his sub-creation to provide fictional explanations for corruptions and contradictions in mythology, literature, and folklore. The *Ainulindalë*’s similarities to the mythologies of Scandinavia and the Mediterranean could be explained as those mythologies’ derivation from the true tradition Tolkien had reconstructed. As an older and more accurate mythology, the *Ainulindalë* would also have to be reconciled with Christianity much as Snorri Sturluson’s *Gylfaginning* framed Norse mythology within a Christian understanding of myth and history. Finally, Tolkien had to make the *Ainulindalë* a successful sub-creation in its own right, internally consistent and generative of secondary belief. This sparked in Tolkien a lengthy reconsideration of the cosmogony and cosmology of the ‘Silmarillion’. These interconnected concerns will form the basis of the first chapter of this thesis.

Unavoidable in any discussion of Creation are the roles of order and chaos, control and freedom; it is not surprising the same problems arise in Tolkien's sub-creation. The

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second chapter will focus on the tangled issue of providence and freedom in Tolkien’s
tellegendarium. This has of course received significant critical attention. As early as 1968,
Patricia M. Spacks noted his universe ‘paradoxically combines qualified determinism with
qualified free will.’ Several studies have stressed the providential or determinist aspects
of Tolkien’s writings, finding sources of fate and doom in medieval Germanic literature
and of providence in medieval theology. Others have stressed the moral significance
Tolkien places on Free Will. Tolkien’s comments on Elven freedom, or its lack, have
been a source of critical disagreement. Scholars have repeatedly sought an overarching,
comprehensive scheme to explain both the directed and freely willed actions of Tolkien’s
characters, as well as the conflicting categories offered by the text’s vocabulary: fate,
doom, chance, luck. It is possible, however, Tolkien used slightly different conceptual
schemes to describe the interaction of freedom and determinism in his different works.
This is not to imply Tolkien’s ideas were contradictory or incoherent, but rather to stress
the differences as well as similarities across Tolkien’s works.

The recent publication of Tolkien’s notes on ‘Fate and Free Will’ in his invented
languages offer a new line of enquiry into understanding his ideas through his use of the
terms ‘fate’ and ‘free will’, within the metaphor of authorial knowledge and control. This

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87 Patricia M. Spacks, ‘Power and Meaning in The Lord of the Rings’ in Neil D. Isaacs and Rose A.
Zimbardo (eds), Tolkien and the Critics: Essays on J.R.R. Tolkien’s The Lord of the Rings (Notre Dame IN:
(Fall/Winter 2010), pp 115–29; Kathleen E. Dubs, ‘Providence, Fate and Chance: Boethian Philosophy in
The Lord of the Rings’ in Jane Chance (ed.), Tolkien and the Invention of Myth: A Reader (Lexington, KY:
University Press of Kentucky, 2004), pp 133–44.
89 For example, Matthew T. Dickerson, Following Gandalf: Epic Battles and Moral Victory in The Lord of
the Rings (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2003).
90 See the table of the distribution of terms relating to freedom and control in Appendix A, below p. 258.
brings questions of providence and freedom back to questions of creation and sub-creation. Tolkien compares Ilúvatar’s knowledge of actions in Arda to that of an author, inviting comparison of the relationship between Arda and the forces controlling it with Tolkien’s own literary sub-creation and his experience of authorship. While this approach will not solve the question of freedom and control in Tolkien’s legendarium, it hopes to shed new light on both the inner working of Tolkien’s world and characters and his own experience of writing.

Ecocritical and environmental studies of Tolkien’s works have become a recognised sub-field of Tolkien scholarship in the last 15 years. Three monographs as well as a number of articles have been published. ‘Green’ studies of Tolkien have established Tolkien’s credentials as a major environmental writer, presenting a natural world under threat from environmental degradation. Such studies, however, risk presenting Tolkien simply as an ‘environmentalist’ writer in terms taken from the critic’s cultural environment rather than Tolkien’s own. At the same time there is the popular perception that Middle-earth is Tolkien’s central character. As George R.R. Martin put it: ‘[I]n contemporary fantasy the setting becomes a character in its own right. It is Tolkien who made it so.’ This concept is in need of careful interrogation. First, Tolkien is by no means the first writer to make the landscape a character; for example, his debt here to the realist tradition, especially Hardy, is yet to be explored. Second, the question of whether

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92 Ibid., p. 186.
94 See Tolkien Studies’ annual bibliography (2004–).
96 I hope to pursue this in later research.
Middle-earth has a personality in its own right or is the aggregation of numerous, independent non-human subjects and subjectivities must be posed. Cynthia M. Cohen has problematised readings of Tolkien's apparently sentient landscapes by stressing the importance of character perception and naturalistic detail. Verlyn Flieger has developed this critique of the sentient landscape and has drawn connections between them and Tolkien's literary theories expressed in ‘On Fairy-stories’. The third chapter of this thesis will address the problems raised by these two studies by examining the methods by which Tolkien achieved the personification and subjectivisation of aspects of the non-human world. It will situate Tolkien both in, and in debate with, a tradition of depicting the natural world either through personification or through the juxtaposition of subjectivities. Just as Tolkien resuscitated dead metaphors, he engaged with prosopopoeia and the ‘pathetic fallacy’, approaching them as if they were descriptions of physical reality rather than simply literary techniques. Tolkien's mediation of non-human subjectivities is at once a judgement on a literary tradition and an experiment in the possibilities of sub-creation.

Drout and Wynne have claimed, with some deserved exasperation, ‘Probably more has been written on Good and Evil (almost always capitalized) in Tolkien’s work than on any other topic.’ Critics have taken excessive pains to refute the shallow claims of Edmund Wilson and Edwin Muir that Tolkien presents a simplistic binary of good and evil. This has been adequately addressed by Shippey, among others. Still, several

99 See Shippey, Author of the Century, p. 122
101 Ibid., pp 110–111.
critics, e.g. Fritz Lieber, Michael Moorcock and China Miéville, who are themselves fantasy authors, and so arguably in a stronger position to judge than Wilson or Muir, have criticised Tolkien’s depiction of the psychology of evil.\(^3\) As one of the areas in which Tolkien has been most criticised, his depiction of evil deserves serious attention. We must remember, Tolkien was not trying to construct a philosophical model but was trying to depict characters’ experiences of, and reactions to, good and evil. Criticism should begin from here. As Ursula K. Le Guin wrote: ‘Those who fault Tolkien on the Problem of Evil are usually those who have an \textit{answer} to the Problem of Evil – which he did not.’\(^4\) The final chapter of this thesis will focus on Tolkien’s exploration of the psychology of evil in the figure of Melkor, its connection with his artistic ambitions, and its influence upon the physical world. Melkor serves as Tolkien’s archetype, his embodiment of evil; present from the earliest drafts, he was the inspiration of Sauron and, through Sauron, Saruman. In many ways Melkor recapitulates the fall of Satan in Christian legend, but Tolkien’s innovation is distinctive: Melkor is a rebellious artist. The connection Tolkien draws between the origin of evil in Melkor’s rebellion against Iliuvatar and Melkor’s own creative and sub-creative impulses has significant implications for an analysis of both Tolkien’s understanding of evil and his attitude towards art and sub-creation.

\(^{102}\) See Shippey, \textit{The Road to Middle-earth}, pp 159–70 and Shippey, \textit{Author of the Century}, pp 112–60.


This study will centre on an analogy which is both literary and theological. As such, theological concepts must form a component of my methodology. From this introduction, however, it should be apparent that this will be but one of a number of approaches including philological, historicist, and ecocritical techniques. Some of the topics mentioned here have received substantial critical attention, yet none have been studied in terms of a metaphor which Tolkien described as central to his literary project. Tolkien warned one reader that he was not a metaphysician (Letters 188). While cosmology, freedom, sentience and evil may ultimately be metaphysical matters, this study must approach them in terms of Tolkien’s literary use. The central question of this thesis is: how important was the analogy between divine creation and artistic sub-creation to Tolkien’s main literary works, *The Silmarillion* and *The Lord of the Rings*?
Chapter One

Cosmogony and Cosmology

An Asterisk-cosmogony?

Tolkien's imagination was stimulated by gaps in the linguistic and literary record. Repeatedly he wrote into these gaps, in the case of his 'New Lay of the Völsungs', literally into a gap in the manuscript. At the same time he was frustrated English mythology seemed nothing but gaps held together by names (Letters 144): whether in poetry (Éarendel, Wade), place names (Grimsdyeke, Wansdyke), or in the days of the week. Tolkien never claimed he was writing 'a mythology for England', and he certainly never claimed to be reconstructing the actual mythology England lost through conversion and conquest. Instead, he reconstructed, for the English, an Elvish mythology set in a fictional prehistory. The original frame narrative of Tolkien's legendarium - the voyage of a fifth-century mariner, Ottor/Eriol, father of Hengest and Horsa, west to the Lonely Isle where he hears the stories of the Elves - provided a literary prologue to English history: the recovery of the lost tales of the Elves. In Tolkien's earliest works the story of the Elves and the story of England were inseparable. As Christopher Tolkien writes:

In those days [...] the primary intention of his work was to satisfy his desire for a specifically and recognisably English literature of 'faerie'. [...] 

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In his earliest writings the mythology was anchored in the ancient legendary history of England; and more than that, it was peculiarly associated with certain places in England.\(^{108}\)

Britain was to be Tol Eressëa, Elvenhome, and the Elven city of Kortirion would be Warwick (*Lost Tales II* 291–2). When Eriol introduced Wóden and Þunor, the Elves would recognise them as their Manweg and Tulkas (*Lost Tales II* 290).

The ‘true tradition’ of the Elves, however, was not itself the English mythology hinted at by the remaining names. The tales drew as much from Norse, Finnish, and Celtic sources. They also, as will be argued below, drew from biblical and classical sources. *The Music of the Ainur*, his original creation myth, at times reads like a Neoplatonic retelling of Genesis. Tolkien had created an English legendary prehistory, but behind it an Elvish mythology. He had allowed his Germanic, not yet Anglo-Saxon, traveller a glimpse of a mythology which was ostensibly much older even than the Germanic. Aspects of *The Music of the Ainur* are remarkably similar to mythologies, both Christian and classical, which do not belong to the ‘single philological province’ of the north-west of Europe.\(^{109}\) In the frame narrative the Elf Rúmil tells Eriol these are things Manwë whispered ‘to the fathers of my father in the deeps of time’ (*Lost Tales I* 52). The Elvish myths are not only pre-English, they almost certainly pre-date the Indo-Europeans; a lost tradition, perhaps only to be found confused and in fragments in the surviving mythologies of Europe and the Mediterranean.

The mythology’s similarities to Christian mythology could be accounted for by reference to a view of the human past Tolkien only hinted at but certainly knew through

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\(^{109}\) J.R.R. Tolkien, ‘English and Welsh’ in *The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays*, pp 162–97 at 188.
his scholarship. Tolkien wrote in *Mythopoeia*, ‘The heart of man is not compound of lies, / but draws some wisdom from the only Wise, / and still recalls him’ (*TL* 87). The same could be said of Elves, with their divinity Ilúvatar (*Lost Tales I* 52). The poem, however, also recognises that we, as humans, use our position as sub-creators, refracting the single light of the Creator, to ‘build gods and their houses out of dark and light’ (*TL* 87). Tolkien may be referring to the practice, first recognised by the Greek mythographer Euhemerus and adopted by Christianity, of interpreting human mythologies as corruptions of original truth: historical in the view of Euhemerus, historical and theological in the view of Christianity. In tenth and eleventh-century England Ælfric and Wulfstan held, on the basis of the Bible, that the earliest generations of humanity knew the true God and paganism was a later development arising out of confusion and demonic temptation.\(^{110}\) Tolkien considered the *Beowulf*-poet to have been of their mind, with a Danish scop singing in the poem of the creation of the world by *se ælmihtiga* ‘the Almighty’.\(^{111}\) As Tolkien commented:

[T]he Anglo-Saxon poet’s view throughout was plainly that true, or truer, knowledge was possessed in ancient days (when men were not deceived by the Devil); at least they knew of the one God and Creator, though not of heaven for that was lost. (*MC* 46 n.25)

In the thirteenth-century Snorri Sturluson provided an elaborate account of this in his *Edda* prologue and in *Gylfaginning* where the Norse gods are euhemerised into human


\(^{111}\) R.D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork and John D. Niles (eds), *Klaeber’s Beowulf and The Fight at Finnsburg*, 4\(^{th}\) ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), *Beowulf*, 90–8. All references to Beowulf will be to this edition. All translations from Old English will be my own.
magicians who dupe both the people of Scandinavia and the protagonist Gylfi. If these authors could imagine their earliest ancestors having ‘true’ knowledge of the creation, Tolkien could plausibly present his Elves as being equally knowledgeable.

Working backwards from the various corrupted reflections of original truth, Tolkien’s imaginative reconstruction would make his creation myth an ‘asterisk-cosmogony’. This term is developed in imitation of the philological practice of designating a reconstructed form with an asterisk, for example, Proto-Germanic *manniz being the root of English ‘men’ and German Männern. From this practise Tom Shippey developed the concept of ‘asterisk-reality’: ‘that which no longer existed but could with 100 per cent certainty be inferred.’ There is a certain rightness in this term, for the reconstruction of entire worlds from words appealed to Tolkien. He told his son Christopher how much he hungered for the stories hinted at by the name Attila (Letters 264). A Hunnish king with a Gothic name, it opened onto an unrecorded history of Gothic soldiers in the service of a king they called ‘Little Father’. Tolkien placed numerous asterisk-words and asterisk-concepts in his mythology, transforming his sources in primary world literature into the fragmentary echoes of the stories of his secondary world. Some would find their way from myth: Túrin could be seen behind Oedipus, Sigurd and Kullervo. Some would be remembered in poetry: the Dwarves of The Hobbit becoming the names in the Völsung’s

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113 Shippey, The Road to Middle-earth, pp 22–26 at 24.

114 Attila is the diminutive form of Gothic atta ‘father’. Ibid., p. 18.

Dvergatal. Others would be remembered only in children's rhymes: Bilbo's song 'The Man in the Moon Stayed Up Too Late' becoming the nursery rhyme 'Hey Diddle Diddle'. The Ainulindalë shows a similar relationship with its derivatives/sources in primary world literature. For this reason, the following chapter will examine Tolkien's creation myth as an asterisk-cosmogony, addressing the issues of creation and sub-creation raised both in and by the text. Concomitant with this, it will follow the developing tension between the Ainulindalë as an asterisk-cosmogony and as a successful literary sub-creation; reflected in Tolkien's abandonment of his original frame-narrative, leaving the connection between his stories and the primary world undefined.

The Ainulindalë

To examine Tolkien's work in light of the concepts of creation and sub-creation inevitably leads to examining the moment of creation as the inhabitants of his world recorded it. Myths of creation are common across human cultures. They express, for the society producing them, fundamental assumptions about the nature and order of reality, and by extension our nature as human beings. Tolkien's creation myth, as it exists in the published Silmarillion, functions in this way.

The Ainulindalë begins with Eru, 'the One', who, within the world, is called Ilúvatar. In the beginning he made the Ainur, 'the Holy Ones', instructed them in themes of music, and they sang before him. Ilúvatar gathered the Ainur and proposed to them a great theme, saying:

116 See Shippey, The Road to Middle-earth, p. 80.
Of this theme that I have declared to you, I will now that ye make in harmony together a Great Music. And since I have kindled you with the Flame Imperishable, ye shall show forth your powers in adorning this theme, each with his own thoughts and devices, if he will. But I will sit and hearken, and be glad that through you great beauty has been wakened into song.\textsuperscript{119}

The choirs of the Ainur began the Music, but one, Melkor, greatest in power and knowledge, introduced dissonances of his own design. Ilúvatar halted the Music three times as Melkor sought to reduce it to strife and clamour. Yet Ilúvatar revealed to Melkor, and to all the Ainur, that his inventions will only redound to the greater glory of Ilúvatar, as none can alter the Music in Ilúvatar's despite.

Ilúvatar then revealed to the Ainur a vision of the Music, a world 'globed amid the Void' (S 6): and foretold the coming of the Children of Ilúvatar, Elves and Men. The Ainur desired to enter the World and prepare it for the coming of the Children, but Melkor desired to shape the world to his will and bring the Children of Ilúvatar under his dominion. But the vision was only a vision, and was taken away again. Knowing the desire of the Ainur that the world should exist, Ilúvatar declared '\textit{Eä! Let these things be!}', and created Eä, the world that is (S 9). Many of the greatest and fairest of the Ainur, for love of the world, entered into it and bound themselves to its fate. Yet the world they found was not that of the vision, but was physically dark and unshaped, only a beginning. Their labour was to achieve the world that had been foresung. But from the beginning Melkor was among them, to spoil all their works. Still in the depths of time and amid the innumerable stars the Earth took shape (S 11–12).

‘It’s like the Old Testament!’ complained one exasperated reader to Christopher Tolkien (Lost Tales I 2). While The Silmarillion does resemble the King James or Douay-Rheims translations in its intentional archaism and parataxis, it does not serve the same purpose in Middle-earth as the Bible does in the primary world. The myth is never claimed as inspired. Tolkien was producing a folklore and a literary tradition, not a divine revelation. Nevertheless, some relationship between the Ainulindalë and the Christian creation myth — expressed in Genesis and the prologue to the Gospel of St John — is inescapable, both as primary and secondary world source. John Gough claimed Tolkien’s mythology is ‘inherently Catholic, or at least deliberately compatible with Catholicism, but with no descriptive or surface elements in common with Catholicism.’ Stratford Caldecott claimed ‘He was trying to write an account that would be complementary to, while not contradicting, the Genesis story.’ Perhaps Tom Shippey comes closest to the truth in calling The Silmarillion a ‘calque’ on the history of Genesis but not a ‘rival’ to it. It is not a straightforward retelling of the Christian creation myth, but neither is it unrelated to it.

Tolkien’s creation myth stresses sub-creation in both its themes and structure. The Ainulindalë, in all its drafts, has four main elements: Êlúvatar, the Ainur, the Music, and the World. Examining each in turn, it is impossible to ignore the relation, despite important differences, of the Ainulindalë to primary world mythologies, Christian, pagan, and

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120 For a comparison between Tolkien and Elias Lönnrot, who succeeded in producing a mythology for his native Finland, see Anne C. Petty ‘Identifying England’s Lönnrot’, Tolkien Studies, 1 (2004), pp 69–84.

121 This does not imply another textual tradition, from the Hebrews to the Elves, but a parallel tradition having its source in angelic knowledge.


philosophical. Ilúvatar is a distant and shadowy figure, clearly divine but not obviously the
God of the Jewish and Christian revelations; an instructor, instigator, and giver of being.
The Ainur are the Powers of the world, holy and wise, with strength to shape divinely-
created matter for good or ill. They are clearly reminiscent of pagan gods but also of
Judeo-Christian angels, at least in the thought of certain Christian writers. The Music is the
work of both Ilúvatar and the Ainur, his theme and their variation, creation and sub-
creation, contested by Melkor, of the world that is to come. It shares with Platonic and
Neoplatonic philosophy the idea of an ordering principle, structuring the world. Eä, the
world that is, the universe, contains within itself Arda, what we might call the solar
system, the immediate environment of Ambar, the planet Earth. This will be the habitation
of the Children of Ilúvatar and the dramatic setting of the rest of Tolkien’s mythology and
his legendary history. It is, as Tolkien repeatedly insisted, our primary world; yet it is our
world mythologically apprehended. The tension between a mythological and ‘scientific’
understanding of Arda as well as its creation and sub-creation would shape Tolkien’s
mythology and even threaten to tear it apart.

Ilúvatar

To begin, two things should be stressed about Tolkien’s Ilúvatar. First, he is presented in
general terms. Second, and importantly, he is, at least in the published Silmarillion, never
depicted except in the act of creation. As such, Ilúvatar’s very nature stresses the
importance of creation, upon which sub-creation is to be performed and defined. The
distinction between creation and sub-creation is founded in references to creation ex nihilo.

125 Outside the Ainyëndëla he gives being to the Dwarves and Ents (S 38–41). While he does intervene to
destroy Númenor (S 334–5), by shaping the round world of later history he can be viewed as engaging in
creative as well as destructive actions.
Ilúvatar’s connections with the Judeo-Christian God, or even specifically Christian God, are suggested through the ‘Flame Imperishable’, only obliquely mentioned, and the prophecy of a future incarnation, not even mentioned in *The Silmarillion*.\(^\text{126}\) Tolkien both suggests and problematises an identification with the Christian God. The description of Elves and humans as the Children of Ilúvatar suggests a relationship similar to that of Genesis, image and likeness, but Ilúvatar remains a distant figure, far from the engaged God of biblical myth.

The *Ainulindalë* is fundamentally monotheistic. The first sentence asserts a single divine source for all subsequent being: ‘There was Eru, the One, who in Arda is called Ilúvatar; and he made first the Ainur, the Holy Ones, that were the offspring of his thought, and they were with him before aught else was made’ (S 3). Tolkien translates Ilúvatar as ‘Father of All’ (S 405). This connects Ilúvatar not merely with the Judeo-Christian God, but with the ruling deity of more than one pagan pantheon. Snorri Sturluson claimed ‘Odin is called All-Father because he is the father of all the gods,’ while Virgil referred to Jupiter as ‘father of gods and king of men’.\(^\text{127}\) The *Ainulindalë*, however, displays a clear qualitative difference between Ilúvatar and the Ainur. They might be described as the offspring of his thought, with implications of being emanations of the godhead, yet they

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\(^\text{127}\) ‘Óðinn heitir Alfgdr. Íviat hann er faðir allra goða.’ Snorri Sturluson, *Edda, Gylfaginning*, 20.21.27.

are 'made' not begotten. This denies any reading of Ilúvatar as merely primus inter pares. Such a distinction was already present in the earliest version of the Ainulindalë published in The Book of Lost Tales:

But Rúmil said: 'Ilúvatar was the first beginning, and beyond that no wisdom of the Valar or the Elves or of Men can go.' 'Who was Ilúvatar?' said Eriol. 'Was he of the Gods?' 'Nay,' said Rúmil, 'that he was not, for he made them. Ilúvatar is the Lord for Always who dwells beyond the world; who made it and is not of it or in it, but loves it.' (Lost Tales I 49)

Ilúvatar, then, is a being predating any material reality, greater than the physical world and yet loving this world as his creation. These are the qualities of a transcendent deity, but more particularly the deity of the Judeo-Christian tradition.

The single, unique feature which distinguishes the traditional Christian conception of God from that of any other theological system is the doctrine of the Trinity. The presence of Trinitarian doctrine, whether implicit or explicit, would strongly support an identification of Ilúvatar with the Christian God. Stratford Caldecott, however, claims Tolkien's creation myth 'cannot be explicitly Trinitarian, for it is supposed to predate the Christian and even the Jewish revelation.' While there is no explicit description of Ilúvatar as a Trinity anywhere in Tolkien's legendarium the same could also be said of the

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128 An important distinction in Christian theology. The description of the Ainur as the 'offspring of his thought' bears some similarity to the concept of the Wisdom of God: 'For she is a vapour of the power of God and a certain pure emanation of the glory of the almighty God.' Wisdom 7:25. All scriptural quotations are from The Holy Bible: Douay Version (London: Catholic Truth Society, 1957).

129 Some Protestant denominations have abandoned the doctrine as unsupported by Scripture. Other religions may have analogous features but lack such a doctrine. See Keith Ward, Religion and Creation (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp 54–8, 67–9, 100.

130 Stratford Caldecott, Secret Fire, p. 78.
Bible, where the Trinity is at best implicit. As later Christians would argue, God is a Trinity whether this is recognised or not. There are two moments which indicate Ilúvatar is a plurality rather than a strict unity. The first is Tolkien’s comments concerning the connection between the Flame Imperishable and Ilúvatar. In the *Ainulindalë* the Flame Imperishable, or Secret Fire, is associated with Ilúvatar’s creative power. Tolkien would later comment that the Flame Imperishable ‘appears to mean the Creative activity of Eru (in some sense distinct from or within Him), by which things could be given a ‘real’ and independent (though derivative and created) existence’ (*Morgoth 345*). Melkor’s fall begins with his seeking the Flame in ‘the void places’ ‘for desire grew hot within him to bring into Being things of his own […]. Yet he found not the Fire, for it is with Ilúvatar’ (*S 4*). Melkor already knew the Flame confers physical being upon potential realities. That it resides with Ilúvatar and is not available for the use of others reveals it to be contained within Ilúvatar himself. Later when Ilúvatar creates the material universe, Eä, the Fire is again invoked. ‘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’ (*S 9*). The positioning of the Fire at the heart of the world implies it is ever present, sustaining the world in existence. In Tolkien’s words Ilúvatar ‘indwells’ in it, on its derivative plane, below that of his own

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131 E.g. Genesis 1:26, Mark 1: 10–11, 2 Corinthians 13:13. Of course Tolkien would have been familiar with allegorical, Trinitarian readings of Genesis from his own upbringing, reinforced one presumes from teaching Ælfric’s *Preface to Genesis*.


133 Though even this is tentative, note his use of the word ‘appears’.

134 ‘Send forth’ finds an echo in Psalm 103:30. ‘Thou shalt send forth thy spirit, and they shall be created: and thou shalt renew the face of the earth.’ All psalm references is to the Vulgate numbering.
being, as the source and guarantee of its being' (*Morgoth* 345). Like the Christian God, Ilúvatar is the reason why there is anything instead of nothing.

In *The Lord of the Rings* Gandalf will invoke the Secret Fire when defying the Balrog: ‘I am a servant of the Secret Fire, wielder of the flame of Anor’ (*FR*, II, v, 330). In a letter Tolkien described Gandalf as both ‘an emissary from the Lords of the West [the Valar]’ and as an ‘angel’ or ‘ἀγγέλος’, messenger (*Letters* 202). By naming the Secret Fire Gandalf refers beyond the Valar to Ilúvatar. The term angel, meanwhile, cannot but imply a servant of the Divinity itself. If the Secret Fire is part of Ilúvatar, yet distinct from or within him, it must bring to mind the Holy Spirit; fire being a symbol of the Holy Spirit ever since Pentecost. In fact, Clyde Kilby claims Tolkien explicitly told him he considered the Secret Fire to be the Holy Spirit. If this is so, Ilúvatar is the reflection of the Triune God of Christianity.

The second moment of implied Trinitarianism in the legendarium does not occur in the published *Silmarillion*, but rather in a debate between an Elf, Finrod, and a human woman, Andreth: the *Athrabeth Finrod ah Andreth* (*Morgoth* 304–26). According to Clyde Kilby Tolkien did not know whether to include this debate in *The Silmarillion* or publish it separately. In the debate the participants discuss metaphysics, mortality, evil and the sovereignty of Eru (*Morgoth* 304–22). Towards the debate’s end Andreth reveals a piece of human lore preserved by those of the ‘Old Hope’: ‘They say that the One will

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135 Cf. ‘The author is not in the tale in one sense, yet it all proceeds from him (and what was in him), so that he is present all the time’, Tolkien, *Fate and Free Will*, p. 186. Ilúvatar’s indwelling could be understood as orthodox panentheism rather than non-Christian pantheism.

136 On the basis of John 1:1–5 the Secret Fire could also be the creative activity of the Word, who is the Son.

137 Clyde Kilby, *Tolkien and The Silmarillion* (Berkhamsted, Herts.: Lion Publishing, 1977), p. 59. In both the letter to Robert Murray and the conversation with Kilby, Tolkien may have merely adopted these terms as approximate analogies. By themselves they are not conclusive. Cf. Tom Shippey’s comments on Tolkien’s often ‘unnoticedly ambiguous’ answers to questions, *The Road to Middle-earth*, p. 28.

himself enter into Arda, and heal Men and all the Marring from the beginning to the end. This they say also, or they feign, is a rumour that has come down through years, uncounted, even from the days of our undoing’ (Morgoth 321).\textsuperscript{139} Finrod replies Eru ‘is already in it, as well as outside’, ‘But indeed, the “in-dwelling” and the “out-living” are not in the same mode’ (Morgoth 322). This appears to refer to the presence of the Secret Fire at Creation’s heart. Yet the possibility of Eru actually entering into Arda requires a different mode, that of an incarnation. The doctrine of the Trinity was developed, in part, to deal with just such a distinction; how God could at the same time be the transcendent ruler of the world and a human being within it.\textsuperscript{140} Finrod recognises the necessity of such a distinction: ‘For, as it seems to me, even if He in Himself were to enter in, He must still remain also as he is: the Author without’ (Morgoth 322). The purpose of Eru’s entering into Arda is exactly the same as that of Christ: narrowly defined, to save humanity from sin and death, or more particularly as St Paul puts it, to heal all of Creation from the corruption of evil.\textsuperscript{141} Finrod presents this same teaching using the terminology of the legendarium:

If we are indeed the Eruhin, the Children of the One, then He will not suffer Himself to be deprived of his own, not by any Enemy, not even by ourselves. [...] Eru will surely not suffer Melkor to turn the world to his own will and to triumph in the end. Yet there is no power conceivable greater than Melkor save Eru alone. Therefore Eru, if he will not relinquish His work to Melkor, who must else proceed to mastery, [...] must come in to conquer him.

(Morgoth 320, 322)

\textsuperscript{139} The Fall is also the moment of the promise of a redeemer in this as in Genesis 3:15.


\textsuperscript{141} See John 8:12; Romans 8:19–23.
This is the closest Tolkien ever came to an outright Christology within his legendarium but it is an unstable support for a Christian interpretation of the legendarium. As Verlyn Flieger has pointed out, Tolkien’s uncertainty over publication is reinforced by the partial and contingent nature of the knowledge and beliefs both parties bring to the debate.\(^{142}\) It is a text which raises questions but does not answer them.

To turn to the differences between Ilúvatar and the Ainur: they are sub-creators while he is a creator. Tolkien is quite clear in the *Ainulindalë* that the source and origin of all of the creative activity in Eä is within Ilúvatar. Each of the Ainur may be free to develop the Music according to their individual gifts and talents, but its original theme is Ilúvatar’s and reveals new realities of which the Ainur had no conception:

Ilúvatar called together all the Ainur and declared to them a mighty theme, unfolding to them things greater and more wonderful than he had yet revealed; and the glory of its beginning and the splendour of its end amazed the Ainur, so that they bowed before Ilúvatar and were silent. (S 3)

When Melkor weaves his own thoughts into the Music, attempting to make creations of his own, Ilúvatar alters the theme to incorporate and subsume Melkor’s inventions, turning his discords into new harmony. Ilúvatar then declares: ‘Mighty are the Ainur, and mightiest among them is Melkor; but that he may know, and all the Ainur, that I am Ilúvatar, those things that ye have sung, I will show them forth, that ye may see what ye have done’ (S 5).

The vision of the unmade universe is Ilúvatar’s means of teaching the Ainur their works exist only within his own. Their creative activity is secondary, partial and derivative, always subject to Ilúvatar’s overarching intentions. As Ilúvatar instructs them:

No theme may be played that hath not its uttermost source in me, nor can any alter the music in my despite. For he that attempteth this shall prove but mine instrument in the devising of things more wonderful, which he himself hath not imagined. (S 5–6)

Creation is ultimately in Ilúvatar’s power alone. For anything to exist it must have received from Ilúvatar the Flame Imperishable, the ‘source and guarantee of its being’ (Morgoth 345). While sub-creation is the right of created beings, it is dependent upon an act of creation, belonging to God alone. Creation brings things into being from nothing, sub-creation gives them new forms. Ilúvatar’s ability to create, rather than sub-create, defines these two concepts for the legendarium. It identifies Ilúvatar with Tolkien’s own conception of God as artist, author, and creator.

Christian theology has always tended to stress God as the ground of all being and that creation takes place, and must take place, ex nihilo, as there can be no pre-existent substance coeval with God. Thomas Aquinas wrote:

Now we have already shown when treating of the divine simplicity, that God is sheer existence subsisting of his very nature. And such being, as we have also noted, cannot but be unique, rather as whiteness would be were it subsistent, for its repetition depends on there being many receiving

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subjects. We are left with the conclusion that all things other than God are not their own existence but share in existence.\(^{144}\)

For Aquinas, the physical world is not subsistent but dependent and as such is qualitatively different from God. Such an understanding of God and Creation is discernible in the *Ainulindalë*. In the beginning Ilúvatar made the Ainur, presumably at the same time as the ‘fair regions’ in which they dwell. They are the ‘offspring of his thought’; like all that will be they have their source in him (S 3–6). Following the Music, Ilúvatar reveals to them a vision of the universe which the Music has mapped. Tolkien is careful to distinguish the Music and vision from the universe which will exist. They are a foreshadowing of it, its pattern, giving it potential form and shape, but not yet actual existence. It only gains independent existence when given it by Ilúvatar, who alone can confer being.\(^{145}\) Tolkien describes the moment of creation thus:

‘I know the desire of your minds that what ye have seen should verily be, not only in your thought, but even as ye yourselves are, and yet other. Therefore I say: Eä! Let these things Be!’ [...] And suddenly the Ainur saw afar off a light, as it were a cloud with a living heart of flame; and they knew that this was no vision only, but that Ilúvatar had made a new thing: Eä, the World that Is. (S 9)

\(^{144}\) *Ostensum est autem supra, cum de divina simplicitate ageretur, quod Deus est ipsum esse per se subsistens. Et iterum ostensum est quod esse subsistens non potest esse nisi unum; sicut si albedo esset subsistens non posset esse nisi una. cum albedines multiplicantur secundum recipientia. Relinquitur ergo quod omnia alia a Deo non sint suum esse, sed participat esse.* Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia.44.1. Tolkien owned a copy of Aquinas’ *Summa Theologiae*. See Alison Milbank, *Chesterton and Tolkien as Theologians: The Fantasy of the Real* (London: T&T Clark, 2008), p. 27 n.38.

\(^{145}\) ‘The One then presented this ‘Music’, including the apparent discords as a visible “history”. At this stage it had still only a validity, to which the validity of a story among ourselves may be compared: it ‘exists’ in the mind of the teller, and derivatively in the minds of hearers, but not on the same plane as tellers and hearers’ (Letters 284).
Here ‘Edh’ can be seen as corresponding to the divine *fiat lux* of Genesis 1:3; tellingly, it is immediately accompanied by the appearance of light. It is a ‘new thing’, not to be identified with the Ainur, or with Ilúvatar, and only now coming into existence.

This Creation, as we learn, exists for the Children of Ilúvatar. Despite the distance of Ilúvatar, there is a connection between Ilúvatar and the Judeo-Christian God in their concern for their creatures. The relationship between the Christian God and humanity is characterised in terms of intimacy and concern, that of a mother for a child (Is 49:15). God’s concern is not limited to a chosen people, instead God ‘will have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth.’ Such intimacy is observable between Eru and the Children of Ilúvatar, Elves and humanity. Ilúvatar reserves their creation for himself: ‘For the Children of Ilúvatar were conceived by him alone; and they came with the third theme, [...] and none of the Ainur had part in their making’ (S 7). In this regard Ilúvatar shows more concern for humanity and Elves than for the rest of Creation. Indeed, the *Ainulindalë* connects the creation of the physical universe with the provision of a habitation for the Children:

And they saw with amazement the coming of the Children of Ilúvatar, and the habitation that was prepared for them; and they perceived that they themselves in the labour of their music had been busy with the preparation of the dwelling, and yet knew not that it had any purpose beyond its own beauty.

(S 6–7)

The Valar had shaped the universe on aesthetic principles; Ilúvatar ensured it would be habitable for his Children. Further, ‘it is said’ the Children of Ilúvatar will be given a central role in the completion of Creation. At the end of time the Children will be gathered

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146 1 Timothy 2:4.

147 The Dwarves are Eru’s Children by adoption (S 38–9). The position of Ents is left unclear.
before the throne of Êلúvatar and will sing a new Music which will remake the world, completing Creation and fulfilling Êlúvatar's designs (S 4).

At the beginning and end of Arda's history, Êlúvatar is deeply concerned with his creatures. In contradistinction to biblical history, however, the only depicted intervention of Êlúvatar in the history of Middle-earth is the destruction of Númenor and the reshaping of the world in the Second Age (S 334). 148 Patrick Curry claims: 'There is never the slightest suggestion that He would do so again no matter how badly matters went in the War of the Ring.' 149 The most visible 'divine' intervention of the Third Age, the sending of the five Wizards to oppose Sauron, occurred 'with the consent of Eru', yet was instigated by the Valar. 150 Tolkien himself noted Êlúvatar was 'immensely remote' (Letters 204). Catherine Madsen has emphasised how minimal the actual interaction between Êlúvatar and his creatures is: 'Middle-earth is a monotheistic world - remotely; it has no theology, no covenant, and no religious instruction; it is full of beauty and wonder and even holiness, but not divinity.' 151 Êlúvatar's remoteness is most apparent in the near absence of any reference to his worship, or indeed any form of religious ceremony, in Tolkien's works. Tolkien claimed religious practises were in the hands of the Valar and that Elves and humanity had 'escaped from "religion" in a pagan sense, into a pure monotheist world, in which all things [...] that might seem worshipful were not to be

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148 Gandalf interprets the finding of the Ring in providential terms (FR, I, i, 56) but Êlúvatar does not take a physical or visible role. The methods of providence will be discussed below.


worshipped’ (*Letters* 204). In Númenor alone there was formal worship of Ilúvatar. Three
times a year the king of Númenor offered prayer, praise, and thanksgiving to Eru upon the
Meneltarma, the island’s highest mountain; yet there was no temple or altar, not even a
pile of stones (*UT* 214–15). Following Sauron’s diabolical cult and the downfall of
Númenor, there was no further organised religion among the Númenóreans. Even
Faramir’s grace before meals refers only to ‘that which is beyond Elvenhome and will ever
be’ (*TT*, IV, v, 676).\(^{152}\) This differs considerably from the God of the Mosaic Law. Of
course, the events of the legendarium take place in fictional prehistory, an ‘imaginary
historical moment’ of this world (*Letters* 239). It is not essential they match any later
practises. Ideas of Ilúvatar and Ilúvatar’s relationship with humanity must not contradict
later Christian traditions but need not match them precisely.

Patrick Curry further questions the monotheism of Tolkien’s mythology, calling it
only ‘nominally monotheistic’.\(^{153}\) Ilúvatar is admittedly a distant figure, certainly in
comparison with the Valar who visit Middle-earth and interact directly with its inhabitants.
Curry also calls the Valar ‘a pantheon of gods and goddesses’, and notes at least
Varda/Elbereth is the object of song and supplication.\(^{154}\) In addition he identifies a strong
streak of animism, with the natural world of Middle-earth often depicted as being literally
alive.\(^{155}\) The Valar complicate the monotheism of Arda but do not necessarily overturn it.
Arda is monotheistic in that there is a gulf between the ontological status of Ilúvatar and
that of the other ‘divine’ beings. The Ainur take part in sub-creation; they are creatures
themselves. Ilúvatar alone is a true creator. This is one of the two main functions of

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\(^{152}\) This could be merely a reference to Aman.

\(^{153}\) Curry, *Defending Middle-earth*, p. 110.

\(^{154}\) Ibid., p. 110. But then again so is the Blessed Virgin.

\(^{155}\) Ibid., pp 110–11. He may be conflating the subjectivity of the physical world with a pantheistic reading of
the natural world. Non-human subjectivities will be the focus of Chapter Three.
Ilúvatar in *The Silmarillion*: to firmly establish the distinction between creation and subcreation. The other is to establish the monotheistic nature of Arda’s cosmology, making it amenable to Christian interpretations without being explicitly Christian. An identification of Ilúvatar with the Judeo-Christian God is not justified by the *Ainulindalë* alone, but Ilúvatar can be easily accommodated within a Christian framework.

**The Valar**

To understand Tolkien’s creation myth we must also understand the Valar. In his much-quoted letter to Milton Waldman Tolkien wrote:

> The Valar (or powers: Englished as gods) are revealed. These latter are as we should say angelic powers, whose function is to exercise delegated authority in their spheres (of rule and government, *not* creation, making or re-making). They are ‘divine’, that is, were originally ‘outside’ and existed ‘before’ the making of the world. [...] On the side of mere narrative device, that is, of course, meant to provide beings of the same order of beauty, power and majesty as the ‘gods’ of higher mythology, which can yet be accepted – well, shall we say baldly, by a mind that believes in the Blessed Trinity. *(Letters 146)*

This captures the tension in the nature of the Valar. They must fulfil the role of gods but be essentially angels. Their imaginative function belongs to one category, their theological to another. By calling them ‘angelic powers’ Tolkien fitted them into the Christian tradition of angelic intermediaries between God and humankind. A straightforward equation of them with angels would, however, be a simplification. They are creatures who owe something to Norse mythology, something to classical mythology, and something to

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Christian theology, apocrypha, and hagiography. They share features with pagan gods as well as the Demiurge of Platonic philosophy. This connects the *Ainulindalë* to primary world mythologies but also complicates its acceptability to Christianity, a tension Tolkien would gradually attempt to reduce.

When explaining his intentions to Milton Waldman, Tolkien wrote that he hoped his created mythology would:

> [P]ossess the tone and quality that I desired, somewhat cool and clear, be redolent of our 'air' (the clime and soil of the North-West, meaning Britain and the hither parts of Europe: not Italy or the Aegean, still less the East).

(*Letters* 144)

This seems to imply a search for analogies to the 'gods' of Tolkien's mythology would have more success in the Norse than in the Greco-Roman tradition. The most obvious point of comparison between the Ainur and the Norse pantheon is actually not in the Valar but in the Maia Olórin: Gandalf. Tolkien referred to Gandalf as an 'Odinic wanderer' (*Letters* 109) and there are indeed many similarities between the two figures. Elderly but hale travellers, bearded and enveloped in cloaks, each could perceive something of the future. They deliberately sacrificed themselves, possessed remarkable horses, Sleipnir and Shadowfax, and sent birds upon errands (ravens and eagles respectively). Yet Gandalf is relatively low in the celestial hierarchy, far from being the leader of the pantheon, and possesses none of Odin's chthonic attributes. There are similarities among some of the other Ainur, although perhaps not as obvious. Ulmo, identified with water, who controls the sea and dwells apart from the other Valar, bears some similarity to Njörðr, the Norse

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god who stills the sea, is not one of the Æsir and dwells apart from his spouse Skaði (S 17). Ulmo's depiction as ruler of the sea, however, cannot but suggest Neptune or Poseidon. The Vala Tulkas can be loosely connected with the Norse Týr. Both are famed for their boldness and strength in battle, and both are involved in the chaining of an enemy of the gods (S 19–20). Yet their actions are different in that Týr offers his hand as ransom in order to coax the wolf Fenrir into the chain Gleipnir, while Tulkas actively wrestled with Melkor before binding him with the chain Angainor (S 48–9).

Characteristics and stories of individual gods may be shared with the Valar, as we would expect from their descent from this original cosmology, but the structures of the respective pantheons have been altered.

Marjorie Burns has argued that Manwë is the equivalent of Odin. Both lead their respective pantheons. Manwë's halls are upon Taniquetil, the highest peak in Middle-earth, just as Odin resides on the high seat Hliðskjólf in the hall Valaskjálf. Both send birds as messengers, are associated with poetry, and wear blue robes. Tellingly, in The Book of Lost Tales when Eriol told the Elves of Wöden they identified him with Manwë (Lost Tales II 290). There are, however, complications. Burns argues persuasively Tolkien split the character of Odin, assigning his positive qualities to Manwë and his negative to Morgoth. Just as Odin is known as 'Swift in Deceit', Morgoth is called 'Master of Lies'. The ravenous wolf Carcharoth, also called Anfauglir, 'Jaws of Thirst', lies before

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158 Snorri Sturluson, Edda, Gylfaginning, 23.23.28–24.24.25. The story of Njörð's unhappy marriage is transferred to the Númenórean king Aldarion, as noted by Shippey in The Road to Middle-earth, pp 277–8.
160 Snorri Sturluson, Edda, Gylfaginning, 25.25.10–19.
161 Burns, 'Gandalf and Odin', p. 224.
Morgoth's throne just as Geri and Freki, both meaning 'greedy one', sit at Odin's feet (S 212). Such an identification is not unreasonable given that 'Manwē and Melkor are brethren in the thought of Ilúvatar'; a suggestive identification (S 16). In the asterisk-mythology, Odin would be a composite figure, drawing on the merged traditions of Manwē and Morgoth.

Yet there are also problems identifying Manwē with Odin. Odin is a war god, the god of heroes, berserkers, and battle fury; Manwē has almost no association with battle. Burns attempts to present Manwē as a war god on two grounds: first, his constant opposition to Morgoth and, second, his allowing the Númenóreans to destroy themselves. This is not convincing. While there was strife between the Valar and Morgoth during the shaping of Arda, Manwē's role is at best implicit; it is Tulkas who wrestled with Morgoth in Utumno and Eonwē, the herald of Manwē, who oversaw the final overthrow of Morgoth's fortress of Angband (S 10, 48–9, 302). Tolkien is also clear it is Ilúvatar, not Manwē, who causes the downfall of Númenor (S 334).

Furthermore Manwē is clearly modelled upon a sky god; Tolkien even invented for him an Old English name Wolcenfrea, 'Skyruler'. Brian Branston identified Odin with the Hindu Vāata of the Rig-Veda, the Lord of the Wind, and traced them both back to an Indo-European wind god. He also interpreted the eye of Odin as a symbol of the sun.

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165 Georges Dumézil, Gods of the Ancient Northmen, ed. Einar Haugen (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1977), p. 29. There is 'strife' between Melkor and the other Valar during the formation of Arda, but apart from calling the Valar together to oppose Melkor Manwē's role is unclear (S 10).
166 Burns, 'Gandalf and Odin', pp 225–6.
and the hiding of the eye as the sunset. Yet Branston recognised Odin cannot be traced back to the Indo-European Sky Father *Djevs, who ultimately became the Norse Tyr. Tacitus, meanwhile, identified Woden with Mercury. Tolkien describes Manwē in the following terms:

In Arda his delight is in the winds and the clouds, and in all the regions of the air, from the heights to the depths, from the utmost borders of the Veil of Arda to the breezes that blow in the grass. Súlimo he is surnamed, Lord of the Breath of Arda. All swift birds, strong of wing, he loves and they come and go at his bidding. (S 16)

These are plainly the characteristics of a sky god. When the Númenóreans turn against the Valar, the messengers who bear the Valar’s final warning are the Eagles of Manwē (S 332). While the raven is Odin’s bird, the eagle is most associated with Zeus/Jupiter, who shares Manwē’s position as head of a pantheon and possesses the power to command thunder and lightning.

Another Vala who connects Tolkien’s mythology to that of Greece and Rome is Yavanna, the Vala associated with the natural world, especially plants. She loves all things that grow in the earth, and holds their countless forms in her mind, ‘from the trees like towers in forests long ago to the moss upon stones or the small and secret things in the mould’ (S 18). In opening lines of De rerum natura Lucretius identified Venus with the animating principle of the natural world:

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169 Ibid., p. 114.
170 Ibid., p. 109.
Nurturing Venus, who beneath the smooth-moving heavenly signs fill with yourself the sea full-laden with ships, the earth that bears the crops, since through you every kind of living thing is conceived and rising up looks on the light of the sun [...] for you the wonder-working earth puts forth sweet flowers, for you the wide stretches of ocean laugh, and heaven grown peaceful glows with outpoured light.\textsuperscript{173}

Yavanna displays a similar generative power during the shaping of Arda, though it requires the light of the lamps, Illuin and Ormal:

Then the seeds that Yavanna had sown began swiftly to sprout and to burgeon, and there arose a multitude of growing things great and small, mosses and grasses and great ferns, and trees whose tops were crowned with clouds as they were living mountains, but whose feet were wrapped in a green twilight. And beasts came forth and dwelt in the grassy plains, or in the rivers and the lakes, or walked in the shadows of the woods. As yet no flower had bloomed nor any bird had sung: for these things waited still their time in the bosom of Yavanna, but wealth there was of her imagining.

\((S\ 27–8)\)

\textsuperscript{173} \textit{Alma Venus, caeli subter labentia signa}

\textit{Quae mare navigerum, quae terras frugiferentis}

\textit{Concelebras, per te quoniam genus omne animantum}

\textit{Concipitur visitque exortum lumina solis:}

\textit{[...] tibi suavis daedala tellus}

\textit{Summititit flores, tibi rident aequora ponti}

\textit{Placatumque nitet diffuso lumine caelum.}

While Yavanna’s role is more limited than Lucretius’ Venus, her part in this first spring of Arda and later in the making of the Two Trees, recalls the passage in *De rerum natura* (S 31). Further, Yavanna’s spouse is Aulë, the smith and craftsman of the Valar, while Venus’ spouse is Vulcan, the smith of the gods (S 17–18). Tolkien’s mythology is not quite as geographically or ethnographically specific as he indicated. It shares features with several European mythologies, including ties to Italy and the Aegean. This is not so surprising when we consider Tolkien received a grammar school education and studied Classics at Oxford before changing to English.\(^\text{174}\)

Tolkien’s cosmology may also be connected with Greek philosophy through the figure of the Demiurge (Greek δημιουργός).\(^\text{175}\) Tolkien describes the Valar as ‘engaged in a demiurgic labour’ (*Morgoth* 330). Christopher Tolkien glosses this as ‘the creative work of “demiurges”, in the sense of mighty but limited beings subordinate to God’ (*Morgoth* 357). This concept of a Demiurge goes back to Plato, particularly the *Timaeus*.\(^\text{176}\) Here the Demiurge brings order out of chaos:

> For [the Demiurge] desired that, so far as possible, all things should be good and nothing evil; wherefore, when He took over all that was visible, seeing that it was not in a state of rest but in a state of discordant and disorderly motion, He brought it into order out of disorder, deeming that the former state is in all ways better than the latter.\(^\text{177}\)


\(^{177}\) Plato, *Timaeus*, 30a. The capitalisation of He is from the edition.
It is not immediately clear from the *Timaeus* whether the Demiurge is merely a metaphor for the operation of reason in the world or, along Neoplatonic lines, the Divine Reason emanating from the One. In order to maintain distance between the pure One and the flawed world available to human senses, Neo-Pythagoreanism asserted the existence of intermediate beings between the corporeal world and the supreme god. The Neoplatonist Plotinus made use of such intermediate beings between the One and the material world in his theory of emanation. The first emanation from the One is Thought or Mind, (Greek νοῦς), to be identified with Plato's Demiurge, from which proceeds the World-Soul and finally matter. Drawing on both Platonism and the idea of the Divine Wisdom from the Sapiential books of the Hebrew Scriptures, the Jewish-Hellenistic philosopher Philo of Alexandria identified the Angel of the Lord with the Logos (λόγος). The Logos is the Word of God, distinct from and subordinate to God yet the instrument by which God forms the world. As well as the Logos, there exist other Powers whom Philo sometimes identifies with the angels and at other times with attributes or powers of God. The identification of the Valar as demiurges had the potential to collapse the distinction between the Valar and Ilúvatar. As ‘offspring of his thought’ (S 3), the Valar could be viewed as powers of Ilúvatar along the line of Neoplatonic emanations.

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183 Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, i, pp 460–1. Tolkien uses this exact term for the Valar (*Shaping 78*).

however, was not attempting to keep a distance between the One and the physical world, but to talk about sub-creation.

Francis Cornford reminds us: ‘Neither in the Timaeus nor anywhere else is it suggested that the Demiurge should be an object of worship: he is not a religious figure.’ Tolkien was equally clear that the Valar were not objects of worship in Middle-earth (Letters 204). Though characters pray to the Valar, these prayers do not include any element of worship, they merely request help. To pray for assistance does not intrinsically imply recognition of a god. In The Silmarillion Fingon’s prayer to Manwë to speed his arrow and end Maedhros’ suffering is swiftly answered by the arrival of Thorondor, essentially Manwë’s representative, who rescues Maedhros (S 124). In The Lord of the Rings when Sam faces Shelob in the Ephel Duath he cries in desperation to Varda, ‘in a language which he did not know’ (TT, IV, x, 729). This may recall speaking in tongues, and the sudden ability to speak an unknown language is certainly a charismatic moment. In neither prayer, however, is there an element of worship. In Catholic theology supplication may be addressed via saints or angels, with the implication they act by God’s leave. Fingon and Sam’s prayers can be reconciled with this. They need not even be so theological; merely a recognition the Valar are stronger than they are and capable, if willing, of granting aid.

The identification of the Valar as angels has been challenged by Richard Purtill on two points: first, through their role as sub-creators of the physical universe and, second, through their taking on of material forms modelled on the forms of Elves and humans.

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185 Cornford, Plato’s Cosmology, p. 35.
186 Cf. Damrod the Gondorian ranger who cries ‘May the Valar turn him aside!’ when faced with the mûmakil (TT, IV, iv, 661).
Tolkien, however, had respectable biblical precedent for such characteristics. God’s plural statements in Genesis 1:26 led rabbinical commentators to speculate God was addressing the angels and inviting them to participate in the forming of humankind.\(^{188}\) John Henry Newman wrote of the angels:

I viewed them, not only as the ministers employed by the Creator in the Jewish and Christian dispensations, as we find on the face of Scripture, but as carrying on, as Scripture also implies, the Economy of the Visible World. I considered them as the real causes of motion, light, and life, and of those elementary principles of the physical universe, which, when offered in their developments to our senses, suggest to us the notion of cause and effect, and of what are called the laws of nature.\(^{189}\)

Newman considered this line of thinking, with the angels governing the motions of the physical world, as being entirely in line with the Alexandrian school and the early Church in general.\(^{190}\)

A theologian who comes even closer to Tolkien’s concept of angelic sub-creation is Augustine. Augustine suggested God can be understood to grant angels permission to shape the created world, while God alone can be said to create it. In *De civitate Dei* he insisted only God could create:

As for the angels [...] even though they directly participate, whether by order or by leave, in the production of things in the world, we can no more

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\(^{190}\) Ibid. Tolkien would likely have come in contact with Newman’s ideas, if not Newman’s works, while at the Birmingham Oratory. See Scull and Hammond, *J.R.R. Tolkien Companion and Guide*, ii, pp 117–18.
call them creators of animals than we in fact call farmers creators of crops and trees.\textsuperscript{191}

Elsewhere Augustine addresses the same theme:

But an angel can no more create a substance than he can create himself. The will of an angel, however, which gives obedient service to God and carries out His commands, is able to work on things subject to him, using them as a kind of matter and employing forces of nature, so that something is created in time in accordance with the uncreated formative principles in the Word of God or in accordance with the formative principles causally created in the works of the first six days. The angel's function in such a case is like that of the farmer or the physician.\textsuperscript{192}

This is strikingly similar to the \textit{Ainulindalë} where Ilúvatar provides the basic principles upon which the Ainur shape creation. Such a distinction between the action of God and the actions of the angels may well be called 'sub-creation.'


Having angels take on material form at first appears more unorthodox. Tolkien describes the Valar, once they enter the world, taking on shape and hue in imitation of the Children of Ilúvatar (S 11). He stresses, however:

[T]hey need it not, save only as we use raiment, and yet we may be naked and suffer no loss of our being. Therefore the Valar may walk, if they will, unclad, and then even the Eldar can not clearly perceive them, though they be present. (S 11)

According to this passage the material form adopted by the Valar merely produces external qualities, not their essential substance. It is not a matter of incarnation and corporeality but it does go against the popular conception of angels as disembodied. There are, however, several examples from Scripture which indicate just such an occurrence. Several times angels are welcomed as apparently human guests, sometimes eating and sometimes not. At Mamre Yahweh appeared to Abraham in the form of three men, traditionally depicted as angels. Abraham provided the three strangers with curds, milk and a calf, which they proceed to eat (Gen 18:1–8). When two angels visit Lot at Sodom they eat the unleavened bread which he prepares for them (Gen 19:1–3). But in Judges 13:16 the angel pointedly says he will not eat and ascends to heaven on the flame of the sacrifice. Tolkien’s description of the Valar taking on material form is not essentially at odds with scripture.

Even with the evident backing of several theological authorities Tolkien clearly came to feel uncomfortable about the nature of the Valar. One trend which is apparent from Tolkien’s revisions of the ‘Silmarillion’ is his tendency to make the Valar both less

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194 Cf. Tobit 12:19.
godlike and less anthropomorphic. In *The Book of Lost Tales* when Eriol asks Lindo if the Valar are 'the Gods', Lindo responds 'So be they [...] though concerning them Men tell many strange and garbled tales that are far from the truth, and many strange names they call them that you will not hear here' (*Lost Tales* I 45). By the time of *The Quenta* in the 1930s Tolkien refers to them as 'the Valar, which is the Powers, though Men have often called them Gods' (*Shaping* 78). Tolkien even changed the etymology of the word Valar from *GWAL* 'fortune, happiness: Gwala “one of the gods including their divine folk and children”' (*Lost Tales* I 272) to Vala 'has power (sc. over the matter of Eä), “a Power”' (*Jewels* 403). This shift from the essentially pagan 'gods' to the more neutral 'Powers' is reinforced by the recasting of the relationship between the Valar in less anthropomorphic terms. While the words 'spouse' and 'brethren' are still used, the concept of the Children of the Valar is removed. Originally Manwē and Varda had two children, Fionwē-Ûrion and Erinti; in 1951 Tolkien amended 'Fionwē, son of Manwē' to 'Eonwē, herald of Manwē' while Erinti eventually became 'Ilmarē, the handmaid of Varda' (S 21). At first Tolkien merely listed the Valarindë, the offspring of the Valar, with the Maiar but later demoted them to the status of Maiar altogether (S 21, cf. *Morgoth* 49). In the published *Silmarillion* the Valar may still have spouses and brethren but it is without the implications of earthly marriage and corporeal children; their relationships refer rather to their place in the mind of Ilúvatar (S 16–18).

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195 Though even at their most godlike and anthropomorphic the Valar lack the affairs, rivalries and casual violence of many of the Greek, Roman and Norse gods.
196 See (*Lost Tales* I 58) and (*Morgoth* 146).
197 The Maia Melian who conceives Lúthien remained an exception. By taking on the form of an Elf she 'became bound by the chain and trammels of the flesh of Arda', yet 'in that form she gained a power over the substance of Arda' (S 281). Gandalf and the other Istari are embodied Maia, but are limited rather than empowered by the process (*UT* 503).
As depicted in the published *Silmarillion* the Valar emerge as beings who owe a great debt to Norse and Greco-Roman mythology for their characterisations and to Platonic philosophy for their role. They are also more anthropomorphic and godlike than the orthodox definition of angels, though Tolkien deliberately edited out aspects, such as the Children of the Valar, which would have made them incompatible with modern Christian orthodoxy. Even with Tolkien's revisions they do not fit comfortably into the category of god, demiurge, or angel. Tolkien would play down the originally explicit connection between the Valar and the gods of various European mythologies and attempt to make them more angelic, but their essential, godlike characteristics remained. Their sub-creative role was, however, remarkably stable throughout all his revisions. This demiurgic rather than creative role could find echoes in non-Christian thought without contradicting Christianity.

**The Music**

The *Ainulindalè* takes its name from the Music of the Ainur, the central image and event of Tolkien's creation myth. Music is a particularly suitable metaphor for creation on two grounds: first, the correspondence between ratio in music and ratio in the physical world, reflected in music being placed in the quadrivium with arithmetic, geometry, and astronomy; second, the relationship of theme to polyphonic variation, which lends itself to the relationship of creation to sub-creation. Although it may seem original to some readers, the Music of the Ainur has its source in a historical connection between harmony

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198 Leaving aside the vexatious issue of the sons of God who wed the daughters of men in Genesis 6:1–4.

and proportion in music and the ordering of the physical universe. This notion, developed in Antiquity, reached medieval Europe primarily via Boethius and Isidore of Seville. Boethius identified three kinds of music: cosmic, human, and instrumental. He associated the cosmic music with the harmonious movement of the heavenly bodies, the elements, and the seasons. Further, in his *Etymologiae* Isidore of Seville claimed:

So it is that without music, no other discipline can be perfected, for nothing is without music. Indeed, it is said that the universe itself is composed from a certain harmony of sounds, and that the very heavens turn to the modulations of harmony.

In the *Ainulindalé* we can see a development of ideas transmitted generally in the west as seen above in Isidore. The Music, originating in Ilúvatar, becomes the Valar’s knowledge of and contribution to the shape of the as yet unmade universe, where the ratios of harmony are reduced to plane and solid geometry. As such, a connection between the Music and the Platonic concept of the Forms is suggested. Still, while the Music has strong Greek philosophical overtones, it also recalls Genesis.

The Book of Genesis opens with God creating heaven and earth, an earth which is void and empty; God commands light to be and divides it from darkness (Gen 1:1–4). Creation is spoken into existence by the Word of God. No activity of the angels is mentioned; their creation is not even mentioned. This did not prevent Christians reading

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angels into the text. Augustine, for example, identified the creation of the angels with the first creation of light. In the *Ainulindalë* the Word of God, as it were, is still the origin and source of all Creation but reduces matter into forms via the Ainur, not through the medium of words but of music. Ilúvatar proposes the theme to the Ainur, who develop it in a great music, before Ilúvatar reveals the Music in visible form and finally gives it actual existence (S 3–9). This progression from Music to Vision to physical reality is analogous to Augustine’s exegesis of the opening verses of Genesis. Taking the text of Genesis 1:6–8 Augustine interprets ‘And God said “Let it be made”’ to refer to the Word of God speaking; ‘And so it was done’ to the knowledge of a creature produced in the intellects of the angels; and the repetition of the phrase ‘God made’ to the created work itself now receiving physical being. Augustine writes: ‘Thus, the created work was in a sense first made in the angelic nature, which by a mysterious operation first saw in the Word of God

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205 Augustine’s text, the Vetus Latina rather than the Vulgate, follows the Septuagint in placing *et factum est ita* ‘And so it was done’ at the end of verse 6 rather than verse 7. See *Literal Meaning of Genesis*, p. 231 n.1.
206 *Quapropter iam luce facta, in qua intelligimus ab aeterna luce formatam rationalem creaturam, cum in ceteris creandis rebus audimus: et dixit deus: fiat, intelligamus ad aeter nitatem urbi dei recurrentem scripturae intentionem. Cum uero audimus: et sic est factum, intelligamus in creatura intellectualis factam cognitionem rationis, quae in uerbo dei est, condendae creaturae, ut in ea natura prius quodam modo facta sit, quae anteriori goudam motu in ipso dei uerbo prior faciendam esse cognouit, ut postremo, cum audimus repeti et dici, quod fecit deus, iam intelligamus in suo genere fieri ipsam creaturam. Porro cum audimus: et uidit deus, quia bonum est, intelligamus benignitati dei placuisse, quod factum est, ut pro modo sui generis maneret, quod placuit, ut fieret, cum spiritus dei superferebatur super aquam.* Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram*, II.8.19, CSEL 28.1, p. 45, *Literal Meaning of Genesis*, i, p. 58 As Augustine’s interpretation depends upon the ordering of the Vetus Latina text, its correspondence with the *Ainulindalë* may imply Tolkien had encountered *De Genesi ad litteram*. Neither the Vulgate nor Douay-Rheims has this reading.
Himself that the creature was to be made.' Tolkien elaborated on Augustine's position by having the angels participate in creation not just through understanding but through active embellishment. Robert Murray reports Tolkien telling him he liked to believe God 'had given the angels some part in the work of creation.' Such an interpretation can certainly be found in the *Ainulindalë.*

The distinction between the Music and the created world in the *Ainulindalë* has a possible source in the *Timaeus.* Ilúvatar presents the Ainur with a vision of the Music which reveals the shape of the world that is to come (S 6). But when they enter Eä the Valar discover:

The Great Music had been but the growth and flowering of thought in the Timeless Halls, and the Vision only a foreshadowing; but now they had entered in at the beginning of Time, and the Valar perceived that the World had been but foreshadowed and foresung, and they must achieve it. (S 10)

The depiction of the Valar perceiving Creation in terms of its eternal pattern before having to shape it according to the ever-present memory of this pattern reinforces sub-creation's possible connection with Platonic philosophy. In the *Timaeus* the Demiurge forms the things of this world according to the model of the Forms:

In the semblance of which of the living Creatures did the Constructor of the Cosmos construct it? [...] for nothing that resembles the imperfect would ever become fair. But [...] the Cosmos, more than aught else, resembles most closely that Living Creature of which all other living

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207 Ibid. Aquinas challenged the idea the angels existed before the creation of the world but accepted it was the universal view of the Greek Fathers, Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia.61.3.


209 Though the memory is ever-present it must be called up (S 40–1).
creatures, severally and generically, are portions. [...] For since [the Demiurge] desired to make it resemble most closely that intelligible Creature which is fairest of all and in all ways most perfect, He constructed it as a Living Creature, one and visible, containing within itself all the living creatures which are by nature akin to itself.\textsuperscript{210}

Here the ‘Living Creature’ is the Form or Forms upon which the entire visible universe is modelled.\textsuperscript{211} The distinction between the Music, the Vision, and the physical universe which is patterned upon them raises the possibility the Music could be interpreted as the Platonic world of Forms.

The sharp distinction between the Music and the material world, marked by Êuvatar’s declaration ‘Eä!’ is not in the original version of the \textit{Ainulindalë}.\textsuperscript{212} The draft of \textit{The Music of the Ainur} from c.1919 reads:

‘Behold your choiring and your music! Even as ye played so of my will your music took shape, and lo! Even now the world unfolds and its history begins as did my theme in your hands. [...] One thing only have I added, the fire that giveth Life and Reality’ – and behold, the Secret Fire burnt at the heart of the world. (\textit{Lost Tales I} 55)

\textit{Ainulindalë} B from c.1937 reads:

And Êuvatar said: ‘Behold your music! For of my will it has taken shape, and even now the history of the world is beginning. [...] But I have given being unto all.’ And lo! The secret Fire burned in the heart of the World.\textsuperscript{213}

\textsuperscript{210} Plato, \textit{Timaeus}, 30c–31a.

\textsuperscript{211} Cornford, \textit{Plato’s Cosmology}, p. 40.

\textsuperscript{212} See Michæl Devaux, ‘The Origins of the \textit{Ainulindalë}: The Present State of Research’ in Allan Turner (ed.), \textit{The Silmarillion: Thirty Years On} (Zurich and Berne: Walking Tree Publishers, 2007), pp 81–110 for a useful outline of the changing versions of the \textit{Ainulindalë}. 
The granting of being and reality to the Music has already taken place in both these accounts. In both texts it is the power of Ilúvatar which takes the Music from concept to physical reality. The Vision only appears from *Ainulindalë* C* onwards: that is, in the period 1946–8 (*Morgoth* 4, 40). *Ainulindalë* C from 1948 reads:

But when they were come into the Void, Ilúvatar said to them: ‘Behold your Music!’ And he showed to them a vision, giving to them sight where before was only hearing; and they saw a new World made visible before them, and it was globed amid the Void, and it was sustained therein, but was not of it. And as they looked and wondered this World began to unfold its history, and it seemed to them that it lived and grew. (*Morgoth* 6, 11)

The declaration ‘*Edë!’ was finally added in *Ainulindalë* D, dating from between 1948 and 1951 (*Morgoth* 7, 31). Tolkien’s original conception of the *Ainulindalë* may seem less Platonic than it later became; actually it was merely less explicitly Platonic.

Tolkien appears to have added the Vision and ‘*Edë!’ to clarify the Ainur’s actions as sub-creators rather than creators proper. Having Ilúvatar give being to the contents of the Music after, rather than during, the Music emphasises Ilúvatar’s creative activity is on a different plane to the Ainur’s. Tolkien had already taken precautions to distinguish divine creation from angelic sub-creation. As Michaël Devaux points out, in *Ainulindalë* A Ilúvatar teaches the Ainur ‘all manner of things’ beginning with music. As such, not only the theme of the Music but even their faculty of musicianship comes from Ilúvatar.\footnote{Devaux, ‘The Origins of the *Ainulindalë*,’ p. 94 and (Lost Tales I 52).}

From *Ainulindalë* B onwards the Ainur’s musicality appears to be innate yet Tolkien is


\footnote{*Ainulindalë* C and C* are the flat Earth and round Earth versions of this draft of the *Ainulindalë*. See (*Morgoth* 3–4). Their relationship is discussed further below.}
quite clear the world only has being due to Ilúvatar’s gift of the Secret Fire (*Lost Road* 156, 159). See Table 1 on the following page.
| Table 1 \(^{216}\) |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| **The Music of the Ainur** | **Ainulindalë B** | **Ainulindalë C and C*** | **Ainulindalë D** |
| Ilúvatar sings into being the Ainur. | Ilúvatar makes the Ainur | Ilúvatar makes the Ainur. | Ilúvatar makes the Ainur. |
| Ilúvatar teaches the Ainur about music. | Ilúvatar teaches the Ainur musical themes. | Ilúvatar teaches the Ainur musical themes. | Ilúvatar teaches the Ainur musical themes. |
| Ilúvatar propounds to the Ainur a design. | Ilúvatar declares to the Ainur a theme. | Ilúvatar declares to the Ainur a theme. | Ilúvatar declares to the Ainur a theme. |
| As the Ainur play the World unfolds and history begins. Ilúvatar has already added the Secret Fire. | As the Ainur play the World unfolds and history begins. Ilúvatar has already added the Secret Fire. | Ilúvatar shows the Ainur a vision of the World to be. | Ilúvatar shows the Ainur a vision of the World to be. |
| - | - | Ilúvatar says “Let These things Be!” and sends the flame imperishable into | Ilúvatar says “Ea! Let these things Be!” and sends the flame imperishable into the Void. |

\(^{216}\) *Lost Tales I*, pp 52–60; *Lost Road*, pp 156–64; Tolkien, *Morgoth*, pp 8–22, 30–7, 39–44.
the Void. Ilúvatar has made a new thing

Ilúvatar has made a new thing, Ea, the World that is.

One problem raised by identifying the Music with the Platonic Forms is that Ea does not passively reflect the Music as an impression does a stamp. For Plato the physical universe is merely a copy of the Forms, and a thoroughly inadequate copy at that. It is clear from Tolkien’s writings that this downgrading of the physical world would not have appealed to him. To repeat his words to Henry Resnick: ‘If you really want to know what Middle-earth is based on, it’s my wonder and delight in the earth as it is.’\textsuperscript{217} Plato, by contrast, famously compared the world of our perceptions to shadows cast upon the walls of a cave by realities which we do not perceive.\textsuperscript{218} Further, in the \emph{Ainulindalë} Tolkien implies Ilúvatar can bring about new creations not contained in the Music: ‘in every age there come forth things that are new and have no foretelling, for they do not proceed from the past’ (S 6). This may be connected to the gift Ilúvatar gives to humans, ‘they should have a virtue to shape their life, amid the powers and chances of the world, beyond the Music of the Ainur, which is as fate to all things else’ (S 35–6). What these new things are is never made clear; it is not even clear they must be things. They represent new creation by the power of Ilúvatar, rather than reflections of the Music. We may be in the realm of miracle, possibly representing an interaction between humans and the divine, analogous to the original interaction between the Valar and Ilúvatar.

This question must be asked because humans not only bring about things not to be found in the Music but will eventually help to produce a Creation which will be more

\textsuperscript{217} Resnick, ‘An Interview with Tolkien’, p. 41.

\textsuperscript{218} Plato, \emph{The Republic}, ed. Paul Shorey, 2 Vols, LCL (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press and Heinemann, 1985), ii, VII.515e–d.
perfect than the original Music. In the middle of the description of the Music we are told a greater Music will be made after the end of days, by both the Ainur and the Children of Ilúvatar:

Then the themes of Ilúvatar shall be played aright, and take Being in the moment of their utterance, for all shall understand fully his intent in their part, and each shall know the comprehension of each, and Ilúvatar shall give to their thoughts the Secret Fire, being well pleased. (S 4)

The idea that out of the activities of corporeal creatures a new Creation could come, more perfect than the Music of the Ainur, challenges an identification of the Music with the Platonic Forms, which are 'fairest of all and in all ways most perfect'. The second Music is more reminiscent of the new heaven and new earth of Revelation 21:1. Tolkien does not talk about the perfection of the unperfectable, but the restoration and further perfection of the damaged. Tolkien, just like Augustine, may have felt Plato had insight into the true nature of reality, described in different modes by Genesis and the Ainulindalë, but he would not tie his creation myth to Plato at the expense of his own definition of creation and sub-creation, a definition which valued sub-creation as much as creation.

The Platonic Forms, however, could be reconciled with sub-creation through Augustine's interpretation of Genesis. According to Augustine the evenings and mornings in the first six days of creation refer to a progression in angelic knowledge of God's creative activity. The angels currently enjoy a unified and comprehensive knowledge of Creation. This was not the case during the act of creation:

\[ \text{Referring to their 'virtue to shape their life [...] beyond the Music of the Ainur, which is as fate to all things else; and of their operation everything should be, in form and deed, completed, and the world fulfilled unto the last and smallest' (S 35–6); see further below.} \]

\[ \text{Plato, Timaeus, 30d.} \]

\[ \text{Augustine, De Genesi ad litteram, IV.24.41, CSEL 28.1, pp 123–4, Literal Meaning of Genesis, i, p. 132.} \]
It would seem rather that on all six days, when God was making the works He was pleased to make on each day, the angels first saw the creature in the Word of God, and thus the creature was originally produced in the knowledge of the angels, as Scripture indicates by the words, *And so it was done.* Then, when the works of one day had been produced in their own proper nature and God had been pleased, seeing that they were good, the angels knew them once more, this time with an inferior sort of knowledge indicated by the name of evening. Finally, when evening had passed, morning came, when the angels praised God for His work and received further knowledge of other creatures to be created, this knowledge being given to them in the Word of God before the production of the works themselves.222

This is an orderly, but not literally temporal, progression in angelic knowledge of creatures, first in potentiality in the mind of God and then as actually existent.

If we examine the progression in the *Ainulindalë* the Ainur first learn the theme of Creation from Ilúvatar and then see its elaborated form in the Vision before finally experiencing the products of the Music in Eä itself. The Platonic Forms would have to be located within Ilúvatar himself and expressed in the theme. For example, Ilúvatar teaches the Ainur knowledge of a form, the Ainur then produce multiple conceptual examples of

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222 'Nonne per omnes sex dies, cum ea, quae per singulos deo condere placuit, conderentur, primo haec accipiebat in uerbo dei, ut in eius notitia primitus fieren, cum dicebatur: et sic est factum, deinde, cum facta essent in sua propria natura, qua sunt, deoque placuissent, quia bona sunt, tunc ea itidem cognoscebat alia quadam inferiore cognitione, quae nomine uesperae significata est ac deinde facta uespera fiebat mane, cum de suo opere deus laudaretur et alterius creaturae, quae deinceps facienda erat, ex dei uerbo notitia, priusquam fieret, acciperetur? Non ergo tunc simul omnia, et dies et uespera et mane, sed singillatim per ordinem, quem scriptura commemorat.' Ibid., IV.31.48, CSEL 28.1, p. 129, *Literal Meaning of Genesis,* i, p. 138.
this form, their variations, before Ilúvatar gives these examples existence. Tolkien differs from Augustine here in allowing the Ainur to elaborate Creation, in the sense of its potential forms, before it is given physical being. They also diverge in that Augustine valorises knowledge of a thing in the mind of God over knowledge of it as it exists in the world. Tolkien, for his part, does not value the physical less than the idea. The Valar enter the physical world for love of it rather than remaining in a world of Forms (S 9–10).

Augustine, however, was far from the last word on the angels and the creation. Aquinas, responding to those who proposed all corporeal forms come from spiritual substances, which Christians would call angels, challenged the reading that angels acted as intermediaries in the creation of the world:

Some [the Neoplatonists and the Muslim philosopher Avicenna] have maintained that things proceed from God in stages, the first creature coming immediately from him, and this producing another, and so on until material creatures were reached. But this is impossible to maintain. The reason is that the first production of material creatures comes about through creation, whereby matter itself is produced; for in generation, the undeveloped state must precede full development. Yet it is impossible that anything be created except by God alone.  

According to Aquinas the Neoplatonists believed the forms of corporeal matter are derived from forms that subsist separately from matter, while Avicenna held that all forms now

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223 ‘Dicendum quod quidam posuerunt gradatim res a Deo processisse, ita scilicet quod ab eo immediate processit prima creatura, et illa produxit aliam, et sic inde usque ad creaturam corporem. Sed haec positio est impossibilis. Quia prima corporalis creaturae productio est per creationem, per quam etiam ipsa materia productur; imperfectum enim est prius quam perfectum in fieri. Impossibile est autem aliquid creari nisi a solo Deo.’ Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, Ia.65.3.
existing in corporeal matter proceed from forms that exist in the minds of spiritual creatures, that is the angelic intelligences.\textsuperscript{224}

Being an Aristotelian, if a Platonised one, Aquinas held that forms only exist in so far as composite beings, form and matter combined, exist:

The forms of corruptible things sometimes exist, and sometimes [do] not, and this is not because they come to be or pass away, but because the composites of which they are parts come to be or pass away. Again it is not forms that have existence; rather it is composites that have existence through forms.\textsuperscript{225}

For Aquinas, individual corporeal forms come into existence by matter being reduced from a state of potentiality, where it is capable of receiving a form, to a state of actual existence, where it of necessity possesses a form.\textsuperscript{226} Now the very first production of material creatures was not a passage from potency to act, \textit{de potentia in actum}; rather God immediately gave them existence, as God alone can create matter from nothing.\textsuperscript{227} This means the angels could not have created the first material creatures. In the same section, however, Aquinas writes:

Forms, having been embodied in matter, are not reducible to unmaterialized forms that serve as patterns, as the Platonists maintained. Rather, they are traceable to material forms, either those of angelic intellects, whence they proceed through a process of movement, or to ideas in the divine mind, which endowed created things even with the seeds of

\textsuperscript{224} Ibid., Ia.65.4.
\textsuperscript{225} 'formae autem corruptibilium rerum habent quidem quod aliquando sint, aliquando non sint, absque hoc quod ipsae generentur aut corrumpantur, sed compositis generatis aut corruptis. Quia etiam formae non habent esse, sed composita habent esse per eas.' Ibid.
\textsuperscript{226} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{227} Ibid.
forms that they might be brought to full realization through a process of movement.\textsuperscript{228}

The angels possess these mental forms in so far as they know of the creatures to which they refer. Aquinas uses Augustine’s term \textit{rationes seminales}, ‘seminal reasons’, latent sources or seeds of development inserted by God into matter during the work of creation, to describe these mental forms.\textsuperscript{229} Aquinas also describes angels as ‘active forces moving bodies to new forms.’\textsuperscript{230} As such, the angels can be seen as shaping and developing material creatures along the lines of the seminal reasons.

Aquinas, who was attempting to merge a Platonic tradition with the new Aristotelianism, arguably is closer to Tolkien than Augustine is. Angels cannot create but can help Creation to develop into new forms. As long as this distinction between creation and what could be called sub-creation is maintained, the conceptual framework of the \textit{Ainulindalë} appears to mirror Aquinas. Tolkien may have been writing myth but he had, if he wished, the benefit of a philosophical as well as theological tradition from which to draw logical coherence for his narrative of creation.

When the Valar enter Eä they are at a loss to discover ‘the World had been but foreshadowed and foresung, and they must achieve it’ (S 10). The Music and the Vision have revealed to them a world which they must now labour to build. It will be patterned

\textsuperscript{228} \textit{Ad secundum dicendum quod formae participatae in materia reducuntur, non ad formas aliquas per se subsistentes rationis ejusdem, ut Platonici posuerunt, sed ad formas intelligibiles, vel intellectus angelici, a quibus per motum procedunt; vel ulterius ad rationes intellectus divini, a quibus etiam formarum semina sunt rebus creatis indita, ut per motum in actum educi possint.’ Ibib. The Blackfriars edition translates \textit{formae participatae} as ‘forms participated.’


\textsuperscript{230} ‘Sed quia agens compositum, quod est corpus, movetur a substantia spirituali creatae, ut Augustinus dicit De Trin., sequitur ulterius quod etiam formae corporales a substantiis spiritualibus deriventur, non tanquam influentibus formas, sed tanquam moventibus ad formas.’ Aquinas, \textit{Summa Theologiae}, Ia.65.4.
upon the Music but is not bound to mirror it exactly. The Music has served to outline the forms along which the Creation will develop. As such, it would correspond closely to Augustine's understanding of angelic knowledge and the 'seminal reasons' of Creation. Yet, at the same time it avoids violating the distinction between creator and creature which Augustine, Aquinas, and Tolkien himself, sought so hard to maintain. The metaphor of the Music, with its essential reliance on ratio and distinction between original theme and subsequent variation, allowed Tolkien to give a role in Creation to 'angelic powers', providing the first and best pattern for sub-creation.

Arda

The final, and in some ways most important, aspect of Tolkien's creation myth is Middle-earth itself. Tolkien's concerns about the relation of his sub-creation to the primary world are most apparent in his handling of Arda. Tolkien repeatedly insisted Arda is our earth:

Middle-earth is not an imaginary world. The name is the modern form [...] of midden-erd > middle-erd, an ancient name for the oikoumenē, the abiding place of Men, the objectively real world, in use specifically opposed to imaginary worlds (as Fairyland) or unseen worlds (as Heaven or Hell). The theatre of my tale is this earth, the one in which we now live, but the historical period is imaginary. (Letters 239)

Middle-earth is (by the way & if such a note is necessary) not my own invention. It is a modernization or alteration [...] of an old word for the inhabited world of Men, the oikoumenē [...]. Many reviewers seem to assume that Middle-earth is another planet. (Letters 283)²³¹

²³¹ See also (Letters 220, 376).
This concern that his readers equate the primary world with his sub-creation reflects Tolkien’s theories on the interrelation of reality and fantasy in ‘On Fairy-stories’. It manifests again and again in Tolkien’s rewriting of the *Ainulindalë* as a desire to make his creation myth acceptable to readers formed on the modern scientific understanding of the world. These revisions, particularly the shift from a flat to a round earth, caused massive upheavals in his mythology, and threatened more. Yet the revisions give us insights into Tolkien’s knowledge of and attitude towards contemporary science, as well as what he considered to be the appropriate relation of fantasy, and sub-creation more broadly, to primary reality.

In ‘On Fairy-stories’ Tolkien characterises fantasy both as the faculty for forming mental images of things not actually present and as participating in ‘unreality’, that is unlikeness to the primary world (*OFS* 60). Further, if the images produced are of things not in the primary world this is a virtue rather than a vice because it requires a greater degree of skill to produce a believable sub-creation from such images (*OFS* 60–1). The important thing is that the artist proves a successful sub-creator, instilling secondary belief in the audience:

> [It] is found in practice that the ‘inner consistency of reality’ is more difficult to produce, the more unlike are the images and the rearrangement of primary material to the actual arrangements of the Primary World. It is easier to produce this kind of reality with more ‘sober’ material. (*OFS* 60–1)

Fantasy, and sub-creation in general, must thread a narrow path between compelling belief and providing arresting strangeness. Such strangeness must not be confused with dreams or hallucinations which do not require art (*OFS* 60). Indeed Tolkien stresses fantasy’s rational components:
[It] does not destroy or even insult Reason; and it does not either blunt the appetite for, nor obscure the perception of, scientific verity. On the contrary. The keener and the clearer is the reason, the better Fantasy will it make. If men were ever in a state in which they did not want to know or could not perceive truth (facts or evidence), then Fantasy would languish until they were cured. (OFS 65)

For Tolkien, fantasy is ‘founded upon a recognition of fact, but not a slavery to it’ (OFS 65). This can, however, produce in fantasy writers an essential uncertainty concerning how far they can stray from the reader’s experience of, and central assumptions about the nature of, the primary world before the sub-creation begins to place an intolerable burden upon their belief.

This uncertainty affected Tolkien. With *The Lord of the Rings* nearing completion, he returned to the *Ainulindalë* sometime after 1946 only to suffer a crisis of confidence. His problems were:

The Flat Earth and the astronomically absurd business of the making of the Sun and Moon. But you can make up stories of that kind when you live among people who have the same general background of imagination, when the Sun ‘really’ rises in the East and goes down in the West, etc. When however (no matter how little most people know or think about astronomy) it is the general belief that we live upon a ‘spherical’ island in ‘Space’ you cannot do this anymore. (*Morgoth* 370)²³²

It may seem odd Tolkien could expect readers to accept Elves yet find a flat Earth unacceptable, but these require different levels of secondary belief. A flat Earth directly

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²³² Tolkien’s struggles with a flat versus round world are traced by Charles E. Noad in ‘On the Construction of “The Silmarillion”’ in Flieger and Hostetter (eds), *Tolkien’s Legendarium*, pp 31–68.
contradicts our experience of the primary world while the existence of Elves, though not presumably taken for granted by most of Tolkien's readers, is neither inherently impossible nor readily disprovable. The flat Earth, he suspected, would have to be explained or altered.

It was not merely the hypothetical reader's scientific worldview at issue; there was also the internal consistency of the text. The Valar, having shaped the physical world, would know its true form. As for the Elves, even if they had not been instructed by the Valar, their desire for knowledge, love of the stars, and practically endless time for observation would surely have led them to an accurate knowledge of the shape of the Earth and its place in the solar system. This prompted Tolkien to suggest:

What we have in the *Silmarillion* etc. are traditions [... ] handed on by *Men* in Númenor and later in Middle-earth (Arnor and Gondor); but already far back – from the first association of the Dûnedain and Elf-friends with the Eldar in Beleriand – blended and confused with their own Mannish myths and cosmic ideas. (*Morgoth* 370)

Having the myths passed down by the successors of the Númenóreans would mean cutting off the direct line to the 'true' Elvish history that the Pengoiloë-Elfwine framing device, in one form or another, had provided since *The Book of Lost Tales*. Tolkien, however, came to feel Middle-earth's legendary literature would have to be as accurate in its geomorphology as it was in its philology. This would require a revised pattern of textual transmission, with its concomitant distortion.

The revision focused on Arda, Tolkien's solar system. In the *Ambarkanta* from the mid 1930s the scope of Tolkien's created universe did not extend far beyond the borders of
the Earth itself. All around the world are the invisible, impassable ‘Walls of the World’, the Ilurambar.

Within these walls the Earth is globed: above, below and upon all sides is Vaiya, the Enfolding Ocean. But this is more like to sea below the Earth and more like to air above the Earth. [...] Above the Earth lies Air, which is called Vista, and sustains birds and clouds. (*Shaping* 236)

In the north and south, the coldest and darkest regions of Arda, Middle-earth comes close to the Walls of the World where ‘Vaiya and Vista and Ilmen flow together and are confounded’ (*Shaping* 236). Middle-earth is the land and water which makes up the centre of the world between the upper and lower portions of Vaiya (*Shaping* 238). The World itself is set amid Kûma, ‘the Void, the Night without form or time’, separated from it by the Walls of the World (*Shaping* 237). Though this world may be ‘globed amid the Void’, it is still very much a flat Earth, with a limited cosmology (*Shaping* 159).

Around 1936 an opportunity presented itself to account for a shift from a flat Earth cosmology to that of a round Earth with the emergence of the cataclysmic downfall of the island of Numenor. In an outline for the new myth Tolkien wrote:

The Gods therefore sundered Valinor from the earth, and an awful rift appeared down which the water poured and the armament of Atalantë was drowned. They globed the whole earth so that however far a man sailed he could never again reach the West, but came back to his starting-point. Thus new lands came into being beneath the Old World; and the East and West were bent back and [?water flowed all over the round] earth’s surface and

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233 For the *Ambarkanta* see (*Shaping* 235–40).

there was a time of flood. But Atalantë being near the rift was utterly thrown down and submerged. (Shaping 12)

This moment of terrestrial reshaping was to immediately become a permanent feature of Tolkien's mythology, surviving largely unaltered into the published *Silmarillion* (S 334–8). See figures 1 and 2.²³⁵

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²³⁵ I am grateful to Julie Le Blanc for these diagrams.
Despite the introduction of a transitional moment between the flat and round world, it was to be several years before Tolkien returned to the *Ainulindalë* to expand Eä from the limits of a solar system to the scale of an entire universe. *Ainulindalë* B, from the mid 1930s, has the Ainur marvel at the world globed amid the Void and observe its airs, minerals, and waters (*Lost Road* 159). No substance is mentioned that is not to be found upon the Earth itself, indicating the world is still not much more than the planet. In *Ainulindalë* C, from 1948, Tolkien added a new passage:

And amid all the splendours of the World, its vast halls and spaces, and its wheeling fires, Ilúvatar chose a place for [the Children of Ilúvatar’s] habitation in the Deeps of Time and in the midst of the innumerable Stars. And this habitation might seem a little thing to those who […] consider the immeasurable vastness of the World, which still the Ainur are shaping, and
Yet, as Charles E. Noad remarks, this massive extension of the scale of the universe did not include a significant alteration to the design of the Earth, leaving Tolkien with the curious image of the miniature universe of the *Ambarkanta* surviving essentially intact within a larger astronomically correct universe. It appears Tolkien found it easier to alter the size of the universe than the shape of the Earth.

Bound up with the issue of a round Earth was the task of situating this world in an accurate solar system. The sun and the moon could no longer be the final fruit and flower of the dying Two Trees of Valinor. Tolkien was also aware of the contradiction of how Yavanna could maintain plants upon Middle-earth if there has been no light to cause photosynthesis since the destruction of the Lamps.

In *Ainulindalë C* the sun is coeval with the Earth, which is itself ‘yet young and full of fire’ (*Morgoth* 40). Having been driven from the Earth by Tulkas, Melkor declares:

‘I will rend the Earth asunder, and break it, and none shall possess it.’

But this Melkor could not do, for the Earth may not be wholly destroyed against its fate; nevertheless Melkor took a portion of it, and seized it for his own, and reft it away; and he made it a little earth of his own, and it wheeled round about in the sky, following the greater earth wheresoever it went [...] Ithil whom Men call the Moon. (*Morgoth* 41–2)

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237 ‘Neither could there be woods and flowers &c. on earth, if there had been no light since the overthrow of the Lamps!’ (*Morgoth* 375).
Kristine Larsen has drawn connections between this myth of lunar formation in *Ainulindalë* C* and contemporary astronomical theories.\(^{238}\) The molten surface of the early earth, the blinding heat and intolerable cold of the moon's surface, and the secular acceleration of the moon's orbit all agreed with contemporary geophysical and astronomical theories.\(^{239}\) Larsen suggests Tolkien's myth was based on the lunar fission theory of George H. Darwin, whereby the young molten earth spun fast enough to fission off the moon, possibly assisted by the Sun's gravitational influence.\(^{240}\)

Another theory of lunar formation is the Impact-Trigger Hypothesis which many scholars, including Larsen, date to the work of W.K. Hartmann and D.R. Davis in 1975.\(^{241}\) In fact, this theory was first put forward by the Canadian geologist Reginald A. Daly in 1946, just before Tolkien wrote this version of the *Ainulindalë*. Daly noted the two best established theories for lunar formation whereby the young Earth fragmented through either internal or external force and lost much of its mass to outer space. He then suggested an alternative hypothesis: that at an early stage in the Earth's development, while its surface was still liquid, a planetoid travelling at great relative velocity collided with the Earth, triggering an explosion and expulsion of matter which coalesced to form the moon.\(^{242}\) This image of a fragment of the Earth being rent away by an external force and

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\(^{239}\) (*Morgoth* 40–2); Larsen, 'A Little Earth of His Own', pp 396–401.

\(^{240}\) Ibid., pp 400–1; see also George H. Darwin, *Scientific Papers*, 5 Vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1908), ii, pp 367–8.

\(^{241}\) Larsen, 'A Little Earth of His Own', p. 401.

\(^{242}\) 'According to a third conjecture, a 'planetoid,' captured be-cause [sic] of tangential, slicing, collision with the liquid earth, brought with it so much angular momentum as to ensure its perpetuation as a separate, revolving body – the moon we know.' Reginald A. Daly, 'Origin of the Moon and its Topography', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 90.2 (May, 1946), pp 104–19 at 118.
set in orbit is quite similar to Melkor’s actions in Tolkien’s text. *Ainulindalë C* does not specify that Melkor struck the Earth, directly or with an object, to dislodge the moon. As such, it could be interpreted in terms of the earlier theory of George H. Darwin. The text, however, equally suggests Daly’s theory: Melkor has been driven from the Earth and is assailing it with violence from without in an action that is more suddenly cataclysmic than the gradual building up of a tidal bulge (*Morgoth* 41). If *Ainulindalë C* was influenced by Daly’s theory then Tolkien was attempting to conform his creation to, or at least taking inspiration from, the very latest scientific developments.

Tolkien’s scientific concerns, and attendant revisions to Arda, extended to geology as well as astronomy.243 He wrote geological change deep into the fabric of his mythology; with the island of Tol Eressēa being dragged across the ocean (S 52), mountains raised and cast down (S 56–8), Beleriand shattered and inundated in the War of Wrath (S 303), and the seismic upheaval entailed by the fall of Númenor (S 334–6). This goes back to the earliest versions of his mythology with Britain and Ireland portrayed as the surviving fragments of what was once Beleriand (*Lost Tales II* 312) and Melko using volcanoes and earthquakes to defend Utumna from the Valar (*Lost Tales I* 101). With these, Tolkien was using familiar pre-scientific tropes to explain natural features and change in geomorphology. He later attempted to adapt these tropes to his readers’ scientific sensibilities.

Henry Gee points out Tolkien’s mention of Gondwanaland proves he was aware of the theory of continental drift (*Letters* 409–10).244 But this letter dates from 1971 when the controversy over continental drift was settling and the theory was gaining general

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243 I explore this further in ""Beneath the Earth’s dark keel": Tolkien and Geology’, *Tolkien Studies*, 9 (2012), pp 21–36.

acceptance. More interesting is a much earlier mention of continental drift in a letter Tolkien wrote to his children in 1932 under the guise of Father Christmas. Referring to cave paintings beneath the North Pole 'Father Christmas' writes:

Cave bear says these caves belong to him, and have belonged to him or his family since the days of his great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great- (multiplied by ten) grandfather; and the bears first had the idea of decorating the walls, and used to scratch pictures in soft parts — it was useful for sharpening the claws. Then MEN came along — imagine it! Cave bear says there were lots about at one time, long ago, when the North Pole was somewhere else. (That was long before my time, and I have never heard old Grandfather Yule mention it, even, so I don't know if he's talking nonsense or not).

It is understandable Tolkien should be noncommittal about the validity of the theory. Alfred Wegener's *The Origin of Continents and Oceans* had only been published in English in 1924 and the reaction from the geological community had been at best mixed.

Tolkien nevertheless inserted a reference to long term geological change into the Council of Elrond (written 1940–1). Saruman had claimed the Ring had been rolled down the river Anduin into the Sea where it would lie forever. Glorfindel seizes upon this suggestion as a means to be rid of the Ring and urges the Council to cast it into the sea where it would be safe.

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'Not safe forever,' said Gandalf. 'There are many things in the deep waters; and seas and lands may change. And it is not our part here to take thought only for a season, or for a few lives of Men, or for a passing age of the world. We should seek a final end of this menace, even if we do not hope to make one.' (FR, II, ii, 266)\textsuperscript{249}

Despite the length of their perspectives, Gandalf takes a longer view than Glorfindel, and thinks in geological time. Sauron’s threat is to all of Middle-earth through all time, and Gandalf’s response considers the full life of the world. Having a statement of long-term geological change come from a figure of such authority, and be accepted by the equally wise, indicates Tolkien considered geologic time and innate geological change an established part of his legendarium at this stage among his characters.

Despite references to slow geological change, Tolkien’s fictional geography’s use of continental movement owes as much to catastrophism, sudden and violent disturbances, as to the slow and regular change of uniformitarianism.\textsuperscript{250} Tolkien was after all writing geomythology as much as geology.\textsuperscript{251} As such, it is not surprising continental drift should not feature prominently, never mind that the theory was still fiercely controversial throughout Tolkien’s life. Yet there are certain passages which seem to imply it. In the \textit{Ambarkanta}, the Valar attempt to strengthen Valinor’s defences by widening the Western Sea separating it from Middle-earth:

\textsuperscript{249} Cf. Frodo’s experience in Lothlórien, ‘hearing far off great seas upon beaches that had long ago been washed away, and sea-birds crying whose race had perished from the earth’ (FR, II, vi, 460).

\textsuperscript{250} Hallam, \textit{Great Geological Controversies}, pp 30–64. Of course nature’s slow and regular forces can occasionally produce cataclysmic results. Plate tectonics caused the 1755 Lisbon earthquake, and more recently the Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami.

\textsuperscript{251} That is ‘the geological application of euhemerism’ as described in Dorothy Vitaliano, \textit{Legends of the Earth: Their Geologic Origins} (Bloomington, IN and London: Indiana University Press, 1973), p. 1.
For their further protection the Valar thrust away Middle-earth at the centre and crowded it eastwards, so that it was bended, and the great sea of the West is very wide in the middle, the widest of all waters of the Earth. [...]

And the thrusting aside of the land caused also mountains to appear in four ranges, two in the Northland and two in the Southland. (*Shaping* 239)

This might be a sudden catastrophe but its effects upon the continents of Middle-earth are the same as those of more gradual continental drift.\(^{252}\) In the published *Silmarillion* there is an interesting sentence: ‘But the mountains were the Hithaeglir, the Towers of Mist upon the borders of Eriador; yet they were taller and more terrible in those days, and were reared by Melkor to hinder the riding of Oromê’ (*S* 52). Here Tolkien displays knowledge that taller mountains are younger, an observation common to all modern geological theory.

In a letter to H. Cotton Minchin Tolkien wrote: ‘Having geological interests, and a very little knowledge, I have not wholly neglected this aspect, but its indication is rather more difficult – and perilous!’ (*Letters* 248). This peril could be interpreted in two ways. Scientific theories could become obsolete all too quickly, leaving scientific references in his works hanging in thin air with no referent, thus robbing the texts of the grounding in reality he sought. The other peril might be the temptation to subject the texts to constant revision in the hope of making them scientifically coherent at the expense of the mythological content of the original conception. If the Sun and Moon did not spring from the Two Trees then the entire mythology up to that point would have to be re-written. For this reason Christopher Tolkien referred to *Ainulindalë C* as a ‘devastating’ development (*Morgoth* 3). Tolkien spent several years attempting to resolve the problem, perhaps fatally

\(^{252}\) Though Tolkien never extended the time scale of his mythology to the depths of geologic time in the primary world, he considered having the Valar reckon time at a different and much longer than humanity, thus extending the length of the First Age to several tens of thousands of years. See (*Morgoth* 49–51, 59–60, 430–1).
delaying the completion of *The Silmarillion* in the process. That he should go to this trouble, never allowing fantasy to lose its recognition of fact, is a testament to how important scientific knowledge of the primary world was to his own sub-creation.

He would never fully reconcile his sub-creation with his scientific knowledge. An Earth, round from its inception, with a sun coeval with it, did not survive in his mythology after *Ainulindalë C* was superseded by *Ainulindalë D*, and yet Tolkien could not simply return to his earlier writings and the *Ambarkanta* cosmology. While considering Númenor’s downfall, Tolkien hit upon a possible solution to reconciling the mythology of his sub-creation to the prehistory of the primary world. In his abandoned time-travel narrative *The Notion Club Papers* he suggested the distinction between myth and history may break down the further back both are pursued. His character Jeremy says:

Somebody once said [...] the distinction between history and myth might be meaningless outside the Earth. I think it might at least get a great deal less sharp on the Earth, further back. Perhaps the Atlantis catastrophe was the dividing line? (*Sauron* 249)

Charles Noad claims this notion that history and myth could equally exist, on different planes, could have cut the Gordian knot for Tolkien. Verlyn Flieger has argued Tolkien came close to combining his Eriol-saga into his Atlantis story, providing a means of bridging the gap between his mythology and the primary world. Instead, however, Tolkien’s framing devices bifurcated into two traditions: the older notion of a true tradition coming directly from the Elves Rúmil and Pengoloð, and carried back to England by Eriol/Elfwine, and the new tradition set entirely inside Tolkien’s secondary world where

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253 See Noad, ‘On the Construction of “The Silmarillion”’, p. 51. There is still the problem of what Tolkien means by the terms ‘myth’ and ‘history’ in this passage, as well as their relation to the real world as he sees it.

the Elvish myths were transferred, being changed in the process, via Númenor to Bilbo's translations from the Elvish. The Pengoloð-Elfwine tradition survived in some form into the late 1950s but the Númenórean tradition was the one Tolkien endorsed at the end of his life. Tolkien wrote to Roger Lancelyn Green in 1971:

'It] is not put forward as geologically or astronomically 'true'; except that some special physical catastrophe is supposed to lie behind the legends and marked the first stage in the succession of Men to dominion of the world. But the legends are mainly of 'Mannish' origin blended with those of the Sindar (Gray-elves) and others who never left Middle-earth. (Letters 411)

This letter perhaps allows us to understand what was meant by 'history' and 'myth' in The Notion Club Papers; that behind such tales of geological catastrophe lay true events, however distorted or misunderstood. As Verlyn Flieger has noted, the publication of The Lord of the Rings made it, and the Númenórean tradition it referenced, the de facto frame narrative for the mythology. For years Tolkien had struggled to make his mythology consistent with itself and with the primary world, in terms not only of metaphysics but also of physics. He had also sought a way to transmit this lost mythology to the hands of his readers. Ultimately, to account for the internal tensions and the disparity from what is known of the primary world Tolkien had to transform his mythology from the 'true tradition' of the Elves to a literary tradition which had passed through many human hands, redactions of redactions.

Along the way his revisions to his creation myth show him considering how Christian he should make the divine and angelic figures of his mythology, how much the act of creation should align with well known theological and philosophical accounts of creation, and how similar the physical world of his sub-creation should be to the primary world. Two considerations remained paramount throughout all revisions: first, the connection, and distinction, between creation and sub-creation, both as acts and as results, and, second, a concern for coherence, both internal and external, which would invite secondary belief on the part of his readers while respecting the primacy of Creation. To be a compelling mythology it would first have to be a successful sub-creation, even if that meant abandoning its status as an asterisk-mythology.
Chapter Two

Providence: Character Freedom and Authorial Control

Authorship and Providence

Creation is a matter of ends as well as beginnings. The Music of the Ainur is immediately followed by a prophecy of the second Music, looking to the time when 'the themes of Ilúvatar shall be played aright' (S 4). In its moment of creation, the mythology points to its moment of completion. *The Silmarillion* presents creation as an incomplete process whose fulfilment necessarily involves guidance and direction; that is providence. Aquinas himself connected creation and providence, arguing the world's goodness lies not just in its existence but in its ordinance towards a final goal.258 This is expressed in explicitly artistic terms in the Quenyan phrase Oienkarmë Eruo, glossed as 'The One's perpetual production' or 'God's management of the Drama' (*Morgoth* 329). Artistic sub-creation raises the same issues as divine creation. Any narrative, in order to have shape, must have direction. So far as a literary sub-creation contains narrative progression, it raises questions of causality, character interaction, and authorial control. Plot and providence arguably are the same progress, one in a sub-creation, the other in a theistic creation. Defining himself as a storyteller, Tolkien understood creation in just these terms, calling Ilúvatar 'the Writer of the Story' (*Letters* 253). In his discussion of Elven concepts of 'fate' and 'free will' he compared Ilúvatar's relationship to Arda with an author's relationship to their story:

Now while composing the *tale* he may have certain general designs (the plot for instance), and he may have a clear conception of the character

(independent of the particular tale) of each feigned actor. But those are the limits of his ‘foreknowledge’. Many others have recorded the feeling that one of their actors ‘comes alive’ as it were, and does things that were not foreseen at all at the outset and may modify in a small or even a large way the process of the tale thereafter. All such unforeseen actions or events are, however, taken up to become integral parts of the tale when finally concluded. Now when that has been done, then the author’s ‘foreknowledge’ is complete, and nothing can happen, be said, or done, that he does not know of and will/allow to be. Even so, some of the Eldarin philosophers ventured to say, it was with Eru.\textsuperscript{259}

Tolkien’s own experience of writing was one of particular openness and uncertainty. He repeatedly described his work writing itself, leaving him with the feeling of recording events rather than inventing them (\textit{Letters} 145, 211–12, 231). In \textit{The Lord of the Rings} Tolkien had planned the climactic scene at Mount Doom early in the writing process yet several major elements in the narrative as a whole surprised even the author.\textsuperscript{260} Strider, Lothlórien, Fangorn, Saruman, and the \textit{palantiri} all emerged with relatively little forward planning (\textit{Letters} 216–17). Faramir simply appeared: ‘A new character has come on the scene (I am sure I did not invent him, I did not even want him, though I like him, but there he came walking into the woods of Ithilien)’ (\textit{Letters} 79). This greater uncertainty is characteristic of a sub-creator and can be compared with Ilúvatar, who knows of the existence of all his ‘characters’ if not all their specific actions. The narrative reality in Tolkien’s sub-creation is created in implicit interaction with the divine. Ilúvatar is

\textsuperscript{259} Tolkien, ‘Fate and Free Will’, pp 186–7.

presented as certain his goals will be achieved although the means are not defined. Instead of a rigidly determined world, Arda emerges as one in which controlling forces and individual choices interact to generate a narrative which is, in a real sense, multi-authored.

Recently Benjamin Saxton has commented on the degree of freedom Tolkien permits his characters, comparing it to Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of polyphony.\textsuperscript{261} Unlike the monologic novel whose characters are essentially objects in the service of authorial discourse, the polyphonic or dialogic novel contains ‘free people, capable of standing alongside their creator, capable of not agreeing with him and even of rebelling against him.’\textsuperscript{262} Saxton draws attention to Tolkien’s depiction of characters’ freedom, the authority of character statements, and the applicability of the text beyond the author’s intentions.\textsuperscript{263} As Brian Rosebury also noted, Tolkien does not define Ilúvatar in terms of his power but in terms of his artistry, ‘an essential feature of the artist, in Tolkien’s conception, being the renunciation of power over one’s creatures, the delegation of power to others.’\textsuperscript{264} Tolkien’s understanding of authorship leads logically to his depiction of authorial control, which he then uses to understand and depict providence within his mythology.

Tolkien’s conception of authorship is obviously not the only source for his assumptions about and use of freedom and control in his legendarium. Tom Shippey has fruitfully examined the medieval sources of fate and doom in Tolkien’s writing, while


\textsuperscript{263} Saxton, ‘Tolkien and Bakhtin on Authorship’, pp 167–74. See, for example, the competing voices at the Council of Elrond or the question of interpreting the incompleteness of \textit{The Silmarillion}. Ibid., pp 170, 173.

\textsuperscript{264} Rosebury, \textit{Tolkien: A Cultural Phenomenon}, p. 186.
Kathleen Dubs has suggested a Boethian source for Tolkien’s treatment of providence. While recognising this medieval influence the reader should not minimise the influence of Tolkien’s contemporary intellectual environment. Intellectual currents originating in the nineteenth century ensured determinism was current while Tolkien was writing. Despite the discoveries of Einstein and Heisenberg, the supposedly natural connection between a scientific and a deterministic worldview persisted. Further, Freudian psychology promised to apply deterministic principles to humanity’s essential nature and provide a causal chain from personal past to present, from unconscious states to conscious actions. At the same time, Marxism, as popularly interpreted, reduced all human activity to economic determinism. The early twentieth century also saw the influence of biological determinism, with everything from intelligence to criminality put forward as biologically inherited.

Tolkien neither accepted determinism in his writings, nor rejected it outright. Instead he should be viewed as engaging dialectically with the deterministic tradition. These deterministic theories could have reinforced a tendency towards fatalism in Tolkien’s writing, whether originally arising from literary sources or from personal

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experience. They were challenged, for Tolkien, however, by the centrality of free will in Catholic theology, particularly moral theology.\textsuperscript{270} Given his education while ‘virtually an inmate of the [Birmingham] Oratory’ (Letters 395), the importance of free will and the concomitant moral responsibility would have been impressed upon Tolkien. In orthodox Christian theology divine providence exists in tension with creaturely free will and must be defined in such a way that both may exist without contradiction or incoherence. The same challenge existed for Tolkien’s sub-created world, and its inhabitants.

Tolkien’s characterisation of freedom and providence cannot, however, admit of a rigid definition. He never defined creaturely freedom or divine providence, making apparently incompatible statements about both. Tolkien engaged with the perennial question of free will without ever claiming to have solved it. His thought was always a work in progress. He was not, first or last, a philosopher or theologian but a conscientious author who thought in story and embodied his concerns and ideas in narrative and character. Crucially, his most developed thoughts come from his own experience, that is, his definition of the divine in terms of author and tale. The interactions of Creator and Creation affect Tolkien’s concepts of freedom and control, and his negotiation of these concepts in relation to his philosophical and theological sources. The following will examine these in the interrelation of freedom, compulsion, and causality as found in \textit{The Silmarillion} and \textit{The Lord of the Rings} before exploring his attempts to relate the providential mechanism of his sub-creation to that he saw underpinning the primary world.

Authorial Control: Providence and Fate

While the Music may reflect Ilúvatar's governing plan for Creation, its details must be accomplished within Creation itself by the Children, through whom the world will be 'fulfilled unto the last and smallest' (S 36). But this may not have been Tolkien's original conception of the Music. In *The Music of the Ainur* Tolkien concentrates to the exclusion of all else on the physical matter of Arda, but by the latest version of the text this physical world has become the stage of history. The published version adds: 'And as they looked and wondered this World began to unfold its history, and it seemed to them that it lived and grew' (S 6; cf. *Lost Tales I* 56). Ilúvatar's introduction of the Children in the third theme could be interpreted as his direct response to Melkor's initial rebellion as it is promised they will help to heal the marring of Arda (S 4). Until this final consummation, Creation develops through the interaction of Ilúvatar's plan and the wills of creatures. Such an interaction of the universal and infinite with the particular and finite raises the question of divine control and creaturely free will. This ambiguous interplay of providence, fate, and freedom has dominated one strain of Tolkien scholarship.271

The debate has recently received further impetus with the publication of Tolkien's notes on the word 'fate' as it appears in both Quenya and Sindarin.272 In these notes, from 1968 or later, Tolkien considered the connections between and implications of the Quenyan words *ambar* 'world' and *umbar* 'fate' through a commentary on their Primitive


Eldarin base MBAR. From MBAR, meaning ‘settle, establish’ and developing to mean ‘settlement, home’, derive Quenyan ambar and Sindarin amar meaning ‘world’, ‘the great habitation’. Tolkien insisted this word’s full implications could not be understood without reference to Elven views concerning ‘fate’ and ‘free will’. The connection between the physical world and fate is apparent from Tolkien’s gloss on Sindarin amarth ‘fate’. He writes that the basic sense of MBAR was ‘permanent establishment/order’, that is:

The order and conditions of the physical world (or of Ea in general) as far as established and preordained at Creation, and that part of this ordained order which affected an individual with a will, as being immutable by his personal will. Here fate is presented primarily as the constraints placed upon the actions of creatures by the physical limitations of the world in which they act. These physical laws were set down in the Music and so form a subset of the divine plan. Umbar ‘fate’ was, to the Elves, clearly related to mbar’ta ‘permanent establishment’ as they conceived of fate as primarily a physical obstacle to the will. Tolkien elaborated with the example of a man being ‘fated’ to meet an enemy at a certain time and place but not ‘fated’ to speak to him with hatred or to kill him. The meeting of the two persons has a complex series of events leading up to it, including the intervention of ‘will’. Tolkien, however, comments:

[T]he Eldar held that only those efforts of ‘will’ were ‘free’ which were dedicated to a fully aware purpose. […] His setting-out may have been a

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273 Ibid., p. 183.
274 Ibid.
275 Ibid., p. 184; cf. Quenyan ambarmenie ‘the way of the world’, ‘the fixed, and by “creatures” unalterable, conditions in which they lived.’ Ibid., p. 183.
276 Ibid., p. 185.
free decision, to achieve some object, but his actual course was largely under physical direction – and it might have led to/or missed a meeting of importance. It was this aspect of ‘chance’ that was included in umbar.\textsuperscript{277}

We can, according to Tolkien, be fated and free at the same time. The word ‘fate’ describes those things which influence our actions but are outside our control: physics, climate, topography, the circumstances of time and place. These circumstances can incline the will but the conscious mind has the power and freedom to overcome them. Whether we can achieve our goals in the face of circumstances, the ability to will, based on intention, individual history, and character, remains free. Later when discussing ‘fate’ Tolkien appears to equate it with providence:

\begin{quote}
if the downfall of Sauron and the destruction of the Ring was part of Fate (or Eru’s Plan) then if Bilbo had retained the Ring and refused to surrender it, some other means would have arisen by which Sauron was frustrated.\textsuperscript{278}
\end{quote}

Here providence makes use of our free decisions to achieve its goals. In both examples fate influences us on a subconscious level but does not lock us into a deterministic system. Our conscious decisions give shape to our lives, beyond its power, and the larger narrative must interact with the wills of its participants as part of that larger narrative’s causality. As Augustine wrote: ‘the wills of men are among the causes of the deeds of men.’\textsuperscript{279}

The problem of reconciling providence, fate, and human free will was acutely felt by two thinkers who profoundly influenced the medieval literature Tolkien studied. As a medievalist Tolkien knew, and was open to the influence of, Augustine of Hippo and

\textsuperscript{277} Ibid.; cf Augustine’s comments on the difference between what happens to us and how we show our character by our reaction to it in \textit{De civitate Dei}, I.8, CCSL 47, p. 8, \textit{City of God}, i, pp 38–9.

\textsuperscript{278} Tolkien, ‘Fate and Free Will’, p. 185.

Boethius. Boethius' *The Consolation of Philosophy* argued that chance, in the sense of completely random events, cannot exist in a providential cosmology: ‘Now causes are made to concur and flow together by that order which, proceeding with inevitable connexion, and coming down from its source in providence, disposes all things in their proper places and times.’¹²⁸⁰ Though Tolkien mentioned an aspect of ‘chance’ in reference to *umbar*, in *The Lord of the Rings* characters repeatedly claim chance does not exist. Elrond says: ‘You have come and are here met, in this very nick of time, by chance as it may seem. Yet it is not so. Believe rather that it is so ordered.’ (FR, II, i, 242).¹²⁸¹ Such statements are perhaps misleadingly definitive. In *The Hobbit* Gandalf subsumes Bilbo’s ‘luck’ into a hinted-at divine providence but his repeated use of the term with the hobbit and the Dwarves demonstrates the concept forms part of their shared worldview.¹²⁸² A non-providential interpretation of ‘chance’ is suggested by Túrin and Niēnor’s gravestone being named the Stone of the Hapless (*S* 275). ‘Hapless’, from Old Norse *happ* ‘good luck’,¹²⁸³ implies a belief in luck, both good and bad, on the part of the poet Glirhuin who first sang of their grave. Tolkien, in fact, never actually uses the word ‘providence’ in his

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¹²⁸¹ Cf. Tom Bombadil: ‘Just chance brought me then, if chance you call it’ (FR, I, i, 126), or Gandalf’s comment on his meeting with Thorin Oakenshield: ‘A chance meeting, as we say in Middle-earth’ (RK, Appendix A, iii, 1080).


legendarium, favouring 'fate' or 'doom'. These categories could, however, be connected to providence. Boethius reconciled fatum 'fate' and providentia 'providence' by explaining fate as the temporal dimension of the eternal order of providence:

For providence is the divine reason itself, established in the highest ruler of all things, the reason which disposes all things that exist; but fate is a disposition inherent in movable things, through which providence binds all things together, each in its own proper ordering.

They are still distinct in Boethius' thought, but fate is contained within providence rather than the reverse.

Augustine understood God's providential foreknowledge of future events challenged human free will. Desiring to preserve both divine foreknowledge and creaturely free will, Augustine included human wills among the order of causes present in divine foreknowledge:

Moreover, even if there is in God's mind a definite pattern of causation, it does not follow that nothing is left to the free choice of our will. For in fact, our wills are also included in the pattern of causation certainly known to God and embraced in his foreknowledge.

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284 'Providence' is almost certainly too loaded with Christian significance to be used in Tolkien's carefully pre-Christian world.
285 'Nam providentia est ipsa illa divina ratio in summo omnium principe constituta quae cuncta disposit, fatum vero inhaerens rebus mobilibus dispositio per quam providentia suis quaeque nectit ordinibus.' Boethius, Consolation, IV pr.6, pp 358–9; cf. Augustine, De civitate Dei, V.1, CCSL 47, p. 128, City of God, ii, pp 134–5.
287 'Non est autem consequens ut, si Deo certus est omnium ordo causarum, ideo nihil sit in nostrae voluntatis arbitrio. Et ipsae quippe nostrae voluntates in causarum ordine sunt qui certus est Deo eiusque praescientia continetur', Augustine, De civitate Dei, V.9, CCSL 47, p. 138, City of God, ii, pp 174–7.
Boethius carried over Augustine’s attempted solution but added the element of time and timelessness, arguing that since God is outside of time he never foresees but merely sees:

God has an always eternal and present nature, then his knowledge too, surpassing all movement of time, is permanent in the simplicity of his present [...] So if you should wish to consider his foreknowledge, by which he discerns all things, you will more rightly judge it to be not foreknowledge as it were of the future but knowledge of a never-passing instant.\(^{288}\)

In such a view, God’s knowledge of a creature’s actions is no more determining than that of any other observer. While Tolkien addressed the issue of free will in these terms of observer and observed in his essay on fate and free will, it is clear neither Boethius’ nor Augustine’s solution was satisfactory: ‘But the ultimate problem of Free Will in its relation to the Foreknowledge of a Designer [...] was of course not resolved by the Eldar.’\(^{289}\) Though Tolkien was influenced by Augustine and Boethius on providence and free will, his depiction of an attempted reconciliation from within Middle-earth would be radically different.

As already mentioned Tolkien had his hypothetical Elvish philosophers characterise divine foreknowledge in terms of the relation of an author to their tale. The author could have general designs for the plot and a thorough knowledge of individual characters but characters could surprise the author and modify the plot in substantial ways. The author would incorporate these unforeseen actions into the narrative. It was only after

\(^{288}\) \textit{Deo semper aeternus ac praesentarius status: scientia quoque eius omnem temporis suprgressa motionem in suae manet simplicitate praesentiae infinitaque [...]. Itaque si praescientiam pensare velis qua cuncta dinoscit, non esse praescientiam quasi futuri sed scientiam numquam deficiente instantiae rectius aemtabis}. Boethius, Consolation, V pr.6, pp 426–7.

\(^{289}\) Tolkien, ‘Fate and Free Will’, p. 186.
the story was concluded that the author’s ‘foreknowledge’ could be said to be complete.\(^{290}\)

Such an image of a dynamic and responsive God, changing the details, but not the overall aim, of the divine plan in response to creatures’ actions would mark a rupture with more than a millennium and a half of Christian theology. Scholastic theology in particular held that God, being perfect, could not change in response to creatures.\(^{291}\) Tolkien’s apparent position in his notes – God can foresee that the divine purpose will be fulfilled but leaves it to creatures to decide the particular way it is fulfilled – shows his willingness to question even the highest theological authorities and places him in line with radical developments in twentieth-century theology.\(^{292}\) Tolkien, admittedly, surrounds the theory with qualifications; *some* philosophers *venture* this theory.\(^{293}\) As radical as this position is, it has intriguing similarities with another reader of Boethius: the translator of the *Consolation of Philosophy* into Old English.\(^{294}\)

The Old English version of Boethius’ *Consolation*, traditionally attributed to King Alfred, deliberately refashions Boethius’ text.\(^{295}\) Despite his innovations, Alfred retained

\(^{290}\) Ibid., pp 186–7.

\(^{291}\) *‘Dicendum quod ex praemissis ostenditur Deum esse omnio immutabilem’*, ‘Our findings so far prove God to be altogether unchangeable.’ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a.9.1.


\(^{293}\) Tolkien, ‘Fate and Free Will’, p. 187.

\(^{294}\) Tolkien certainly knew this version as excerpts of the Old English Boethius were included among the set texts for his final English examinations. See Scull and Hammond, *J.R.R Tolkien Companion and Guide*, ii, p. 332.

\(^{295}\) An obvious change is that Mind and Wisdom replace Boethius and Philosophy as the interlocutors. See Malcolm Godden and Susan Irvine (eds), *The Old English Boethius: An Edition of the Old English Version of Boethius’ De Consolatione Philosophiae*, 2 Vols (Oxford: OUP, 2009), i, pp 50–79, 140–51. I use the earlier prose text rather than the later prosimetric text. See also F. Anne Payne, *King Alfred and Boethius: An Analysis of the Old English version of the ‘Consolation of Philosophy’* (Madison, WI: University of
Boethius' temporal distinction between providence, *foredonce*, and fate, *wyrd*. But that which we call God's providence [*foredonce*] and his foreshowing, that exists while it is there in his mind, before it is carried out, while it is thought, but after it is completed then we call it *wyrd*. Alfred also distinguishes between what God knows can happen and what God ordains must happen:

It does not all have to happen without change, but some of it must happen without change, that is, that which is our necessity and is his will. But some of it is so disposed that there is no necessity for it and, though it does no harm if it happens, there is no harm if it does not happen.

This marks a loosening of the iron bonds of causality inherent to Augustine and Boethius' thought and brings the discussion of providence more in line with Tolkien's notes where Ilúvatar knows what must happen to achieve his ultimate goals but leaves a great deal open to the choices of his creatures.

Though asserting its stable basis in God's providence, Alfred acknowledged *wyrd* appears mutable and unreliable. Indeed Alfred's choice of words emphasises *wyrd*'s changeability. Alfred usually translated *fortuna* as *wyrd* or *gesæl∂*, but distinguished between *gesæl∂* as 'prosperity, good fortune' and *wyrd* as the mutable bestower of

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Wisconsin Press, 1968) for a study of the translator's intentions. The identity of the translator is unimportant to the current discussion.

296 'Fate' is the most common translation of Old English *wyrd*, but by no means an exact fit. See E.G. Stanley, *The Search for Anglo-Saxon Paganism* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1975) for the highly debated nature of *wyrd*.

297 'Ac þet þætte we hatað Godes foredoncé and his foresceawung, þæt bið þa hwile þe hit þærmid bið on his mode. ærpam þe hit gefremde weorðe. þa hwile þe hit gefolht bið, ac siðdan hit fullfremed bið, þonne hatað we hit wyrd.' Godden and Irvine (eds). *The Old English Boethius*, i, 39.121–5.

298 'Ne pearf hit no eall gewiorðon unawendenclice; ac sum hit sceall wyrfan unawendenclice. þæt bið þætte ure nydfpearf bið and his willa bið. Ac hit is sum swa geral þæt his nis nan neodpearf, and þeah ne derað no þeah hit gewiorðe. ne nan hearm ne bið þeah hit no ne gewiðe.' Ibid., i, 41.87–91.
prosperity and adversity.\textsuperscript{299} For example: ‘How would you now pay when you were happiest [\textipa{\textipa{ba hu gesælgost wäre}]} and thought that fate [\textipa{\textipa{wyrd}}] went completely with your desires?’\textsuperscript{300} But Alfred also used \textipa{\textipa{wyrd}} as the exclusive translation of \textipa{\textipa{fatum}} to carry the sense ‘fate’. As \textipa{\textipa{fatum}} and \textipa{\textipa{fortuna}} are subordinate to \textipa{\textipa{providentia}} in the \textit{Consolation}, this maintains a clear connection between our changeable experience of fortune and misfortune and the ultimate control and order of providence. \textipa{\textipa{Wyrd}} serves \textit{foreðonc}, perhaps accounting for the apparent examples of ‘chance’ even in a providential cosmology.\textsuperscript{301}

Regarding human freedom outside the compulsion of providence Alfred has Wisdom state: ‘He who has reason can judge and distinguish what he must desire and what he must shun, and every man has the freedom that he knows what he desires and what he does not.’\textsuperscript{302} If this appears limited to freedom of volition rather than action Wisdom had earlier said:

If they wish to take the middle way [between prosperity and adverse \textipa{\textipa{wyrd}}], then they must themselves moderate the pleasant and carefree \textipa{\textipa{wyrd}} for themselves. Then God will moderate the severe \textipa{\textipa{wyrd}} both in this world and the next.\textsuperscript{303}

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{299}{Ibid., i, p. 77.}
\footnotetext{300}{\textit{Hu woldest hu nu gebycggan ha hu gesælgost wäre and he puhte þæt seo wyrd swìðost on þinne willan wolde?}’ Ibid., i, 20.33–5.}
\footnotetext{301}{Cf. ‘\textit{Wyrd oft nered unfægne eorl. þonne his ellen ðéah!},’ ‘\textit{Wyrd often spares the unfated man when his courage holds},’ \textit{Beowulf}, 573–4.}
\footnotetext{302}{\textit{Se þe gesceawnisnesse hæfð, se meæg deman and tosceadan hwæt he willnian sceal and hwæt he onsceutan sceal, and ælc mon hæfð þone friodom þæt he wat hwæt he wile hwæt he nele.}’ Godden and Irvine (eds), \textit{The Old English Boethius}, i, 40.106–8.}
\footnotetext{303}{\textit{Gif hi þonne þone midemstran weg aredian willað, þonne scýlan hi selfe him sleyðum gemægian þa wynsuman myrde and orsorgan. Þonne gemægad him God þa reþan wyrdæ ge on þisse worulde ge on þære towearðan.’} Ibid., i, 40.56–9.}
\end{footnotes}
God helps those who help themselves, as it were. Far from being unchangeable, a person can forestall *wyrd* as ill fortune by how they live when faced with good fortune. Considering God 'rewards each justly according to his deeds', this places a tremendous amount of autonomy and responsibility on human free will.\(^{304}\) For Alfred, as for Tolkien, we have a virtue to shape our lives with consequences extending beyond this life.\(^{305}\) Alfred values the moral worth of the freely willed choice regardless of its external success; this is evident in his representation of Boethius actively rebelling against Theodoric in contrast to the *Consolation* which stresses Boethius' innocence.\(^{306}\) Alfred wanted Boethius to be an active, if unsuccessful, Roman patriot.

Tolkien, however, complicated the matter by introducing a distinction between human and Elvish freedom. He has Ilúvatar say:

‘[T]he Quendi shall be the fairest of all earthly creatures [...]. But to the Atani I will give a new gift.’ Therefore he [Ilúvatar] willed that the hearts of Men should seek beyond the world and should find no rest therein; but they should have a virtue to shape their lives, amid the powers and chances of the world beyond the Music of the Ainur, which is as fate to all things else; and of their operation everything should be, in form and deed, completed, and the world fulfilled unto the last and smallest. (S 35–6)

Verlyn Flieger has argued from this passage Tolkien's philosophical originality lies in assigning fate and free will to two different groups living in the same world at the same time.\(^{307}\) This seems incontestable in terms of the passage, especially the phrase about the

\(^{304}\) *gilt ælcum be þam ryhte æfter his gewyrtum.* Ibid., i, 42.45.

\(^{305}\) See below pp 130–41.

\(^{306}\) Ibid., i, 1.11–30; cf. Boethius, *Consolation*, I pr.4, pp 152–3.

music being 'as fate to all things else.'\textsuperscript{308} The earliest draft of this passage (c.1919) is straightforward about human freedom and Elvish bondage: 'And he devised that they should have free will and the power of fashioning and designing beyond the original music of the Ainu' (Lost Tales I 61). Though later versions make the nature of the difference less obvious, Tolkien retained the distinction.\textsuperscript{309} Even in its later form the passage has caused no end of difficulty to scholars, who have been forced to ignore it themselves or argue Tolkien ignored its implications.\textsuperscript{310} Certainly Tolkien's Elvish characters act as though they believe they have free will. Flieger avoids reducing Elves to mere automata by arguing they possess an internal freedom. Though their deeds inevitably occur according to fate, their internal psychology and thus their motives are within their power to alter.\textsuperscript{311} Flieger's interpretation is logical, yet is resisted by the text.

Following Melkor's assault on the Two Trees, Yavanna requests the Silmarils from Fëanor so that in breaking them she may use their light to revive the Trees. Fëanor cries, 'This thing I will not do of free will' (S 83). At this moment messengers arrive with news of Melkor's theft of the Silmarils. The narrator comments:

The Silmarils had passed away, and all one it may seem whether Fëanor had said yea or nay to Yavanna; yet had he said yea at the first, before the tidings came from Formenos, it may be that his after deeds would have been other than they were. (S 84)

Neither of these quotations makes sense if Elves do not possess the freedom to alter their wills and their actions. Adding 'of free will' to 'This thing I will not do' is redundant

\textsuperscript{308} The passages can be compared in their varying drafts in Appendix A, below p. 258.

\textsuperscript{309} Cf. (Lost Road 163) and (Morgoth 21, 36, 42). The text of the published Silmarillion uses paragraphs 38 and 39 of Ainulindalë D (Morgoth 36).

\textsuperscript{310} 'Happily, Tolkien seems not to have tried to illustrate the implication that the Elves, the Valar, and Melko lack free will, which would surely have blighted his narrative.' Garth, Tolkien and the Great War, p. 275.

\textsuperscript{311} Flieger, 'The Music and the Task', p. 168.
whether Fëanor has free will or not, but its inclusion is much stranger if he does not. Without free will Fëanor’s after deeds could not possibly be ‘other than they were.’ Flieger has argued Fëanor’s reply would merely alter his emotional state and subsequent motivation, while his external actions would still follow inevitably. She describes Elvish freedom as ‘an internal process not affecting events but deeply influencing the inner nature of individuals involved in those events.’ In support she cites the version of the passage as it existed in the Later Quenta Silmarillion (c.1951), ‘had he said yea at the first, and cleansed his heart ere the dreadful tidings came, his after deeds would have been other than they proved’ (Morgoth 295). Flieger interprets the cleansing of his heart as referring to his interior psychology and ‘other’ as being used adverbially, i.e. ‘differently, in another way’. While fate would still drive him to lead the Noldor forth to recover the Silmarils it could be in order to restore them to Valinor rather than to be ‘lords of the unsullied Light’ (S 88). Flieger compares this distinction of motivation to the difference between killing for revenge and killing in self-defence, between murder and manslaughter. However, if Fëanor’s deeds cannot be altered, he is about to carry out murder in the kinslaying (S 93-4). Alternatively, if Fëanor, being cleansed in heart, does not murder his fellow Elves then he has managed to alter his fate. There does not appear to be a way he could carry out the same atrocities if his heart had been cleansed and his motivation pure. Either Fëanor has the radical freedom to change his external actions, or he has none at all.

The matter is further complicated by texts outside the Quenta Silmarillion. In The Lord of the Rings, as the company leave Lothlórien, Legolas attempts to comfort Gimli for

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313 Ibid.
314 Ibid.
315 Thomas Fornet-Ponse claims it is possible to interpret the kinslaying as ‘psychologically’ unavoidable after Fëanor’s oath, but does not believe this is the case. Fornet-Ponse, ‘Strange and Free’, p. 69.
the loss of Galadriel’s presence, adding: ‘I count you blessed, Gimli son of Glóin: for your loss you suffer of your own free will, and you might have chosen otherwise’ (*FR*, II, viii, 378). This attributes free will to the Dwarves, as is implied in Aulë’s making of them (S 38), in contradistinction to the claim the Music is ‘fate to all things else.’ As well as this, Tolkien’s late essays, such as ‘Laws and Customs among the Eldar’ (c.1958–60), repeatedly emphasise Elvish freedom. The Eldar marry for love ‘or at least by free will upon either part’ and have ‘freedom’ to refuse an offer of marriage (*Morgoth* 210–11).

Upon death, disembodied *fëar* (souls) can refuse the summons to the halls of Mandos, and the length of time they spend in those halls was ‘partly at their own will’ (*Morgoth* 219). Also, ‘[t]hose who were healed could be re-born, if they desired it: none are re-born or sent back into life unwilling’ (*Morgoth* 222–3). At this stage of composition (c.1960), Elvish actions could have very real effects upon external reality, for themselves and others. Humans are not alone in their ability to shape their lives within the world. A possible definition of Tolkien’s distinction is that humans may act with consequences beyond Arda while Elvish actions only effect events within Arda. Given the *Atthabeth* with its suggestion of an incarnation of the divine through humanity, the consequences of human choices based on free will now enters a cosmic plane far beyond the effects available to Elvish will. Yet a clear distinction between Elves and humans within the world cannot be drawn. Nevertheless a distinction is a consistent feature over forty years of rewriting. It is always possible Tolkien left this as a deliberate paradox, more likely he never resolved it to his satisfaction. A broadly acceptable interpretation of the passage does not yet exist.

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316 Rather than Legolas recognising a freedom of will in Gimli which he himself does not possess, he could be aware that the call of the sea will prove too powerful for his otherwise free will. As he later says, ‘But deep in the heart of all my kindred lies the sea-longing, which it is perilous to stir. [...] No peace shall I have again under beech or under elm’ (*RK*, V, ix, 873).

despite much scholarly effort. This study will not attempt to resolve this impasse. Instead, it investigates how Tolkien related various depictions of free decisions, whether Elven or human, within the constraints of character, consequence, and outside interference, to an overarching sense of authorial direction.

**Freedom and Compulsion in *The Silmarillion***

*The Silmarillion* is notably darker in tone than *The Lord of the Rings*. Tolkien was himself concerned it would be too sombre as nearly all its narratives were, 'grim and tragic: a long account of the disasters that destroyed the beauty of the Ancient World' (*Letters* 333). This sense of destruction and loss was at the heart of the stories from the beginning. To situate the kingdoms of the Elves in the same world as that of humanity but in the remote past necessitated the fall of these societies and the obliteration of their memory. This obliteration required a rupture with the following age. Concentrating on the ruin of that world, however, saturated *The Silmarillion* with inevitability. In *The Lord of the Rings* events conspire to assist the fellowship, in *The Silmarillion* the opposite seems the case. The Trees are poisoned, Fëanor falls, every Elvish kingdom is destroyed. It appears as if the oath sworn by Fëanor and his sons and the Doom pronounced by Mandos rule the fate of the Noldor, condemning them to endless catastrophe. Even more problematic is the story of the children of Húrin. Their tragic fate suggests a world that knows no loving Creator. ‘Doom’ occurs more than twice as often in *The Silmarillion* as in *The Lord of the Rings* and ‘fate’ more than five times as often. Fate and doom are, however, not the only forces at work in *The Silmarillion*. ‘Free’, and its derivatives, also occur almost twice as often in *The Silmarillion* than in *The Lord of the Rings*.\(^\text{318}\) Despite its at times fatalistic tone, *The Silmarillion* is a work structured around the interplay of freedom and

\(^{318}\) See Appendix B below, p. 259.
compulsion. The doom of the Noldor and curse on Húrin are the most developed presentations of freedom and compulsion's interaction in *The Silmarillion*, but are not the only explorations of these themes. The story of Beren and Lúthien, with its unusual juxtaposition of human bondage and Elven freedom, or the interaction between Tuor and Ulmo could also shed light on the matter. But nevertheless the fate of the Noldor and the family of Húrin pose the greatest challenges to a providential reading of the work, and must be the focus of the following.

In *The Silmarillion* the Oath of Fëanor and the Doom of Mandos combine to drive the tragedy of the Noldor. They are invoked whenever an Elvish kingdom falls or strife arises among Elves. It is unclear, however, whether the Oath and Doom are external forces dominating the actions of the Elves or have always been constructions of the Elves' own choices. The oath itself is a paradox. It is a concrete expression of the will of Fëanor and his sons; freely taken, entirely in character, and never questioned by them until the very end of the text. It also, however, ratifies their decision and greatly narrows their freedom of action, becoming the ultimate touchstone of all their actions. Tolkien describes the oath as 'blasphemous' (*Letters* 148). They swore 'by the name even of Illúvatar, calling the Everlasting Dark upon them if they kept it not' (*S* 89). As such they are setting their will not only against Illúvatar's representatives, the Valar, but against the will of Illúvatar. Considering Illúvatar's warning to Melkor that the Music cannot be changed in his despite, providence must integrate the oath into its own pattern.

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319. [I]n his fate Lúthien was caught, and being immortal she shared in his mortality, and being free received his chain' (*S* 194). Their story is based on the Lay of Leithian which is glossed 'Release from Bondage' (*S* 189).
When the Silmarils were created Mandos foretold, ‘the fates of Arda, earth, sea, and air, lay locked within them’ (S 69). They exert a fatal influence both through their own innate desirability and the oath that binds the Elves to them. As Finrod warns Beren:

It is plain that Thingol desires your death; but it seems that this doom goes beyond his purpose, and that the Oath of Fëanor is again at work. For the Silmarils are cursed with an oath of hatred, and he that even names them in desire moves a great power from slumber; and the sons of Fëanor would lay all the Elf-kingdoms in ruin rather than suffer any other than themselves to win or possess a Silmaril, for the Oath drives them. (S 198)

The oath continually shapes the actions of the sons of Fëanor. Even though Maedhros does not wish to attack the Elves at the Havens, ‘the knowledge of their oath unfulfilled returned to torment him and his brothers’ (S 296). Yet the oath can be quiescent. It seems to subside from the beginning of the siege of Angband until Beren and Lúthien win a Silmaril. After the sons demand the Silmaril from Thingol, the oath appears to again sleep until Dior takes up Thingol’s throne. Indeed when Fingolfin suggested an assault on Angband the sons of Fëanor were the least disposed to hear him (S 174). It would appear the oath sleeps when the sons of Fëanor feel they have no chance of claiming a Silmaril and reawakens only when a chance presents itself. Their knowledge of the oath unfulfilled, and attendant guilt whenever the possibility of fulfilling it arises, appears to drive the sons of Fëanor as much as any external force unleashed by the oath itself.

320 They could be interpreted as an ‘asterisk-trope’, the first cursed treasure.

321 ‘Maedhros] also was bound by the oath, though it slept now for a time.’ (S 127); ‘For Maedhros and his brothers being constrained by their oath, had before sent to Thingol and reminded him with haughty words of their claim, summoning him to yield the Silmaril, or become their enemy.’ (S 223); ‘But now the rumour ran among the scattered Elves of Beleriand that Dior Thingol’s heir wore the Nauglamir, and they said: “A Silmaril of Fëanor burns again in the woods of Doriath”; and the oath of the sons of Fëanor was waked again from sleep’ (S 284).
There is a curious comment on the oath near the end of *The Silmarillion*. The narrator questions why the Valar, both during and after the utter ruin of the Noldor, refused to come to their aid. One suggestion is that a messenger was needed; one who could speak for both Elves and humans, and Eärendil was not yet born (S 293). Another intriguing suggestion is then offered:

[A]nd the oath of Fëanor perhaps even Manwē could not loose, until it found its end, and the sons of Fëanor relinquished the Silmarils, upon which they had laid their ruthless claim. For the light which lit the Silmarils the Valar themselves had made. (S 293)

The Valar knew that if they defeated Morgoth and reclaimed the Silmarils the sons of Fëanor would be constrained by their oath to make war on the forces of the Valar, as in fact they do. The Valar therefore remain inactive to avoid another Kinslaying. At the same time, the narrator suggests Manwē does not have the power to annul the oath but the sons of Fëanor do. In the final debate between Maedhros and Maglor their own despair seems as strong as the oath in forcing their hands. Maedhros despairs that their penitence could ever reach the ears of Ilúvatar while Maglor believes everlasting darkness is their lot whether they keep the oath or break it. Though he knows it will only do more harm, Maglor allows himself to follow Maedhros (S 304). The sons of Fëanor are presented as constrained by their oath to despair and bring their final doom upon themselves through despair, though they could have done otherwise.

While the oath weighs on the sons of Fëanor, the Doom of Mandos lies upon all of the Noldor who returned to Middle-earth. Mandos ‘knows all things that shall be, save only those that lie still in the freedom of Ilúvatar’ (S 19). It is beyond doubt Mandos has seen the events he prophesises will occur. It is much less clear whether he actually causes these events by pronouncing his doom. The Doom itself contains four elements.
(1) The Valar will fence Valinor against the Noldor and pay no heed to their lamentations.

(2) For the house of Fëanor, 'Their Oath shall drive them, and yet betray them, and ever snatch away the very treasures that they have sworn to pursue' (S 94–5).

(3) All who took part in the Kinslaying must render blood for blood and, having been slain 'by weapon and by torment and by grief', their fëar must wait in the halls of Mandos (S 95).

(4) Those who survive will grow weary of the world and fade as the dominion of humans expands.

These four points are not exactly alike. The fencing of Valinor and the period of waiting in the halls of Mandos are punishments within the power of the Valar to impose. Points 2 and 4 are, it could be argued, more observations than curses. These are extrapolations from the nature of Fëanor and the Noldor more generally, rather than a curse of compulsion like a geis.\(^\text{322}\) The Noldor's guilt, to be punished by the Doom, is centred on the Kinslaying. The two are sometimes linked formulaically, for example: 'the shadow of the Kinslaying and the Doom of Mandos lay upon the Noldor' (S 164). The Doom will be worked out in their own actions. They have murdered their kin and therefore must now live in fear of future kinstrife. For this reason Orodreth spares the lives of Celegorm and Curufin 'for the spilling of kindred blood by kin would bind the Curse of Mandos more closely upon them all' (S 207). The doom of the Noldor lies in their own disloyalty and fear of disloyalty. What is not clear is the degree the curse of Mandos acts externally to encourage treachery or merely draws out the Noldor's inherent qualities. Faced with the opportunity of

supplanting Finrod as ruler of Nargothrond ‘the curse of Mandos came upon the brothers [Celegorm and Curufin], and dark thoughts arose in their hearts’ (S 199). When they later flee from Nargothrond their followers will not go with them ‘for all perceived that the curse lay heavily upon the brothers and that evil followed them’ (S 207). The curse is both external and internal. One complication is that the doom is not limited to those who took part in the Kinslaying but affects the Noldor in their entirety. Thingol describes Angrod as ‘ensnared in evil that you did not aid’ and Angrod departs from Doriath ‘perceiving how the words of Mandos would ever be made true, and that none of the Noldor that followed after Fëanor could escape from the shadow that lay upon his house’ (S 149–50). The doom even weighs upon those not yet born at the time of the Kinslaying. Maeglin’s wickedness results in part from his parents’ loveless marriage yet it is also bound up with the Doom. His incestuous desire for his cousin Idril is judged to be ‘an evil fruit of the Kinslaying, whereby the shadow of the curse of Mandos fell upon the last hope of the Noldor’ (S 161). Tolkien does not separate the external, coercive force of the curse from the consequences of the internal, free choices of the Elves.

There is another complication to Mandos’ prophecy. While it insists the Valar will close their ears to the pleas of the Noldor, one does not: Ulmo. The *Valaquenta* records how ‘Ulmo loves both Elves and Men, and never abandoned them, not even when they lay under the wrath of the Valar’ (S 17). Moreover, Ulmo, along with Manwë, has ‘served most faithfully the purpose of Ilúvatar’ (S 9). As such, this hints Ulmo is an agent of providence in his dealings with the Elves in Beleriand. He sends Finrod and Turgon dreams advising them to build hidden refuges (S 129) but his most prominent intervention in the fate of the Noldor is the sending of Tuor to Gondolin so he may marry Idril and father Eärendil. In the extended account of this scene, published in *Unfinished Tales*, Ulmo explains his role:
‘[I]n the armour of Fate (as the Children of Earth name it) there is ever a rift, and in the walls of Doom a breach, until the full-making, which ye call the End. So it shall be while I endure, a secret voice that gainsayeth, and a light where darkness was decreed. Therefore though in the days of this darkness I seem to oppose the will of my brethren, the Lords of the West, that is my part among them, to which I was appointed ere the making of the World.

(UT 39)

Ulmo insists ‘fate’ and ‘doom’ are not inexorable forces, and until the world is completed there is still time to change its pattern. It is Ulmo’s task to assist Elves and humans to change their doom for the better; a task to which he has been ‘appointed’, implicitly by Ilúvatar. As such, Ulmo’s concern and aid can be seen as a reflex and expression of Ilúvatar’s. But Ulmo’s power is limited. It is restricted by the growing might of Morgoth but also by the wilfulness of Elves and humans. If Ulmo’s assistance can be ignored, as it is in Nargothrond and Gondolin shortly before their falls, then so can Ilúvatar’s. There is hope for the Noldor in Eärendil, yet they have neither looked for nor prepared for it.

Before that rescue can be achieved Tuor had warned Turgon that ‘the Curse of Mandos now hastened to its fulfilment’ (S 287). On the one hand this predicts the approaching fall of Gondolin, implicit in Mandos’ prophecy that ‘all the works of the Noldor should perish’ (S 287). On the other hand, it could also indicate the Doom of Mandos will shortly have run its course. Writing to Rhona Beare about the Fall, Tolkien asserted ‘A divine “punishment” is also a divine “gift”, if accepted, since its object is ultimate blessing’ (Letters 286). If the revolt of the Noldor is in a sense the Elven Fall then the Curse of Mandos is a divine punishment. It is however a punishment which the elves

323 The Elven Fall differs from the human Fall in being less serious, a revolt against God’s stewards rather than against God directly. As such, they are reconciled to the Valar without a divine incarnation, though
carry out themselves. Each kingdom was given the opportunity to avert its ruin. Thingol could have avoided the destruction of Doriath if he had surrendered the Silmaril as Melian advised (S 223). Ulmo sent messengers to both Orodreth and Turgon warning them (S 253, 287). Had Turgon left for the coast the people of Gondolin would have been spared the catastrophe of the city’s fall. The Doom cannot be separated from the choices of individuals.

Though the oath and the Doom have evil consequences they hold within themselves the circumstances for Elves’ redemption. They bring Eärendil from Gondolin to the coast. At the same time they destroy Doriath sending Elwing and the Silmaril to the Havens. The greatest of mariners and the bearer of the Silmaril come together. At the last moment Ulmo reappears to save Elwing and the Silmaril from the waves, transform her into a bird, and send her to Eärendil (S 296). The relief of the Elves may come from Valinor but it is brought about by the willed actions of Eärendil and Elwing in cooperation with Ulmo. The tension between the evil consequences of the oath and Doom and the fortuitous collaboration of Eärendil and Elwing captures the same tension between external forces and free choices present since the Ainulindale.324

The tale of the children of Húrin addresses the same tension but does not deal in salvation and liberation but in corruption and apparent damnation.325 A retelling of the

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324 This pattern of destruction and redemption can be compared to the idea of a felix culpa. The phrase, taken from the Exsultet of the Easter liturgy, encapsulates the paradoxical view that the Fall was fortunate as it lead to the Incarnation. See Missale Romanum: ex decreto SS. Pontificis Maximi jussu editum, Clementis VIII, Urbani VIII et Leonis XIII auctoritate recognitum (Rome, Tournay, Paris: Desclée et Socii, 1913), p. 233 and John Hick, Evil and the God of Love, 2nd ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp 243–4.

325 This tale exists in several versions of greater or lesser completeness. The Silmarillion contains a continuous, though condensed, narrative while Unfinished Tales provides a fuller, though incomplete,
story of Kullervo from the *Kalevala*, it attracted Tolkien in the first place by its tragedy.\textsuperscript{326} The story is bookended by statements about ‘fate’. In his childhood Túrin asks his friend Sador ‘What is fate?’ and just before his death his sister Nienor calls him ‘A Túrin Turambar tunin ambartanen: master of doom by doom mastered!’ (*UT* 80, 178; *S* 267).

The tale ends not with a clarification of the concept but with a paradox: Túrin is both master of his own fate, recognising the role his free decisions play, yet also mastered by fate, recognising its external, coercive power. Túrin cannot be classified as either a hero brought down solely by his own flaws nor the innocent victim of external forces. He is a character struggling as much with his own personality as with Morgoth’s hostility. The tale personalises fate in the figure of Morgoth.\textsuperscript{327} Indeed, an alternative title Tolkien considered was *Narn e’Rach Morgoth* ‘Tale of the Curse of Morgoth’.\textsuperscript{328} But as Túrin’s character develops, fate is revealed as more complicated than merely the imposition of a curse.

Captured in battle and offered rewards for betraying Turgon, Túrin’s father Húrin mocks and defies Morgoth and is cursed along with all his family. Morgoth tells him:

> But upon all whom you love my thought shall weigh as a cloud of Doom, and it shall bring them down into darkness and despair. Wherever they go, evil shall arise. Whenever they speak, their words shall bring ill counsel.

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\textsuperscript{326} He wrote to his then fiancé Edith in 1914 that he was attempting to retell the story of Kullervo ‘which is really a very great story and most tragic’ (*Letters* 7).

\textsuperscript{327} Cf. Augustine’s comment that if he must use the word fate he would say the fate of the weak is the will of the strong: ‘Qua propter si mihi fati nomen alicui rei adhibendum placerat, magis dicerum fatum esse infirmioris potentioris voluntatem, qui eum habet in potestate’, Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, V.9, CCSL 47, p. 140, *City of God*, ii, pp 180–1.

\textsuperscript{328} See (*Morgoth* 373). Túrin will also translate Turambar ‘Master of Doom’ as ‘Master of the Dark Shadow’, presumably Morgoth (*UT* 159).
Whatsoever they do shall turn against them. They shall die without hope, cursing both life and death. (UT 87–8)

When Húrin argues that Morgoth ‘cannot see them nor govern them from afar’, Morgoth replies ‘The shadow of my purpose lies upon Arda, and all that is in it bends slowly and surely to my will’ (UT 87). He finally claims to be ‘Master of the fates of Arda’ (UT 89). This claim comes at the end of a speech filled with lies and half-truths, yet by the end of the narrative it does not appear to be an entirely empty boast.

This would appear to have given the diabolic figure of Tolkien’s mythology too much power, tipping Arda’s cosmology into outright dualism, but that is not necessarily the case. One feature of medieval theology, only questioned in the early modern period, was that the Devil was in fact the princeps huius mundi. This teaching had roots in the New Testament and was formulated as early as the second century in the letters of Ignatius of Antioch. Húrin may warn Morgoth, in what appears to be a moment of divine inspiration, ‘You are not the Lord of Men, and shall not be, though all Arda and Menel fall into your dominion. Beyond the Circles of the World you shall not pursue those who refuse you’ (UT 88), but this defiance, even if grace-filled, concedes evil’s dominion within the world.

Húrin insists on a point on which the Church was unanimous: the Devil cannot compel a person to do evil. Demons were believed to attack the bodies of unwilling

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329 Although in the converse of Húrin and Morgoth Tolkien alludes to Morgoth causing humanity’s fall, he does not include the notion of Morgoth’s corruption of Arda nor connect Túrin’s faults to any material or biological cause. Túrin’s story was of course in existence long before Tolkien developed his ideas of how the mechanics of Morgoth’s corruption of the world would work. See (Morgoth 399–401).


331 ‘This last thing I say to you, thrall Morgoth,’ said Húrin, ‘and it comes not from the lore of the Eldar, but is put into my heart in this hour’ (UT 88).
victims from without, by obsession, or from within, by possession, thus causing disease or madness but not corrupting the soul unless the free will of the victim yielded to the enemy. Temptations, however, assaulted the will. Athanasius of Alexandria, drawing on the experiences of the Desert Fathers, recorded that demons could take visible forms and create images and fantasies in the minds of their victims. This more subtle approach is often adopted by Morgoth and his servants who work 'by “shadow” and suggestion.' Morgoth’s lieutenant Sauron convinces Gormlin to betray Barahir and Beren by means of a ‘phantom devised by wizardry’ (S 190). Morgoth does not so much create visions to entrap Túrin as use words to suggest images he knows will affect him deeply. In his childhood Sador explained the misery of thralldom to Túrin using the example of the threat of being hunted by hounds (UT 94). The image of a hunted woman with her clothes torn will come to haunt Túrin. When Saeros mocks Túrin for his unkempt hair he creates this very image: ‘If the men of Hithlum are so wild and fell, of what sort are the woman of that land? Do they run like deer clad only in their hair?’ (UT 104). This comment leads directly to Sador’s death and Túrin’s exile, and Mablung at least believes it came from Morgoth. Again when Túrin faces Glaurung at Nargothrond Glaurung brings up a memory of Sador’s words with an image of thralldom: ‘As thralls thy mother and thy sister live in Dorlómin, in misery and want. Thou art arrayed as a prince, but they go in rags’ (S 255). Desperate to rescue his kin, Túrin abandons Finduilas and travels to Hithlum to find

332 Russell, Satan, pp 40–2.
333 Ibid., pp 168–70.
334 Shippey, Author of the Century, p. 254.
335 Shippey suggests ‘this image, this fear, haunts the whole tale.’ Ibid., p. 300.
336 ‘Indeed I think that some shadow of the North has reached out to touch us tonight. Take heed, Saeros son of Ithilbor, lest you do the will of Morgoth in your pride, and remember that you are of the Eldar’ (UT 105).
337 In this instance Glaurung may use a vision, showing Túrin his lordly self ‘as in a mirror misshapen by malice’ to emphasise Morwen and Nienor’s destitution (S 255).
Morwen and Nienor gone long before. Túrin is already racked with guilt for Finduilas’ death when the image finally becomes a reality and he finds Nienor naked and hunted on Finduilas’ burial mound.

The influence of Morgoth, however, is not offered as the only explanation for Túrin’s misfortune: his own character contributes equally. He has inherited this character in large part from his mother Morwen and the narrator apportions a substantial degree of blame to her. The child Túrin is described as ‘dark-haired as his mother, and promised to be like her in mood also; for he was not merry and spoke little […] Túrin was slow to forget injustice or mockery’ (UT 77). Most of all Morwen gave Túrin her pride. She ignored Húrin’s advice to leave Dor-lómin before the battle of Unnumbered Tears, both because she still hoped for his return and ‘she would not yet humble her pride to be an alms-guest, not even of a king’ (UT 92). The narrator notes that with this delay ‘the first strand of the fate of Túrin was woven’ (UT 92). Later she insisted on going with Thingol’s scouts to search Nargothrond for survivors, and though Nienor follows them in the hope of convincing her to turn back, Morwen once more could not overcome her pride (UT 146–9). Thus they are both present when Glaurung attacks and Nienor is driven, under the dragon-spell, into the arms of Túrin.

Túrin himself is just as guilty of pride.338 When he inadvertently causes Saeros’ death he refuses to explain that Saeros assaulted him first or to let his case be brought before Thingol’s judgement. As Túrin later tells Mablung, ‘My Man’s heart was proud [...] Not yet will it suffer me to go back to Menegroth and bear looks of pity and pardon, as for a wayward boy amended’ (UT 122). In Nargothrond he convinces Orodreth to abandon the secretive tactics of guerrilla warfare, which had kept the kingdom hidden from Morgoth,

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and instead wage open battle, even building a great bridge over the Narog for the swift movement of troops; ‘Thus Nargothrond was revealed to the wrath and hatred of Morgoth’ (S 252). Even when messengers from Ulmo warn Orodreth to ‘Cast the stones of your pride into the loud river, that the creeping evil may not find the gate’, Túrin refuses to let the bridge be demolished, ‘for he was become proud and stern, and would order all things as he wished’ (S 253). The host of Nargothrond is destroyed and Glaurung crossed the bridge to sack the city. Finally, by naming himself Turambar ‘Master of Doom’ Túrin explicitly mirrors Morgoth’s claim to be ‘Master of the fates of Arda’ (UT 144). He is quickly proven wrong by the return of Glaurung, the discovery of his unwitting incest, and Nienor’s suicide. As if to emphasise the destructiveness of Túrin’s pride, when he does humble himself and ask for help, requesting companions to face Glaurung alongside him, he receives it and Hunthor even saves his life when they climb the cliff to stab Glaurung from below (UT 166, 172). Without the pride of Morwen and especially of Túrin himself, Morgoth’s curse would have had much less power to bring about their doom.

Túrin’s repeated changing of his name exemplifies the duality of his predicament. At times he completely fails to see the part his choices play in the tragedy of his life. Treating his misfortunes as solely the result of outside forces, he calls himself Neithan ‘the Wronged’ among the outlaws (S 238). His name in Nargothrond, Agarwaen son of Umarth ‘Bloodstained son of Ill-fate’ (S 250), is more complicated. It both identifies his guilt and his innocence. He recognises he is stained with the blood of Beleg, whom he accidentally killed, but this is actually one of his least culpable actions given the darkness and his recent torture by the Orcs. The narrator commented ‘fate was that day more strong’ (S

339 Unlike Ulmo’s instructions to Finrod and Turgon to found hidden kingdoms (S 129), this warning is couched in metaphor. The lord of Nargothrond is Orodreth but the message is clearly aimed at Túrin. One possible reading is that Ulmo knew Túrin would reject direct instruction but a riddle, if a relatively plain one, would allow him to consider his position and goals, inviting an inner change of heart.
That he is ‘son of Ill-fate’, however, places responsibility outside his own person. It attributes his misfortune to the power of the curse but also to Húrin for leaving him practically a fosterling and bringing the curse upon him in the first place. His anger at Gwindor when the latter reveals his true name to Finduilas shows him again interpreting his troubles as coming from without rather than within: ‘you have done ill to me, friend, to betray my right name and call my doom upon me, from which I would lie hid’ (S 251). Gwindor disagrees: ‘The doom lies in yourself, not in your name’ (S 251). This is true but insufficient. Túrin’s personal mistakes are numerous but he is also labouring under a curse, a curse he believes in and reinforces.

That curse has two noteworthy features. The first lies in Húrin’s response to it: ‘Do you forget to whom you speak? Such things you spoke long ago to our fathers; but we escaped from your shadow’ (UT 88). This ties Morgoth’s curse to his original temptation of humanity and the Fall.³⁴⁰ It is a comfort to Húrin who, recalling Morgoth’s claims to be Master of the Dark and creator of the sun, moon, and stars, knows Morgoth’s power is not as great as he would have humanity believe (see Morgoth 346). The reference to the Fall, however, should alert the reader that humankind is fallen through Morgoth and labours under the curse of original sin. Morgoth can sever humankind in general, and Húrin’s family in particular, from divine grace if he can convince them by deception or temptation to sin and despair. Túrin and Húrin are an extreme example of humanity’s position after the Fall. Like the curse of Mandos, Morgoth’s curse is less an external force than a recognition and ratification of internal flaws. Túrin, like Fëanor, is directed by pride and,

³⁴⁰ The ‘Tale of Adanel’ which recounts the events of the fall of humanity at the hands of Morgoth is of uncertain canonicity. Tolkien relegated it to an appendix to the Athrabeth Finrod ah Andreth. That said, Húrin’s words demonstrate Morgoth is still to be held responsible. See (Morgoth 345–9).
viewing that pride as an essential part of his personality, to reject it would be to become someone else, one lesser in his own eyes.

One final point to be made is that Túrin’s story as presented in *The Silmarillion*, *Unfinished Tales* and *The Children of Húrin* is arguably incomplete. Each version ends shortly after Túrin’s suicide and burial. But that is not necessarily where Tolkien intended the tale of Túrin Turambar to end. The earliest version of the tale, ‘Turambar and the Foalókë’ (c.1918), ended with this passage:

Yet now the prayers of Úrin and Mawwin [Húrin and Morwen] came even to Manwë, and the Gods had mercy on their unhappy fate, so that those twain Túrin and Nienóri entered into Fös’Almir, the bath of Flame, [...] and so were all their sorrows and stains washed away, and they dwelt as shining Valar among the blessed ones [...] but Turambar indeed shall stand beside Fionwë in the Great Wrack, and Melko and his drakes shall curse the sword of Mormakil. (*Lost Tales II* 115–16)

That this was not an early and evanescent feature, or mere soft-hearted self-doubt, is clear when later versions of the tale are considered.

The *Quenta Silmarillion* (c.1937) contains a prophecy of Mandos that at the end of days Morgoth shall return through the Door of Night and destroy the sun and moon:

In that day Tulkas shall strive with Morgoth, and on his right shall be Fionwë, and on his left Túrin Turambar, son of Húrin, coming from the halls of Mandos; and the black sword of Túrin shall deal unto Morgoth his death and final end; and so shall the children of Húrin and all Men be avenged.

(*Lost Road* 333)

The Silmarils will be recovered and the world restored. While the fate of humans is unknown, to Túrin a ‘place is given among the sons of the Valar’ (*Lost Road* 333). In the
Later Quenta Silmarillion (c.1958) Tolkien altered ‘Túrin Turambar [...] coming from the halls of Mandos’ to ‘Túrin Turambar [...] returning from the Doom of Men at the ending of the world’ and also marked for deletion the passage where Túrin was named among the sons of the Valar (Jewels 247). As Douglas Kane has argued, for Tolkien to make specific edits to this scene, but make no effort to delete the prophecy of Túrin’s return and Morgoth’s death, indicates he intended to retain this material in the published text.\(^{341}\) In the Annals of Aman, dating from this time, the making of the constellation Menelmakar ‘The Swordsman of the Sky’ is accompanied by the comment: ‘This, it is said, was a sign of Túrin Turambar, who should come into the world, and a foreshadowing of the Last Battle that shall be at the end of Days’ (Morgoth 71).\(^{342}\) In Tolkien’s notes on the very late text ‘The Problem of Ros’, from 1968 or later, he records a prophecy of Andreth the Wise-woman that, ‘Túrin in the Last Battle should return from the Dead, and before he left the Circles of the World for ever should challenge the Great Dragon of Morgoth, Ancalagon the Black, and deal him his death-stroke’ (Peoples 374). Even if in this last version Túrin’s revenge is at one remove and he does not win a semi-divine nature he still is given a posthumous redemption and victory against Morgoth.\(^{343}\) Even in the published Silmarillion Túrin and Nienor are given a qualified posthumous victory. The seer and poet Glirhuin


\(^{342}\) Menelvagor, the Sindarin form of Menelmakar, is to be seen when the hobbits meet Gildor’s Elves (FR, I, iii, 81).

\(^{343}\) There may also be relevant material in Tolkien’s ‘New Lay of the Völsungs’. In the prelude to the lay Tolkien echoes the Völuspá concerning Ragnarök, but adds a prophecy that Sigurd will return from the dead on the ‘day of Doom’ to save the world. J.R.R. Tolkien, The Legend of Sigurd and Gudrith, ed. Christopher Tolkien (London: HarperCollins, 2009), pp 63–4. Christopher Tolkien notes, it is at least ‘extremely probable’ that the source for this innovation is Túrin Turambar (SG 184–5). That the prophecy of Túrin’s return from death and part in the Last Battle should seep from Tolkien’s legendarium into otherwise unrelated material implies that the image had a powerful effect upon Tolkien.
prophesised their grave would never be defiled by Morgoth or ever overthrown (S 275). After the ruin of Beleriand this grave survives as Tol Morwen, the only island remnant of Beleriand. Just as Húrin can hope to escape Morgoth beyond the circles of the world, in the end Túrin is beyond Morgoth’s power.

None of this fundamentally changes *The Silmarillion*’s tone, which is still much bleaker than *The Lord of the Rings*, but it does indicate the difference in tone does not involve a difference in worldview.³⁴⁴ Even in Sauron’s defeat there is the sadness of the passing of the Elves. Lórien will be lost; without violence, but no less certainly than Nargothrond and Gondolin. At several times Tolkien holds out the possibility that with greater wisdom and greater humility the Elves could have avoided their fate. Both Morgoth and Túrin claim to be Masters of Fate/Doom. Túrin is clearly mistaken. But in light of that knowledge Morgoth’s claim is no more secure. Though Elves and humans are entangled in circumstances only partially of their own making, their freedom is never entirely lost. Like the translator of the Old English Boethius, Tolkien attempts to give recognition to both human choice and the weight of circumstance pressing upon them, and like his Anglo-Saxon predecessor he will not sacrifice human intention on the altar of failure. Creaturely choices are not just in tension with the forces of compulsion within the world, but are also in cooperation with the author without.

³⁴⁴ Tolkien was, however, capable of very great differences of mood. See Verlyn Flieger, *Splintered Light*, pp 1–10 for Tolkien as ‘A Man of Antitheses’.
Freedom and Control in *The Lord of the Rings*

While *The Silmarillion* has been characterised as fatalistic, many critics have discerned a providential pattern in *The Lord of the Rings*.\(^{345}\) It is one of the few interpretative judgements about the work to have received essentially universal acceptance. The two scenes most frequently cited as evidence of this are Gandalf's comments to Frodo in Bag End that ‘Bilbo was meant to find the Ring, and not by its maker. In which case you also were meant to have it’ (*FR*, I, i, 56), and Frodo’s experience when he volunteers to bear the Ring to Mordor, ‘At last with an effort he spoke, and wondered to hear his own words, as if some other will was using his small voice. “I will take the Ring,” he said, “though I do not know the way”’ (*FR*, II, ii, 270). These examples have received more than enough attention. Instead the following will look at three moments of crisis in the narrative when the quest could easily have failed and the Ring fallen into Sauron’s hands. At each of these points an apparently providential concurrence of the decisions of the characters directly involved, their past decisions, and the actions of others occurs to overcome the immediate danger to the quest. The success of the quest depends upon the interaction of individual wills, acting without full knowledge of each other, and yet leading to an apparently providential result. Each of these moments can only be characterised as providential afterwards.\(^{346}\) During them, Tolkien does not foreshadow closure and inevitability but suggests what Gary Saul Morson calls ‘sideshadowing’: the projection, from the ‘side’, of an alternative present, thus emphasising both contingency and the responsibility of

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\(^{346}\) Given the dangerous nature of the quest there are an almost infinite number of moments when it could have failed. These three have been chosen as they deliberately point to alternative possibilities.
individual choice. The first of these crisis points is Boromir’s attempt to take the Ring leading to the breaking of the fellowship. The second is Sam’s decisions on the pass of Cirith Ungol forced upon him by Frodo’s apparent death. The third is Frodo’s failure to destroy the Ring himself and the web of choices which provided another means for its destruction. While this scene has received much more critical attention than the other two, it is included to show the narrative connecting providential point to point.

The breaking of the fellowship is a decisive point in *The Lord of the Rings*. Until then, there is one narrative thread, essentially centred upon Frodo. After it, the narrative divides with the various strands running parallel and occasionally crossing until they are reunited in ‘The Field of Cormallen’. Each of these strands is individually necessary for the success of the quest. The attack led by Saruman’s Orcs completes the physical breaking of the fellowship, but it is Boromir’s attempt to seize the Ring from Frodo which is the true breaking point (*FR*, II, x, 399). Frodo flees Boromir and the fellowship scatters in search of him. This is crucial. Had they been together when the Orcs attacked, most, if not all, of them would have died defending the hobbits who would have been brought, with the Ring, to Saruman. Finding them without Sam and Frodo, the Orcs assume Merry and Pippin are the only hobbits and abduct them, killing only Boromir. Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli are away from the epicentre of the fighting and are unscathed. Meanwhile, with the distraction, Sam and Frodo are able to escape across the Anduin.

Splintering the fellowship proves essential for the success of the quest. Gandalf will later insist on the importance of Merry and Pippin reaching Fangorn just in time to rouse the Ents and defeat Saruman: ‘So between them our enemies have contrived only to

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348 Incidentally allowing him to redeem himself. See below pp 131–3.
bring Merry and Pippin with marvellous speed, and in the nick of time, to Fangorn, where otherwise they would never have come at all!’ (TT, III, v, 497). Similarly Aragorn ‘would have guided Frodo to Mordor and gone with him to the end’ (TT, III, i, 419) but Frodo is placed beyond his responsibility, leaving Aragorn free to help defend Rohan and save Minas Tirith with Gondor’s southern forces. Boromir’s actions mean the fellowship separates precisely when it needs to.

It was a prophetic dream which made Boromir part of the fellowship in the first place: ‘Seek for the Sword that was broken: / In Imladris it dwells’ (FR, II, ii, 246). Yet the dream came first, and repeatedly, to Boromir’s brother Faramir and only later to Boromir himself. It was Faramir who was originally to go and only Boromir’s insistence convinced their father Denethor to allow him to take Faramir’s place (FR, II, ii, 246). By emphasising how easily it could have been Faramir’s role to journey with the fellowship, Tolkien must be inviting his readers to ask how events may have turned out if their roles had in fact been reversed. Tom Shippey has interpreted this as an example of how human free will can reject providence and change one’s own fate. In this he sees humanity’s ability to frustrate providence and interprets Boromir’s choice as essentially negative and destructive. ‘It was human decision, or human perversity, which led to Boromir claiming the journey, with what chain of ill-effects and casualties no one can tell.’ Shippey reads Boromir’s decision as almost entirely negative, an example of humanity’s ability to reject providence, but it can also be read, as Augustine would have, as demonstrating how the wills of humanity become part of the causality of providence. As the Ainulindalë insists (S 6), providence incorporates the free decisions of creatures into an altered providential pattern which will achieve Ilúvatar’s ends by different means.

349 Shippey, The Road to Middle-earth, p. 173; see also Shippey, Author of the Century, p. 146.
350 Shippey, The Road to Middle-earth, p. 173.
The second crisis occurs in a chapter whose title draws attention to free will: ‘The Choices of Master Samwise’. Gollum has betrayed Frodo and Sam to Shelob. With Frodo apparently dead, Sam must take the Ring. Frodo is captured by Orcs who kill each other fighting over their prisoner’s valuables. Sam is able to rescue him and return the Ring to his possession. There are any number of ways this could have ended in disaster. Taking for granted Shelob had poisoned Frodo and Sam had fought off Shelob, Sam could still have abandoned the quest and sought out Gollum for revenge, or killed himself. He considered both actions (TT, IV, x, 731–2). Here the chapter further draws attention to the question of freedom and fate by making one of only two references to Túrin in The Lord of the Rings. Sam stabs Shelob from below, just as Túrin stabbed Glaurung, and the narrator comments that her skin could not be pierced by human strength ‘not though Elf or Dwarf should forge the steel or the hand of Beren or Túrin wield it’ (TT, IV, x, 728). With Frodo apparently dead, Sam considers suicide, just as Túrin had. Unlike Túrin, Sam chooses to live as to choose suicide ‘was to do nothing’ (TT, IV, x, 732). The striking similarity between their respective situations seems intended to draw attention to the power of choice to change a character’s fate even when outside constraints seem overwhelming.

Even the precise time it takes for Sam to make his choices is important. Had he stayed by Frodo’s side in indecision, the Orcs would have found both of them. Had he spent less time mourning Frodo and making up his mind he could have left the pass entirely and never learnt from overhearing the Orcs that Frodo was still alive. As the narrator reports:

Only a few steps; and now only a few more and he would be going down and would never see that high place again. And then suddenly he heard cries and voices. [...] He had taken too long in making up his mind, and now it was no good. (TT, IV, x, 734).
If Sam and Frodo had been captured with the Ring, the quest would of course be over. If Sam had inadvertently left Frodo in Cirith Ungol, Frodo may have revealed under torture that the Ring was somewhere within Sauron’s realm and not in Aragorn’s possession as Sauron believed. Sam’s decision to carry the Ring, and to make his decision slowly, entirely in character, was exactly what was needed at exactly the right time.  

One of the curious aspects of the episode atop the pass of Cirith Ungol is that Sam put on and wore the Ring for an extended period of time on the very borders of Mordor without Sauron being aware of his presence. This contrasts starkly with Frodo’s experience on Amon Hen when he feels Sauron’s gaze leap ‘towards him; almost like a finger he felt it, searching for him. Very soon it would nail him down, know just exactly where he was’ (FR, II, x, 401). The answer partially lies in Sam’s essential character. He simply does not possess enough ‘will to power’ for the Ring to draw upon. After a fleeting moment of grandeur where he imagines himself as ‘Samwise the Strong, Hero of the Age’, his ‘plain hobbit-sense’ and love for Frodo return him to sanity (RK, VI, i, 901). Sam does not declare himself openly as a rival to Sauron as Frodo will do at Mount Doom. The other element of the explanation is to remember when these events are occurring. The entries in the Chronology for March 12th–14th read:

12 Gollum leads Frodo into Shelob’s lair. […] 13 Frodo captured by the Orcs of Cirith Ungol. The Pellenor is overrun […]. 14 Samwise finds Frodo in the Tower. Minas Tirith is besieged. (RK, Appendix B, 1093)

At this very moment Sauron’s attention is fixed on Minas Tirith, for he still considers Gondor with its military might to be the greatest threat. As the Orc Shagrat puts it, ‘The

351 Sam’s choices atop Cirith Ungol arise from his choices on the stairs earlier when he harshly questioned Gollum (TT, IV, viii, 714–15) again reflecting the contingency of events.
Eye was busy elsewhere, I suppose [...] Big things going on away west, they say’ (TT, IV, x, 738). Circumstances have again conspired, fortuitously, to keep the Ring safe.

Even without the distraction of the assault on Gondor. Sam is probably the character who could have taken the Ring with the least amount of danger to his moral integrity. His decision to leave Frodo and take the Ring has consequences which he could not have predicted. It allows Frodo to be captured without endangering the quest. The value of the mithril shirt Frodo is found in sparks off the battle between the two Orc bands and clears the tower watching the pass (RK, VI, i, 906). Sam is then able to retrieve Frodo and disguise themselves with the gear of the dead Orcs. Without these disguises they would not have been able to travel openly on the road. They would have had to travel cross-country and would have arrived at Mount Doom too late, if at all.352 Without the Orc gear the Orcs who overtook them would have recognised them at once (RK, VI, ii, 930). In his moment of decision, Sam’s choices, made with the imperfect information available to him, are supported by events elsewhere of which he has no knowledge. His choices, and those events, allow the quest to be fulfilled. When viewed in hindsight its dependence on a series of apparently random, but logical, actions and consequences is revealed.

The third crisis differs from the first two by emphasising a theological concept intimately related to providence: grace. Frodo’s failure to destroy the Ring when he finally reaches Mount Doom is of vital importance not just for the narrative and for his character but for the theological and philosophical assumptions behind the entire work. The fate of the Ring was in fact decided much earlier in ‘The Taming of Sméagol’ when Frodo, seeing Gollum in person for the first time, finally feels pity for him and spares his life. Frodo’s

352: “Then we must take the road, Mr. Frodo,” said Sam. “We must take it and chance our luck, if there is any luck in Mordor. We might as well give ourselves up as wander about any more, or try to go back. Our food won’t last. We’ve got to make a dash for it”’ (RK, VI, ii, 928).
decision provides another means of destroying the Ring should the primary quest fail.\[353\] This decision partly depends on Frodo’s character and innate goodness and partly on the advice of Gandalf that ‘even the very wise cannot see all ends’ (FR, I, ii, 59). The quest only succeeded because Frodo held on to the, seemingly irrational, belief that showing pity to Gollum was a good in itself regardless of the dangers it engendered. As Tolkien noted:

At any point any prudent person would have told Frodo that Gollum would certainly betray him, and could rob him in the end. [...] He did rob him and injure him in the end – but by a ‘grace’, that last betrayal was at a precise juncture when the final evil deed was the most beneficial thing any one cd. have done for Frodo. (Letters 234)

In response to one of the few readers who questioned him about Frodo’s failure, Tolkien expressed surprise that it was not commented upon more often and asserted its importance (Letters 330).

Tolkien claimed Frodo’s failure was necessitated by the logic of the story (Letters 251, 325). As early as 1939, when the narrative had only reached Rivendell, Tolkien sketched out the scene at the Crack of Doom: ‘When Bingo [written above: Frodo] at last reaches Crack and Fiery Mountain he cannot make himself throw the Ring away.? [...] At that moment Gollum [...] comes up and treacherously tries to take Ring. They wrestle and Gollum takes Ring and falls into the Crack’ (Shadow 380). Although Tolkien hesitated over who would throw or fall with the Ring into the fire, Frodo’s inability to part with it remained constant throughout all revisions (see Sauron 3-7). Frodo’s words when he claimed the Ring changed from ‘But I cannot do what I have come to do. I will not do it.

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353 Tolkien elsewhere refers to Gollum’s presence at Mount Doom as ‘a means for the Ring’s destruction [...] being kept in reserve by Eru as it were.’ Tolkien, ‘Fate and Free Will’, p. 185; cf. Gandalf’s comments about Gollum having a part to play before the end (FR, I, ii, 51).
The Ring is mine’ in the draft, to ‘But I do not choose now to do what I came to do. I will not do this deed. The Ring is mine!’ Christopher Tolkien did not consider this a very significant difference, doing no more than emphasising that Frodo fully willed his act (Sauron 38). But Tom Shippey is surely correct to suggest the choice of words is significant. Frodo does not choose not to, he does not choose. Though he is in the Sammath Naur, the heart of Sauron’s realm where ‘all other powers were [...] subdued’ (RK, VI, iii, 945), it is not merely a question of Sauron’s power overriding his free will. After all, Tolkien speculated that if Gollum had succeeded in repenting he could have voluntarily cast himself, along with the Ring, into the fire (Letters 330). But exhausted and tormented by long possession of it Frodo could not will the destruction of the Ring. It is left to an act of pure chance, Gollum accidentally stepping too far and falling. In his letter Tolkien treated his fictional world as if operated as the primary world. The reader follows the narrative and in following accepts the philosophy of the interaction of providence and free will. In the narrative Tolkien places a mirror up to the world he has inhabited and this mirror reflects for him and for us the limitations of creaturely will when it comes to achieving providential goals. Providence works at the level of interactions between wills, not requiring the success of any one creature’s actions but the cumulative effect of several choices, none of them forced by providence.

The narrative of The Lord of the Rings is constructed from several narrative strands, developing concurrently and influencing each other before combining to achieve resolution. There are times our attention is drawn to apparently fortuitous choices, which the protagonists could have made otherwise, and from them to their potential effects on the larger narrative. Tolkien knew the essential outcome at the outset but the course of events

354 Cf. (Sauron 38) and (RK, VI, iiii, 945).
355 Shippey, Author of the Century, p. 140.
leading to it was changed again and again. Sub-creator and sub-creation mimic providence and history for Tolkien. In both the free decisions of characters are taken up into an ordering pattern where the end is foreknown but the means of achieving it are open and infinite.

The Narrative of Salvation

Providence operates on the cosmic level. In Tolkien's sub-creation, the overarching narrative of Arda is the imposition and subsequent elimination of Morgoth's corruption: the journey from Arda Marred to Arda Healed. Providence at the same time works on the level of the individual, each of whose lives take place within this larger narrative. Any discussion of providence requires both microcosm and macrocosm. On the level of the individual, in Tolkien's works, the redemptive narrative of providence operates in terms analogous to the Christian. One complication for Tolkien, and for some of his readers even today, was that his sub-created world is pre-Christian, and therefore in tension with the principle of extra ecclesiam nulla salus. The same problem arises for the world of Beowulf. The economy of salvation, or damnation, in Beowulf has proven fiercely controversial. In 'The Monsters and the Critics' Tolkien opposed the 'grave and Gallic voices' of hard-line orthodoxy who in their 'harsh and intolerant view [...] consigned all the heroes to the devil' (MC 24, 28). This disagreement carried over, one suspects, into

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356 See Fulk, Bjork, and Niles (eds), Klaeber's Beowulf, pp lxvii–lxxix. One of the best known articles is Charles Donahue's, 'Beowulf, Ireland and the Natural Good', Traditio, 7 (1949–51), pp 263–77, notwithstanding his comments on the limited ability of an 'eighth-century barbarian' poet being able to work out the salvation of his characters from the text of Augustine, see p. 266 n.20.

his legendarium, where Tolkien at least suggested the salvation of a number of characters despite the apparent absence of Ecclesia. This is not to claim Tolkien had a fully worked out theology of salvation; merely that he had problems condemning individuals outside the visible church. In his legendarium Tolkien appears to have two requirements for salvation. First, the individual must act morally. As Aragorn tells Éomer 'Good and ill have not changed since yesteryear; nor are they one thing among Elves and Dwarves and another among Men. It is a man’s part to discern them' (TT, III, ii, 438). Second, it seems likely they must have some hope beyond the ‘circles of the world’, however tenuous or vague. This hope would be an acceptance of their creation by Ilúvatar, who willed that their hearts ‘should seek beyond the world and should find no rest therein’ (S 35).\textsuperscript{359} \textit{The Lord of the Rings} provides us with at least examples of this narrative of salvation in action.

Matthew Dickerson has argued although Tolkien does not use the term ‘salvation’ it is central to the spiritual and moral victory for which his characters struggle.\textsuperscript{360} Salvation, in Tolkien’s terms, is presented both as successful, with Boromir and Aragorn, and as unsuccessful, with Gollum and Denethor. Boromir’s fate in particular receives extended commentary from both Gandalf and Faramir (TT, III, v, 496; IV, v, 669), indicating its importance to Tolkien. When Aragorn discovers him mortally wounded,

\textsuperscript{358} Shippey has compared Tolkien’s reconstructed mythology with those of Jacob Grimm and N.S.F. Grundtvig and sees in it a model of ““virtuous paganism”, which was heathen; conscious of its own inadequacy, and so ripe for conversion; but not yet sunk into despair and disillusionment.” ‘Tolkien and Iceland: The Philology of Envy’ in Tom Shippey, \textit{Roots and Branches: Selected Papers on Tolkien} (Zurich: Waling Tree Publishers, 2007), pp 187–202 at 192. I agree with Shippey’s assessment but would use slightly different terminology.

\textsuperscript{359} This is almost a calque of Augustine; both in terms of the potential for salvation outside the visible church, \textit{De civitate Dei}, XVIII.47, CCSL 48, pp 645–6, \textit{City of God}, vi, pp 52–5, and the idea that our hearts are restless until they rest in God, Augustine, \textit{Confessionum libri XIII}, ed. Lucas Verheijen, CCSL 27 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1981), I.1., p. 1.

\textsuperscript{360} Dickerson, \textit{Following Gandalf}, p. 150.
Boromir says: ‘I tried to take the Ring from Frodo’ [...] ‘I am sorry. I have paid’ [...] ‘Farewell Aragorn! Go to Minas Tirith and save my people! I have failed.’ Aragorn replies, ‘You have conquered. Few have gained such a victory. Be at peace! Minas Tirith shall not fall!’ (7T, III, i, 414). Boromir’s defence of the hobbits was certainly worthy but hardly merits being described as victory, as Boromir is dead and the hobbits taken. Boromir’s victory is more likely in context his atonement for his earlier attempt to take the Ring from Frodo by force.\textsuperscript{361} His salvation appears to be confirmed later by Gandalf, whose judgement has greater status given his position as a Maia, one who has seen Ilúvatar and has just returned from the dead. Having heard Aragorn’s account of Boromir’s death, Gandalf comments:

> It was a sore trial for such a man: a warrior, and a lord of men. Galadriel told me that he was in peril. But he escaped in the end. I am glad. It was not in vain that the young hobbits came with us, if only for Boromir’s sake.

(7T, III, v, 496)

Gandalf’s use of the word ‘escaped’ brings to mind the escape from death in ‘On Fairy-Stories’, humanity’s greatest desire and an intimation of our eternal fate (OFS 74–5). Also, Galadriel did not describe Boromir as ‘a peril’ to the fellowship, but as ‘in peril’; the greatest danger from Boromir’s actions was always to himself. Boromir’s ultimately good end is reinforced by Faramir’s words to Frodo: ‘Whether he erred or no, of this I am sure: he died well, achieving some good thing. His face was more beautiful even than in life’ (7T, IV, v, 669). When Faramir saw Boromir’s funeral boat passing down the Anduin it bore several of the signs of sanctity. His body was uncorrupted and his countenance beautiful, there was a pale light around it of unknown source, and the boat was filled with

\textsuperscript{361} Dickerson, Following Gandalf, p. 151.
clear water, suggesting baptism (TT, IV, v, 666).\(^3\) All of this implies a newly won sanctity, despite Boromir dying without any of the trappings of religion, not even mentioning the Valar. This is salvation without the mediation of covenant or church; at the time of course there was neither.

Boromir’s salvation is not automatically the fate of everyone in Middle-earth. Gollum and Denethor end their lives in flames, suggesting damnation. But their fates are not predetermined and others, especially Gandalf, attempt to help them to come to contrition and repentance.\(^3\) When Frodo argued Gollum should have been killed, Gandalf responded that though many deserve death judgement should be avoided, ‘For even the very wise cannot see all ends. I have not much hope that Gollum can be cured before he dies, but there is a chance of it’ (FR, I, ii, 59). Gandalf’s mercy towards Gollum is predicated upon acknowledging the sinful state of humanity, including hobbitkind. Gandalf spares Gollum for the sake of Gollum’s soul, not just for the part he will play in the destruction of the Ring. But Gandalf does not speak of Gollum’s ‘salvation’; he speaks of him being ‘cured’. To an Anglo-Saxonist like Tolkien the connection was perhaps more obvious. In one letter Tolkien referred to Christ by his usual Old English name, *Hælend*, ‘the Healer’ (*Letters* 340). As Christ’s healing miracles demonstrate, physical recovery and spiritual regeneration have been seen as connected in Christian thought.\(^3\)

Yet for all Gandalf’s, and later Frodo’s, efforts Gollum was not saved. Tolkien suggests he came extremely close.\(^3\) Seeing Frodo asleep on the stairs of Cirith Ungol:

> Gollum looked at them. A strange expression passed over his lean hungry face. The gleam faded from his eyes, and they went dim and grey, old and

\(^3\) Water also has a connection with the Music and with Ulmo’s concern for humanity (S 8).

\(^3\) Saruman, being a Maia, needs separate treatment and is perhaps outside the scope of this argument.


\(^3\) ‘Gollum […] seeing Frodo asleep nearly repents’ (*RK*, Appendix B, 1093).
tired. A spasm of pain seemed to twist him, and he turned away, peering back up towards the pass, shaking his head, as if engaged in some interior debate. [...] For a fleeting moment, could one of the sleepers have seen him, they would have thought that they beheld an old weary hobbit, shrunken by the years that had carried him far beyond his time, beyond friends and kin, and the fields and streams of youth, an old starving pitiable thing. (TT, IV, viii, 714)

But Sam wakes and, by harshly questioning Gollum, confirms him in his corruption. ‘Gollum withdrew himself, and a green glint flickered under his heavy lids. Almost spider-like he looked now, crouching back on his bent limbs with his protruding eyes. The fleeting moment had passed, beyond recall’ (TT, IV, viii, 715). Gollum’s damnation is influenced by chance, but it depends ultimately upon his character. Bilbo took such little harm from long possession of the Ring as he began his ownership with an act of pity and mercy, overcoming his temptation to murder Gollum. Sméagol on the other hand was tempted to murder by the mere sight of the Ring and strangled Déagol almost immediately upon his discovery of it (FR, I, ii, 53).66 The suggestions of cannibalism that hang about Gollum, whether of the woodsmen’s babies or the corpses of the Dead Marshes, are not entirely incredible (FR, I, ii, 58; TT, IV, ii, 628). It says a great deal for Tolkien’s skill that even with this knowledge, the possibility of Gollum’s redemption seems real and the tragedy of his relapse palpable.

Denethor has a similar moment of wavering before his final despair and suicide (RK, V, vii, 853). His death is explicitly a renunciation of hope. Gandalf tells him:

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66 He also quickly put his newfound powers ‘to crooked and malicious uses. He became sharp-eyed and keen-eared for all that was hurtful’ (FR, I, ii, 53).
Authority is not given to you, Steward of Gondor, to order the hour of your death [...] And only the heathen kings, under the domination of the Dark Power, did thus, slaying themselves in pride and despair, murdering their kin to ease their own death. (RK, V, vii, 853)

As Tom Shippey has noted, Tolkien only uses the word ‘heathen’ twice in his legendarium; pointedly both occurrences refer to Denethor.\(^{367}\) Presuming to have greater knowledge through the *palantír*, Denethor chooses death with his son rather than face what he considers Sauron’s inevitable victory. He turns Gandalf’s words, ‘pride and despair’, back upon him, insisting his reaction is the only rational response to certain defeat. When asked what he desires he responds ‘things as they were in all the days of my life [...] But if doom denies this to me, then I will have *naught*’ (RK, V, vii, 854). Denethor’s final choice is the choice of Melkor, nihilism.\(^{368}\) If he cannot have Gondor as he remembers it, he will see Gondor and his son and himself burn. Despite his long years of struggle against Sauron, Denethor has come to resemble his enemy. It is Denethor’s despair, however, which seals his fate.

Aragorn’s fate is different, though he too chooses the hour of his death. Unlike Denethor this is neither despair nor the rejection of his duties but an act of hope and responsibility. His death scene, nevertheless, is not one of straightforward consolation. Shippey comments that his death, as that of his mother Gilraen, is noticeably lacking in ‘the comforts of religion’.\(^{369}\) Arwen certainly is not comforted, as she finally and personally feels the full weight of human mortality and the sorrow and grief of loss.

\(^{367}\) Shippey, *The Road to Middle-earth*, pp 196, 229.

\(^{368}\) See below pp 248–55.

\(^{369}\) Shippey, *Author of the Century*, p. 177
Aragorn responds with confidence, although he cannot offer anything more than 'the substance of things to be hoped for, the conviction of things not seen' (Heb 1:11):

I speak no comfort to you, for there is no comfort for such pain within the circles of the world. [...] In sorrow we must go, but not in despair. Behold! we are not bound for ever to the circles of the world, and beyond them is more than memory. Farewell!' (RK, Appendix A, v, 1063)

This is admittedly vague. 'More than memory' implies a future existence but says no more. Yet Aragorn dies at peace and, like Boromir, is beautiful to see, 'he fell into sleep. Then a great beauty was revealed in him, so that all who after came there looked on him in wonder' (RK, Appendix A, v, 1063).

Aragorn’s death has even more parallels with Beowulf’s. Central to Aragorn’s death scene is his acceptance of the span of life allotted to him and the death now approaching: ‘“Would you then, lord, before your time leave your people that live by your word?” she said. “Not before my time,” he answered. “For if I will not go now, then I must soon go perforce’’ (RK, Appendix A, v, 1062). Beowulf too knows his death is approaching and accepts it, knowing he has done all he can as a king: ‘In my home I awaited my allotted time, cared well for my own, did not seek treacherous quarrels, nor swore any oaths unjustly.’ Both think of their realm and a need for a successor. Aragorn partly accepts his death because he knows he would otherwise grow too feeble to rule and his son Eldarion is ‘a man full-ripe for kingship’ (RK, Appendix A, v, 1062). His last public act is to give the crown of Gondor and the sceptre of Armor to Eldarion (RK,

370 It also contrasts with the fate of the Elves who increasingly come to dwell in memory.
371 ‘Ce on earde bād / mælgesceafa, hēold mīn iela, / ne sōhte searonīdas, nē mē swōr fela / āda on unriht.’, Beowulf, 2736b–2739a.
372 Cf. the kings of Númenor who refused to pass the crown to their heirs (RK, Appendix A, I, 1035), (UT 285).
Appendix A, v, 1062). Beowulf has neither wife nor children but attempts to ensure the succession by appointing Wiglaf as his heir:

Now I would have given my war-garments to my son, if fate had granted to me that any heir of my body should afterwards come. [...] Now I have bartered my old life for a hoard of treasure you must still see to the people’s needs.373

His last act is to give Wiglaf his armour and advise him to use it well.374 As ‘The Monsters and the Critics’ makes clear, Tolkien believed Beowulf was saved (MC 39). Aragorn may not know in detail where he is going but we suspect it is the söðfæstra dōm.

This mixture of hope and uncertainty regarding the world to come is common to the pre-Christian monotheists of Beowulf and those of Middle-earth. Beowulf’s soul merely seeks dōm, while no one knows who received Scyld’s boat.375 Aragorn only speaks of something ‘more than memory’. He has the support of the obvious parallels between his and Arwen’s story and that of Beren and Lúthien, an indication they will be reunited after death, despite Arwen’s doubts. Aragorn has hope, a word Tolkien uses repeatedly in ‘The Tale of Aragorn and Arwen’, with varying shades of meaning. Some years later Tolkien would define two types of hope: amdir ‘looking up’, roughly equivalent to optimism, and estel ‘trust’, the cardinal virtue of hope with its foundation in Ilúvatar (Morgoth 320). The

374 Beowulf, 2809–12.
distinction, however, appears to have already been present in his mind to some extent when writing this passage. When fostered by Elrond, Aragorn was called Estel ‘Hope’, for he was the hope of the Dúnedain. Coming of age and learning of his lineage, Aragorn sang, ‘for he was full of hope and the world was fair’ (RK, Appendix A, v, 1058). This is merely amdir. The hope his love for Arwen gives him is of a different sort, sustaining him in his hardships, ‘His face was sad and stern because of the doom that was laid on him, and yet hope dwelt ever in the depths of his heart, from which mirth would arise at times like a spring from the rock’ (RK, Appendix A, v, 1060). This has affinities with Gandalf’s ‘fountain of mirth’, which Matthew Dickerson argues comes from seeing the spiritual reality behind present physical circumstances.\textsuperscript{376} In this way it is estel. The hope of Arwen and the hopelessness of Aragorn’s mother Gilraen are then contrasted. Arwen believes, despite the mounting darkness, that Sauron can be overthrown, ‘Dark is the Shadow, and yet my heart rejoices; for you, Estel, shall be among the great whose valour will destroy it.’ And so ‘in hope’ she made a royal standard for him, which could only ever be raised if Aragorn succeeded to the Númenórean kingship (RK, Appendix A, v, 1061). This is no mere optimism based on military might, for it is quite clear military victory against Sauron cannot be achieved and martial valour is useless. Yet Arwen sees beyond certain military defeat to a victory based on a ‘fool’s hope’, the quest of the Ringbearer. Gilraen, however, cannot bear to face the approaching darkness, telling Aragorn, ‘Ónen i-Estel Edain, ú-chemin estel anim’, ‘I gave hope to the Dúnedain, I have kept no hope for myself’ (RK, Appendix A, v, 1061). She understands the need for hope but cannot feel any for herself. In this she is like the most tragic of pagans, despite her presumed monotheism. The Third

\textsuperscript{376} Cf. ‘Yet in the wizard’s face he saw at first only lines of care and sorrow; though as he looked more intently he perceived that under all there was a great joy: a fountain of mirth enough to set a kingdom laughing, were it to gush forth’ (RK, VI, i, 759). See Dickerson, Following Gandalf, p. 184.
Age may have ended ‘in victory and hope’ (LR, Appendix A, v, 1062), but Tolkien does not spare Arwen, or the reader, the bitterness of mortality. Aragorn’s last words to her, acknowledged as cold comfort, are to tell her that we must face death in sorrow but not in despair. Yet her ironic cries of “Estel, Estel!” and the description of her having ‘become cold and grey as nightfall in winter that comes without a star’, suggest she may in fact despair (RK, Appendix A, v, 1063). The last passage of the tale is thoroughly sombre:

There at last when the mallorn-leaves were falling, but spring had not yet come, she laid herself to rest upon Cerin Amroth; and there is her green grave, until the world is changed, and all the days of her life are utterly forgotten by men that come after, and elanor and niphredil bloom no more east of the Sea. (RK, Appendix A, v, 1063)

It is characteristic of Tolkien that this passage, though mournful in tone, can be read as actually saying something hopeful. She dies at the end of winter, but spring is promised. Her grave is forgotten, but the world will be changed; a phrase that elsewhere implies the mending of Arda and the new Creation to come.377 There is hope though it is well hidden. Tolkien does not automatically grant saving hope to all of his characters, but there is the barest hint that it is there nonetheless.

Aragorn never explicitly mentions God or a Saviour. But he does refer to his own death as the ‘Doom of Men’. This might be considered in an impersonal sense as ‘fate of men’, except for the capitalisation. The ‘Doom of Men’ is ‘the gift of the One to Man’ as

377 For example, Bombadil’s ‘till the world is mended’ (FR, I, vii, 142) or Galadriel’s ‘until the lands that lie under the wave are lifted up again. There in the willow-meats of Tasarinan we may meet in the Spring’ (RK, VI, vi, 981). It should be noted Shippey considers these lines syntactically ambivalent. ‘Do they mean (a) Arwen will lie there until the world is changed; and now she is utterly forgotten? Or (b) Arwen will lie there until the world is changed, and until she is utterly forgotten?’, Shippey, Author of the Century, p. 178. Such ambivalence would be characteristic of Tolkien’s habit of suggesting rather than stating the fate of humans, which Arwen now shares.
Arwen immediately calls it (*RK*, Appendix A, v, 1063). Aragorn sees his death as a final test and by asserting that humans are not bound for ever to the circles of the world directly echoes the passage on the ‘Doom of Men’ from *The Silmarillion* (*RK*, A, v, 1063; cf. S 35–6). He may not die thinking of his redeemer but his last thoughts are focused on his God. Like Beowulf, we are not told for certain Aragorn is saved but all the evidence indicates as much. As Tolkien comments on Beowulf’s death:

[The poet] does not tell us, saying simply that Beowulf’s spirit departed to whatever judgement awaits such just men, though we may take it that this comment implies that it was not destined to the fiery hell of punishment, being reckoned among the good. (*MC* 39)

Rather than attempt to make the noble monotheists of the pre-Christian world fit into a tightly defined theological system, Tolkien, and in his view the *Beowulf*-poet, felt it was sufficient to reckon the good and the saved as one.

Tolkien does allow glimpses of belief in an afterlife from two cultures not yet discussed. We see a very rare mention of Dwarven beliefs in *The Hobbit* when the dying Thorin tells Bilbo he is going to ‘the halls of waiting to sit beside my fathers, until the world is renewed’ (*H*, xviii, 262). In *The Lord of the Rings* when Théoden lies dying he tells Merry ‘I go to my fathers. And even in their mighty company I shall not now feel ashamed’ (*RK*, V, vi, 842). While this could just represent his feeling of joining them in the royal mounds of Rohan, it could be taken as belief in an afterlife. We are told Théoden’s minstrel Gléowine composed a dirge for him which hints at his salvation in its final lines: ‘Hope he rekindled, and in hope ended; / over death, over dread, over doom lifted / out of loss, out of life, unto long glory’ (*RK*, VI, vi, 976). These lines track a

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378 That these glimpses of religious belief only occur at deathbed scenes reflects the general reticence about religion Tolkien desired for Middle-earth.
progression from hope, through death, to glory. Théoden's life ending 'in hope' is suggestive when viewed in light of the discussion of hope in the tale of Aragorn and Arwen. The passive voice of the second and third lines places Théoden as the recipient of freedom from the doom and loss of the circles of the world. It may echo Ilúvatar's gift to humanity of release from the world (S 35–6). Though Théoden's 'glory' may be merely his earthly fame, it hints at eternal glory, much as 'sōðfēstra dōm' does in Beowulf. It is a glory separated from 'loss', something Théoden has been freed from. While these lines are composed in the vocabulary of pre-Christian heroic verse, they hint at salvation.

No less than the Beowulf-poet, Tolkien does not offer certainty about the fate of the souls of the just and unjust. There are enough suggestions about the fates of such characters as Boromir and Aragorn that it is impossible to see automatic damnation or oblivion as the natural fate of the Children of Ilúvatar.379 'The Monsters and the Critics' indicates how Tolkien felt the Beowulf-poet to have faced the challenge of what to do with virtuous pre-Christians. We can argue he took that poet as his master. In his development of individual providence he attempted to embody in his sub-created world the mixed hope and unknowing of the rapidly de-Christianising world around him, reflecting perhaps his own moments of uncertainty.

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379 They may of course be waiting in Limbo as Shippey suggests, The Road to Middle-earth, pp 229–30. The question of the Elves' salvation is too large a topic to be adequately treated here. See Shippey's The Road to Middle-earth, pp 151–2, 271–2, and his article 'Alias Oves Habeo: The Elves as a Category Problem' in Tom Shippey (ed.), The Shadow-Walkers: Jacob Grimm's Mythology of the Monstrous (Tempe, AZ and Turnhout: Arizona Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies and Brepols, 2005), pp 158–88.
Despite accepting the pressure of circumstance upon every individual and character, Tolkien rejected the determinism of many of his contemporaries. Instead he sketched a sub-creation based on his own theories of character freedom and authorial control. Despite significant differences in tone, both *The Silmarillion* and *The Lord of the Rings* depict a world where characters negotiate their fate through constant interaction with the choices of others and the intentions of their 'author'. Tolkien created a world where external pressures constantly play upon characters, yet they rarely succumb to fatalism, instead insisting on autonomy and responsibility for their actions. He constructed narratives which grow from the free choices of his characters yet are always guided to the conclusion the author requires of them. In this regard his sub-creation was aligned closely with the narrative of salvation Tolkien saw operating in the primary world.
Focalisation and anthropocentrism

Just as Tolkien sought a frame narrative for his sub-creation he also sought an appropriate focalisation for the narrative, a perspective from which the tales could be told.\textsuperscript{380} On occasion he claimed the mythology was ‘Elf-centred’ (\textit{Letters} 237), writing: ‘the legendary \textit{Silmarillion} is peculiar, and differs from all similar things that I know in not being anthropocentric. Its centre of view and interest is not Men but “Elves”’ (\textit{Letters} 147). This perspective is apparent in passages of \textit{The Silmarillion}. It is particularly apparent when humans are introduced and there follows a catalogue of Elvish names for them: the After-born, the Sickly, the Usurpers, the Strangers, the Inscrutable (S 115). Each of these names expresses an Elven perspective and prejudice, and can be compared with the first meeting of Elves and Dwarves. The Elves call them the Stunted People but also Masters of Stone (S 99), revealing both condescension and respect. When the cities of the Dwarves are mentioned, interestingly they are named in both Sindarin and Khuzdul (S 99–100).\textsuperscript{381}

These names create a narrative perspective informed by Dwarven culture.\textsuperscript{382} Perhaps more to the point, Tolkien experimented with different focalisations for the same event in competing versions of certain narratives. He had composed versions of the \textit{Annals of...
Valinor and Annals of Beleriand in Ælfwine’s native Old English in the early 1930s (Shaping 281–93, 338–41). In the 1960s he considered presenting his three versions of the downfall of Númenor (The Fall of Númenor, The Drowning of Anadûnë, and the Akallabêth) as, respectively, from Elvish, human, and mixed Dúnedanic perspectives with attendant differences in the knowledge and languages of the narrator (Sauron 406–7). We should be aware Tolkien also experimented with offering perspectives which were neither human nor Elvish, as we shall see below.

Tolkien would have sympathised with the biologist E. O. Wilson’s warning, ‘No intellectual vice is more crippling than defiantly self-indulgent anthropocentrism.’

Tolkien did not see the world in anthropocentric terms. In Tolkien's creation myth Ilúvatar reveals to the Ainur a vision of the universe their music was forming:

[T]he Ainur saw that it contained things which they had not thought. And they saw with amazement the Children of Ilúvatar, and the habitation that was prepared for them; [...] For the Children of Ilúvatar were conceived by him alone; and they came with the third theme, and were not in the theme which Ilúvatar propounded at the beginning, and none of the Ainur had part in their making. Therefore when they beheld them, the more did they love them, being things other than themselves, strange and free, wherein they saw the mind of Ilúvatar reflected anew, and learned yet a little more of his wisdom, which otherwise had been hidden even from the Ainur. (S 6–7)

On the one hand this apparently endorses a traditional Christian anthropocentrism where the universe is created for the sake of humankind. The passage, however, also questions this assumption. The Ainur had given humanity, or Elves, no thought whatsoever when

they sang the universe; for them it was a work of art with its own aesthetic worth regardless of humanity’s existence. Humans had not been part of Ilúvatar’s original theme. They may have become crucial to the universe’s completion, but apparently they were not essential to its original existence.

The passage also introduces the notion that other beings have value arising precisely from their independent existence and otherness from us. This emphasis on the experience of others is extended in The Lord of the Rings not just to other clearly sentient, and essentially ‘human’, beings but to the non-human world generally. Lawrence Buell’s comments on environmental consciousness seem particularly relevant to this vision of the world.

The effect of environmental consciousness on the perceiving self [...] is most fundamentally to raise the question of the validity of the self as the primary focalizing device for both writer and reader: to make one wonder, for instance, whether the self is as interesting an object of study as we supposed, whether the world would become more interesting if we could see it from the perspective of a wolf, a sparrow, a river, a stone. [...] To get this point across, environmental writing has to be able to imagine nonhuman agents as bona fide partners. To have his sub-creation accurately reflect his vision of the primary world, Tolkien pre-empted Buell’s challenge, imagining plants, animals, and even mountains as capable of dialogue and relationship.

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384 The Ents were implicitly present in the Music by its end though at what point they entered, and their relation to the Children, is uncertain. See (5 41–2).

This ascription of personhood to the natural world, particularly to trees, was not merely a rhetorical strategy employed to advance an environmental agenda. From his non-fiction writing, especially his letters, it is clear that these were the terms Tolkien applied in the primary world. His letters to Christopher Tolkien while the latter was on service in South Africa show, not unexpectedly, that he paid close attention to the trees he encountered day to day, taking great pleasure in their particular characteristics:

At no time do birches look so beautiful: their skin snow-white in the pale yellow sun, and their remaining leaves shining fallow-gold. [...] Leaves are out: the white-grey of the quince, the grey-green of young apple, the full green of hawthorn, the tassels of flower even on the sluggard poplars. 

*(Letters 63, 73)*

Tolkien was not an idle observer of trees as merely an aesthetically pleasing part of the landscape; he had direct experience of arboriculture. A letter to Christopher from November 1944 finds Tolkien bemoaning having to spend two hours grease-banding his apple trees, chastened by the experience of losing half of the previous year's crop to moth *(Letters 102)*. This first-hand experience gives added weight to his emotive defence of trees. Tolkien wrote, 'I am (obviously) much in love with plants and above all trees, and always have been; and I find human maltreatment of them as hard to bear as some find ill-treatment of animals' *(Letters 220)*. Trees for Tolkien were emphatically not inert stores of wood which required no moral consideration. They could suffer 'maltreatment' at the hands of humans, who are morally corrupted on this account. Tolkien was personally offended by a *Daily Telegraph* leader which complained that Forestry Commission plantations possessed an ugly 'Tolkien gloom'. He responded with anger, claiming:

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*386 See also his detailed and impassioned letter on flowers to Amy Ronald (Letters 401–3).*
In all my works I take the part of trees as against all their enemies. Lothlórien is beautiful because there the trees were loved; elsewhere forests are represented as awakening to consciousness of themselves. The Old Forest was hostile to two legged creatures because of the memory of many injuries. (*Letters* 419)\(^{387}\)

Tolkien does not just condemn human mistreatment of trees; he reinterprets the situation away from that of a subject acting upon an object to one where two subjects are in conflict, a conflict in which Tolkien can take a side. He goes on to write: ‘nothing [the Forestry Commission] has done that is stupid compares with the destruction, torture and murder of trees perpetrated by private individuals and minor official bodies’ (*Letters* 420). ‘Torture’ and ‘murder’ are strong terms. Even today, only committed activists are likely to use them to describe human maltreatment of animals, let alone trees. But the terms do more than express the fervency of Tolkien’s views; they imply subjective experience and personhood on the part of trees in our primary world. You kill a thing, you murder a person. Compare Tolkien’s reaction to the poplar felled by his neighbour:

> It was suddenly lopped and mutilated by its owner, I do not know why. It is cut down now, a less barbarous punishment for any crimes it may have been accused of, such as being large and alive. I do not think it had any friends, or any mourners save myself and a pair of owls. (*TL* vi)\(^{388}\)

The idea that trees could have friends is as suggestive as the notion they can feel pain. This passage also extends subjectivity to the owls whom Tolkien felt shared his grief.

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\(^{388}\) Tolkien claimed this poplar was the inspiration for *Leaf by Niggle* (*TL* vi).
Gandalf shows ecocentrism similar to Tolkien’s in his response to Denethor when the latter puts the interests of Gondor above all others:

‘[T]he rule of no realm is mine, neither of Gondor nor any other, great or small. But all worthy things that are in peril as the world now stands, those are my care. And for my part, I shall not wholly fail of my task, though Gondor should perish, if anything passes through this night that can still grow fair or bear fruit and flower again in days to come. For I also am a steward.’ (RK, V, i, 758)

In the context of openness to non-human beings developed in the book, Gandalf’s statement becomes more than just a counterargument to realpolitik; it recognises that Sauron’s threat is to Middle-earth itself, not just the kingdoms of humanity and Elves, and in so doing makes common cause with the natural world.

Tolkien expresses the subjecthood, the personhood, of the natural world by presenting it as animated with a life of its own. It is difficult to simply explain this as the fantasy possible in sub-creation; it is as much a heightened version of the subjectivity Tolkien saw in the natural world. Sub-creation represents a negotiation between imagination and reality; nowhere is this line more blurred than in Tolkien’s depiction of animate nature and non-human subjectivities. We use animate and even anthropomorphic language so frequently to describe the natural world (the wind sighs or hurries, mountains have feet and shoulders)\(^\text{389}\) that they have become dead metaphors. Tolkien breathes life back into them. His descriptions animate the natural world, building to points of heightened animation when the landscape literally comes alive: in the Old Forest, on

Caradhras, in Fangorn Forest. When Tolkien describes woods ‘marching’ or ‘stalking’ away into the distance in *The Fellowship of the Ring* (FR, II, viii, 371, 379) he is foreshadowing the literal march of Fangorn Forest in chapter IV of *The Two Towers*. Unsurprisingly, forests are usually the locations where animate description reaches a peak.\(^{390}\) Forests represent a critical mass of otherness in the complex interactions of the innumerable lives they contain. As Robert Harrison writes:

> In other words, in the religions, mythologies, and literatures of the West, the forest appears as a place where the logic of distinction goes astray. Or where our subjective categories are confounded. Or where perceptions become promiscuous with one another, disclosing latent dimensions of time and consciousness. In the forest the inanimate may suddenly become animate [...] the ordinary gives way to the fabulous.\(^{391}\)

Tolkien actively challenges our subjective categories, between animate and inanimate, between human and non-human. In attempting to make his sub-creation reflect his ecocentric view of the primary world Tolkien redefined a number of literary devices which had previously served to re-inscribe anthropocentrism upon the world: anthropomorphism, personification, the pathetic fallacy. Tolkien looked behind traditional, metaphoric animation and saw subjectivity, consciousness, and personality. In so doing, he questioned the assumptions these literary devices transmit, and suggested the ability of perspectival freedom in a literary sub-creation to redefine readers’ perspectives about Creation itself.

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390 In theory the animate descriptions per chapter could be tabulated. There is, however, the problem of defining an animate description and the subjective judgment of what descriptions reflect the landscape rather than the human character’s perceptions. An unscientific survey indicates the peaks happen, unsurprisingly, in the chapters ‘The Old Forest’ and ‘Treebeard’.

Tolkien and Animate Nature

Just as there are shallow and deep ecologies, there are shallow and deep anthropomorphisms. Shallow anthropomorphism maintains a focus on human subjectivity even while it loans human qualities to the non-human world. The landscape, no matter how physical it is, is a mental landscape, and human psychology is unavoidably privileged over humanity’s environment. With anthropomorphism readers are aware that the natural world only displays these human characteristics because it is being used to reflect the emotional state of the characters and will cease to do so when they move on and mood or symbolism no longer require it. Deep anthropomorphism involves identifying ‘human’ characteristics in the natural world itself: the ability to feel pain and empathy, and the ability to attempt communication. Animals, plants, and even mountains may be ascribed characteristics and actions indicating subjectivity precisely because a significant subjective experience on their part is assumed. Anthropomorphism is anthropocentric while an apprehension of nature’s subjectivities is necessarily decentred and pluralistic. As will be seen, Tolkien both uses anthropomorphism and identifies nature’s subjectivities. There is not a straightforward shift in his writing from an early shallowness to a later depth. Anthropomorphism is for Tolkien a tool to be used rather than a viewpoint and a limitation to be overcome: these non-human subjects, however, become essential to Tolkien’s narrative and interaction with them essential for the development of Tolkien’s characters. This emphasis on subjectivities in the natural world, and the worldview giving rise to it, places Tolkien in opposition to one of the classic authorities on anthropomorphism, John Ruskin.

The anthropomorphic tendency in art and literature was identified as the ‘pathetic fallacy’ by John Ruskin in Vol. III of *Modern Painters* (1856). Ruskin was concerned with ‘the difference between the ordinary, proper and true appearances of things to us; and the extraordinary, or false appearances, when we are under the influence of emotion, or contemplative fancy.’ It should be stressed that Ruskin did not intend the term to be inherently pejorative. He used pathetic (from Greek παθητικός, ‘capable of feeling or emotion’) in the sense of producing an effect upon the emotions. Ruskin called it a fallacy because it created descriptions that were untrue in a literal sense: flowers are not literally spendthrift, the sea is not literally cruel. The pathetic fallacy was a quandary for Ruskin because up to that point truth and beauty, for Ruskin as for Keats, were one:

For, throughout our past reasoning about art, we have always found that nothing could be good or useful, or ultimately pleasurable, which was untrue. But here is something pleasurable in written poetry which is nevertheless untrue. And what is more, if we think over our favourite poetry, we shall find it full of this kind of fallacy, and that we like it all the more for being so.

One strategy of Ruskin’s was to make a distinction between willed and unwilled, therefore irrational, fancy. ‘Poets of the second order’ perceive wrongly because their feelings overcome their perception, while ‘poets of the first order’ perceive rightly in spite of their feelings and are able to see a natural object for what it is while also being aware of the

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394 Ruskin, ‘On the Pathetic Fallacy’, p. 70.
395 *OED*, ‘pathetic’, adj. and adv.
396 Ruskin, ‘On the Pathetic Fallacy’, p. 70.
associations and passions that crowd around it.\textsuperscript{397} That said, Ruskin recognised that ‘however great a man may be, there are always some subjects which ought to throw him off his balance’;\textsuperscript{398} certain experiences will overpower first rate poets as thoroughly as second rate and produce fancy equally ‘untrue’ to everyday perception.

Arguing that a poet’s greatness was in proportion not only to the strength of his passion but also to his government of that passion, Ruskin wrote that there would, however, be ‘always a point beyond which it would be inhuman and monstrous if he pushed this government, and, therefore, a point at which all feverish and wild fancy becomes just and true.’\textsuperscript{399} He offers two examples from the prophet Isaiah, passages of which Tolkien would likely have approved, given his depiction of the Ents. In the first Isaiah is overcome by the scale and wonder of the fall of the kingdom of Assyria: ‘Yea, the fir-trees rejoice at thee, and the cedars of Lebanon, saying “Since thou art gone down to the grave, no feller is come up against us.”’\textsuperscript{400} In the second, Isaiah’s astonishment at the presence of God prompts: ‘The mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.’\textsuperscript{401} Even ascribing voice and movement to natural objects is not illegitimate in Ruskin’s opinion if the emotion involved is strong enough and is expressed honestly. But it is the emotion of the poet, projected onto the physical world, which always remains primary. He could enjoy anthropomorphism as a literary technique for expressing human experience but it did not reveal anything new, or anything truthful, about the natural world. For Tolkien on the other hand, fancy did not need the justification of heightened emotions and an animated depiction of the natural

\textsuperscript{397} Ibid., p. 74.
\textsuperscript{398} Ibid., p. 74.
\textsuperscript{399} Ibid., p. 77.
\textsuperscript{400} Ibid., Isaiah 14:8.
\textsuperscript{401} Ibid., Isaiah 55:12.
world was not a fallacy but the vehicle of profound truth. Tolkien shared Ruskin's concern to see the world aright but for him this was well served by the fantastic.\textsuperscript{402}

Tolkien knew perfectly well how to use shallow anthropomorphism to express a character's emotional state. We have a good example in the black riders' assault on the house at Crickhollow:

[D]arkness lay on Buckland; a mist strayed in the dells and along the river-bank. The house at Crickhollow stood silent. Fatty Bolger opened the door cautiously and peered out. A feeling of fear had been growing on him all day, and he was unable to rest or go to bed: there was a brooding threat in the breathless night-air. As he stared out into the gloom, a black shadow moved under the trees; the gate seemed to open of its own accord [...]. One went to the door, one to the corner of the house on either side; and there they stood as still as the shadows of stones, while night went slowly on. The house and the quiet trees seemed to be waiting breathlessly. \textit{(FR, I, xi, 176)}

There is scarcely any wind and so Crickhollow is literally breathless, but it is only described as such because Fatty Bolger is breathless with fear. The 'breathless night-air' is his perception as much as it is the narrator's. The breathlessness of the house and the trees is undercut by the use of 'seemed', just as the movement of the gate only 'seemed' to be of its own accord. The emotional quality of the air, gate, house and trees is a projection of Fatty Bolger’s growing anxiety, not a quality inherent in the landscape around Crickhollow. But this limited use of anthropomorphism was only part of Tolkien's technique. In \textit{The Lord of the Rings} he redefines it to allow for the expression of the

\textsuperscript{402} Their views of the natural world also essentially differ in that Ruskin's remains anthropocentric while Tolkien's is more ecocentric.
feelings not just of his human (hobbit/Elf/Dwarf) characters but the thoughts and feelings of the natural world itself. The point at which descriptive passages shift from anthropocentric anthropomorphism to something decentred and polyvocal is, unsurprisingly, chapter VI, ‘The Old Forest’.

The use and manner of Tolkien’s anthropomorphism had been foreshadowed early when Sam reports his cousin Hal’s sighting of a ‘Tree-man’ or giant in the Northfarthing; ‘as big as an elm tree, and walking’ (FR, I, ii, 44). This walking tree, possibly an Ent, is the most literally anthropomorphic moment in the first five chapters; it assigns human shape and motion to a tree. There are descriptions of the natural world that imply a degree of animation through their verbal forms, the wind sighs, leaves whisper (FR, I, iii, 77), but these are so commonplace as to seem unimportant unless reread in the larger context of the book’s progression. Bag End ‘seemed sad and gloomy and dishevelled’ (FR, I, iii, 69) when Frodo leaves it but this is primarily his subjective perception of it; again undercut by the use of ‘seemed’. Examples of limited anthropomorphism such as these occur sporadically in chapters II to IV but there is an explosion of them in chapter VI. Animated descriptions of natural features, often multiple examples per page, occur on every page of ‘The Old Forest’, a trend which continues for most of ‘In the House of Tom Bombadil’. This spike in anthropomorphic and animate descriptions coincides with the hobbits’ discovery that trees too have subjective experiences.

The heightened sense of awareness and purposefulness in nature begins on the first page of chapter VI when the hobbits ride through mist, ‘which seemed to open reluctantly before them and close forbiddingly behind them’ (FR, I, vi, 108). The conversation

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403 This privileging of numerous previously unheard voices approaches Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of ‘polyphony’ as much as the freedom from authorial control Tolkien allows his human and Elvish characters. See Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics, pp 6–7.

404 Also ‘gloomy’ may simply refer to light rather than mood, while dishevelled merely means untidy.
between Merry and Pippin before they enter the Old Forest establishes its reputation for being particularly animated:

But the Forest is queer. Everything in it is very much more alive, more aware of what is going on, so to speak [...] And the trees do not like strangers. They watch you. [...] Occasionally the most unfriendly ones may drop a branch, or stick a root out, or grasp at you with a long trailer. But at night things can be most alarming, or so I am told. I have only once or twice been in here after dark, and then only near the hedge. I thought all the trees were whispering to each other, [...] and the branches swayed and groped without any wind. They do say the trees do actually move, and can surround strangers and hem them in. (FR, I, vi, 110)

And yet, as Cynthia Cohen has argued, most of the anthropomorphic description up to the point the hobbits reach the Withywindle valley can be plausibly explained as psychological projection on the hobbits’ part. Merry’s information is largely second-hand: ‘so I am told’, ‘They do say’. His own personal experience occurred at night when emotions could magnify perceptions. As the hobbits pass through the forest the emphasis is as much on the hobbits’ subjective experience of the forest as on the forest itself:

[I]t seemed that the trees became taller, darker, and thicker. [...] For the moment there was no whispering or movement among the branches; but they all got an uncomfortable feeling that they were being watched with disapproval [...]. The feeling steadily grew, until they found themselves looking up quickly, or glancing back over their shoulders, as if they expected a sudden blow. (FR, I, vi, 111)

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As at Crickhollow, Tolkien undermines the immediacy of the trees’ animation through use of the word ‘seemed’: ‘the wood seemed to become more crowded and more watchful than before’ (FR, I, vi, 111). Cohen comments, ‘the trees take no physical action of which trees in the Primary World are incapable’ and ‘the hobbits’ feelings of being watched, attacked, and sabotaged by the trees are entirely imagined.’ These are both arguably overstatements, as will be seen below.

Merry’s account of the Old Forest switches from hearsay to historical fact in its latter part:

In fact long ago they attacked the Hedge: they came and planted themselves right by it, and leaned over it. But the hobbits came and cut down hundreds of trees, and made a great bonfire in the Forest [...]. After that the trees gave up the attack, but they became very unfriendly. There is still a wide bare space not far inside where the bonfire was made. (FR, I, vi, 110)

Although this could describe natural processes, trees germinating and growing to overhang the Hedge, it must have occurred at much too fast a rate to be natural if the hobbits were alarmed enough to consider it an attack. The account is confirmed when the hobbits find the Bonfire Glade itself. Clearings in forests are of course not unusual but Tolkien’s description implies that this particular glade is significant: ‘The leaves were all thicker and greener about the edges of the glade, enclosing it with an almost solid wall. No tree grew there, only rough grass and many tall plants’ (FR, I, vi, 112). The trees around the glade are growing healthily and the ground is not poisoned against plant-life. It would appear the

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406 Cohen, ‘The Unique Representation of Trees’, pp 106–7. For example, Cohen notes that the branch that drops suddenly behind the hobbits could simply be an example of the perfectly natural phenomenon of summer branch drop, p. 108.
only reason the trees have not colonised the glade is a memory of past injury, and a conscious decision on their part. But this is largely a sentience distanced by location in the past. It is the memory of the activity of trees; soon the hobbits will experience this activity directly. They come face to face with an active, natural purposefulness when they try to find their way out of the forest.

Merry had also commented that the paths through the forest 'seem to shift and change from time to time in a queer fashion' (FR, I, vi, 110) and when he cannot find the path to the Bonfire Glade asserts, 'These trees do shift. [...] [T]he path to it seems to have moved away' (FR, I, vi, 111). But Merry has already admitted that he is relying on memory for the location of the path (FR, I, vi, 110). Similarly, the narrator may call the path 'misleading' (FR, I, vi, 114) because it leads south-east down to the Withywindle valley but Merry could only remember that it went 'more or less' in the right direction, that is east-north-east (FR, I, vi, 110). There is nothing geographically unusual about the folds in the ground that run south-east into the valley, however unhelpful they may be. What is unusual is that the flora is always thicker uphill and to the left, where the hobbits wish to go: 'the trees seemed deeper and darker; and always to the left and upwards it was most difficult to find a way, and they were forced to the right and downwards' (FR, I, vi, 114). That the growth is both uphill and to the north is itself odd. It is at this moment that subjective anthropomorphism begins to give way to the objective perception of natural sentience.

407 Cohen compares this passages to Strider leading the hobbits successfully though the Chetwood, 'although left to themselves they would soon have been at a loss' (FR, I, xi, 182). Cohen, 'The Unique Representation of Trees', p. 108.
In the Withywindle valley the hobbits encounter Old Man Willow, a figure anthropomorphised to a greater degree than any of the trees previously encountered. He does two things which the earlier trees have only ‘seemed’ to do: deliberately move and speak. The hobbits’ encounter with Old Man Willow moves quickly from the style of their previous encounters with the trees to something much more immediate and animated: ‘it seemed that they could almost hear words, cool words, saying something about water and sleep. They gave themselves up to the spell and fell fast asleep at the foot of the great grey willow’ (FR, I, vi, 116). Here ‘seemed’ reinforces rather than undermines the willow’s insidious speech; it is taking effect almost without the hobbits realising. Suddenly the willow adds aggressive movement to speech: “The beastly tree threw me in!” [...] Pippin had vanished. The crack by which he had laid himself had closed together, so that not a chink could be seen. Merry was trapped: another crack had closed about his waist’ (FR, I, vi, 117). The willow has revealed a fully formed, and malevolent, subjectivity but it is a subjectivity to which the hobbits cannot fully relate. The speech between the willow and the hobbits is never simply direct: there is no true dialogue. He sings to the hobbits about sleep but the song is never translated into words for the reader. When Frodo kicks the tree in frustration the sound of the willow’s laughter is expressed through the rustle and whisper of leaves (FR, I, vi, 118). When threatened, the willow does not speak aloud to Frodo and Sam but has his words reported via Merry (FR, I, vi, 118). Frodo does not even immediately realise which ‘he’ Merry is referring to when he says ‘He’ll squeeze me in two [...] He says so!’ (FR, I, vi, 118). This failure to understand that the Willow is capable

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408 Bombadil later calls him ‘Willow-man’, which situates him between the natural and the human (FR, I, vii, 126).

409 While Benjamin Saxton has stressed the overcoming of alterity in Tolkien’s works, it should be emphasised that when faced with other subjectivities failures of communication and understanding are as common as successes. See Saxton, ‘Tolkien and Bakhtin’, pp 174–9.
of speech continues; Frodo and Sam make no attempt to talk to the tree but think immediately how to threaten it with axe and fire (FR, I, vi, 118). Though Old Man Willow is another sentient creature, the hobbits relate to him only as a threat, not as a person. Of course hostile encounters are not the ideal locations for mutual understanding, but the mutual incomprehension between the two parties is highlighted by the introduction of a figure who can relate to, and communicate with, both.

Tom Bombadil is immediately distinguished from the hobbits; he does not reply to Merry’s cries with ‘Who? What?’, as Frodo had, but with ‘Old Man Willow? Naught worse than that, eh? That can soon be mended. I know the tune for him. Old grey Willow-man! (FR, I, vi, 120). Tom immediately identifies Old Man Willow by his name, the first character to do so. He already has a relationship with the willow. When Bombadil sings the willow back into quiescence it involves reminding him of his natural state, ‘You should not be waking. Eat earth! Dig deep! Drink water! Go to sleep! (FR, I, vi, 120). But he does not ask the willow to give up his sentience; ‘Go to sleep!’ implies waking at a future date, when there are no hobbits about. Bombadil does admittedly break off a branch and strike the side of the tree with it but the tree does not shudder in response, as it did when Sam kindled a fire beside it. Bombadil’s expectation that the tree will go to sleep implies he has not caused pain or harm.

Later in his own house Bombadil shares with the hobbits some of what he has learned through a long relationship with the Old Forest:

He told them tales of bees and flowers, the ways of trees, and the strange creatures of the Forest, about the evil things and good things, things friendly and things unfriendly, cruel things and kind things [...]. As they

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410 In this respect, they are no different than the hobbits mentioned earlier who reacted to the Old Forest’s ‘attack’ on the Hedge with violence.
listened, they began to understand the lives of the Forest, apart from themselves, indeed to feel themselves as the strangers where all other things were at home. [...] Tom's words laid bare the hearts of trees and their thoughts, which were often dark and strange, and filled with a hatred of things that go free upon the earth, gnawing, biting, breaking, hacking, burning: destroyers and usurpers. (*FR*, I, vii, 129–30)

In this passage Bombadil forces the hobbits to realise that trees have a subjective experience equal to that of the hobbits and begins to move them to understand that they have been treating the forest as an object and must begin to interact with it as a subject. This includes a recognition that to the trees the hobbits are the stranger, the enemy, the Other. Rather than comforting the hobbits with notions that the trees are just like them, he teaches them that the trees' perspectives are often 'dark and strange' and that there is 'pride, and rooted wisdom, and malice' in 'the fathers of the fathers of trees' who remember when they were lords (*FR*, I, vii, 130). Through Bombadil the perspective of the trees of the Old Forest can be uncovered but neither he nor Tolkien suggests that this understanding will lead inevitably to better relations between the hobbits and the trees.

Fangorn Forest, though having much in common with the Old Forest, provides a considerably different encounter with the life of trees. The personhood of other entities reaches its deepest and most fully formed expression with the emergence of the Ents of Fangorn. The two forests, the Old Forest and Fangorn, are literally connected. They form the western and eastern remnants of a single, vast, prehistoric forest (*TT*, III, iv, 468). Entrance to each is preceded by warnings. Celeborn warns the fellowship that 'they should not go too far up [the Entwash], nor risk becoming entangled in the Forest of Fangorn.'
That is a strange land, and is now little known' (FR, I, viii, 374).\(^{411}\) Both forests contain a darkness and malice surviving from the past. Treebeard compares them:

Aye, aye, something like, but much worse. I do not doubt there is some shadow of the Great Darkness lying there still away north; and bad memories are handed down. But there are hollow dales in this land where the Darkness has never been lifted, and the trees are older than I am. (TT, III, iv, 468)

But this leads to the most obvious difference between the Old Forest and Fangorn: there is no unifying force of malice in Fangorn. If there is an individual who represents the trees of Fangorn to the extent Old Man Willow represents the Old Forest, it is Treebeard. The differences between Treebeard and Old Man Willow, however, form the basis of the hobbits' very different encounter with Fangorn's subjectivity.

Treebeard's first act upon entering the narrative is an act of mercy and patience; he does not crush the hobbits (TT, III, iv, 464). His first thought is to try to understand them, what they are, and where they fit into the scheme of creation: 'Ent the earthborn, old as mountains; / Man the mortal, master of horses: / Hm, hm, hm' (TT, III, iv, 464). Treebeard asks questions: he wishes to learn from the experience of others.\(^{412}\) In comparison, Old Man Willow seeks first of all to control, dominate and kill. Fangorn has been built up in advance, for the reader, by Celeborn and Éomer to be a threatening place, and Treebeard admits that it is dangerous, but the hospitality of the Ents challenges an easy identification of Fangorn as uncivilised wilderness. Unlike Old Man Willow who traps Merry and Pippin inside his cracks, Treebeard brings them into his own home, Wellinghall, feeds them at his

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\(^{411}\) Cf. Fatty Bolger's comments regarding the Old Forest (FR, I, v, 108).

\(^{412}\) 'It felt as if something [...] was considering you with the same slow care that it had given to its own inside affairs for endless years' (TT, III, iv, 463).
table and gives them his bed (*TT*, III, iv, 470–1). Treebeard’s hospitality presents nature’s subjectivity not as a threat, but as a space for coexistence, mutual interdependence, and even friendship. Wellinghall itself is both a hall (in Old English literature a microcosm for human civilisation) and a natural feature, possibly carved by the Entwash itself (*TT*, III, iv, 470–1). Ironically, Fangorn, a dark rumour beyond its eaves, becomes a place of refuge for the hobbits and a source of aid for the rest of the company and the kingdom of Rohan.

At the same time Tolkien recognises the difficulty of communication between two subjectivities with such different basic experiences of the world. This is expressed through the difficulty and strangeness of the Entish language. Tolkien captures the interplay between language and perception in the shaping of mental categories. What the hobbits describe quickly, and unthinkingly, as a ‘hill’, Treebeard describes with a name that begins ‘a-lalla-lalla-rumba-kamanda-lind-or-burume’ and goes on for an indefinite length (*TT*, III, iv, 465). As Treebeard says, ‘Hill. Yes that was it. But it is a hasty word for something that has stood here ever since this part of the world was shaped’ (*TT*, III, iv, 466). As well as the highly agglutinative nature of Entish, communication is also hampered by the Entish experience of time, which, given the Ents are practically immortal, is very different to that of humans and hobbits. ‘Do not be hasty’ is Treebeard’s motto, reflecting his longer, slower perspective (*TT*, III, iv, 463). At the Entmoot the hobbits are able to observe communication between Ents for the first time and find it alienating not just because they do not know the language but because Ents have such different assumptions about time:

The Ents began to murmur slowly: first one joined and then another, until they were all chanting together in a long rising and falling rhythm [...].

After a long time (and the chant showed no sign of slackening) [Pippin]

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found himself wondering, since Entish was such an ‘unhasty’ language, whether they had yet got further than Good Morning; and if Treebeard was to call the roll, how many days it would take to sing all their names. (*TT*, III, iv, 480)

Despite this, however, communication is not just possible but successful; they are not so different that there are no shared categories. Merry and Pippin’s report of Saruman’s doings moves Treebeard from concern to action. The conversation between the hobbits and the Ent in Wellinghall leads directly to the Entmoot and a reinvigorated communication and solidarity among the Ents themselves. By listening to and speaking with these representatives of the natural world the hobbits are able to make common cause against an enemy who threatens two sites of civilisation, Edoras and Wellinghall.414

But the Ents should not be reduced to human terms too easily. Though Treebeard lists Ents among the four ‘free peoples’ (along with Elves, Dwarves and humans) the distinction between the Ents and the rest of the natural world is not clear-cut. The adjective ‘free’ indicates that conscious will is the defining characteristic of the free peoples. But as the text amply demonstrates trees too can have a will of their own. Ents are sufficiently similar to trees to be described in ‘treeish’ terms at the Entmoot (*TT*, III, iv, 480) but the description of Treebeard situates Ents somewhere between trees and humans:

[A] large Man-like, almost Troll-like figure, at least fourteen feet high [...]. Whether it was clad in stuff like green and grey bark, or whether that was its hide, was difficult to say. At any rate the arms, at a short distance from the trunk, were not wrinkled, but covered with a brown smooth skin. The large

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414 Despite the Ents’ openness to the subjectivities of others, there is their curious failure to understand the position of the Entwives (*TT*, III, iv, 475–8). This failure to understand, and the promised reconciliation between Ent and Entwife, is charted in Corey Olsen, ‘The Myth of the Ent and the Entwife’, *Tolkien Studies*, 5 (2008), pp 39–53.
feet had seven toes each. The lower part of the long face was covered with a sweeping grey beard, bushy, almost twiggy at the roots, thin and mossy at the ends. (*TT*, III, iv, 463)

This is humanoid but also un-human. Treebeard is ‘Troll-like’, almost human but not quite, and his unusual number of digits suggests the difficulty of assigning him to known categories.\footnote{Trolls were made by Morgoth in mockery of Ents, as Treebeard tells the hobbits later (*TT*, III, iv, 486).} Treebeard himself notes that Ents and trees are not rigidly separated categories, but tend towards each other:

Some of us are still true Ents, and lively enough in our fashion, but many are growing sleepy, going tree-ish, as you might say. Most of the trees are just trees, of course; but many are half awake. Some are quite wide awake, and a few are, well, ah, well getting *Entish*. That is going on all the time. [...] We are tree-herds, we old Ents. [...] Sheep get like shepherd and shepherds like sheep, it is said. [...] It is quicker and closer with trees and Ents, and they walk down the ages together. (*TT*, III, iv, 468)

The intermediate stage between tree and Ent would appear to be occupied by the Huorns, but Merry’s difficulty in categorising them emphasises how problematic a straightforward tripartite division (tree, Huorn, Ent) would be:

It was the Huorns, or so the Ents call them in ‘short language’. Treebeard won’t say much about them, but I think they are Ents that have become almost like trees, at least to look at. [...] it is difficult to see them moving. But they do [...] Suddenly you find that you are in the middle of a wood with great groping trees all around you. They still have voices and can

On the difficulty of categorizing Ents, and Tolkien’s use of the grotesque more generally, see Alison Milbank, *Chesterton and Tolkien as Theologians*, pp 63–4.
speak with the Ents — that is why they are called Huorns, Treebeard says —
but they have become queer and wild. *(TT, III, ix, 565)*

Treebeard declines to define fully what Huorns are. One distinctive characteristic is their voices but, as Treebeard acknowledged earlier, trees have voices.*⁴¹⁶* Huorns are distinguished from trees by their locomotion, but descriptions of Huorns in motion are always vague, ‘walls of impenetrable gloom [...] moving towers of shadow’ *(TT, III, vii, 552)*. Compare this to Ents, whom the Riders of Rohan see ‘striding though the grass. [...] walking like wading herons in their gait’ *(TT, III, viii, 549)*. The result of this apparently deliberate blurring of the boundaries between trees, Huorns, and Ents is a challenge to the distinction between what we would call sentient and non-sentient life.*⁴¹⁷* The liminal position of the Ents makes them ideal representatives not just of the plant kingdom but of the natural world more generally.

Tolkien did not limit his openness towards other subjectivities to trees. Animals, even when they do not express themselves through language, are shown to have subjective experiences of their own. The first non-human character to have an internal dialogue in *The Lord of the Rings* is a fox: ‘A few creatures came and looked at them when the fire had died away. A fox passing through the wood on business of his own stopped several minutes and sniffed. “Hobbits!” he thought. “Well, what next?”’ *(FR, I, iii, 72)*. The animals do not perform any external action which animals do not do in the primary world, and animals, being sentient, of course have ‘business of their own’. The fox’s thoughts are no more

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*¹⁶ *Some of my kin look just like trees now, and need something great to rouse them; and they speak only in whispers. But some of my trees are limb-lithe, and many can talk to me* *(TT, III, iv, 468)*. Huorn may derive from the base KHUG- ‘bark, bay’. See Wayne G. Hammond and Christina Scull, *The Lord of the Rings: A Reader’s Companion* (London: HarperCollins, 2008), p. 425.

inherently incongruous than Gwaihir's speech, for example. Tolkien is merely putting an internal reaction, which would have happened to some degree or another in the Primary World, into terms we, as linguistic animals, can understand. Other animals which show a degree of thought and volition are the birds who serve as spies and messengers, but we are almost never shown their point of view. The exception is the great Eagles.\footnote{This is somewhat complicated by the possibility that the eagles may be Maiar. See \textit{Morgoth} 410-11.} Though their arrivals are often timely, Tolkien is careful not to reduce them to mere plot devices. While Gwaihir provides Gandalf with news, and a means of escape from Orthanc, he also gives Gandalf a very practical reason why he cannot bear him far: 'I was sent to bear tidings not burdens' \textit{(FR, II, ii, 261)}. He has an existence outside his role as messenger and occasional conveyor of burdens, being a physical being who gets tired. That Gandalf reminds him of this at the Black Gate, promising to be lighter this time, demonstrates the relationship that exists between them. Gwaihir's response, 'I would bear you [...] whither you will, even were you made of stone' \textit{(RK, VI, iv, 949)}, indicates he understands the gravity of the present situation, putting the rescue of Frodo before his own comfort or even safety.

The animals which appear most often in \textit{The Lord of the Rings} are in fact horses, and though none of them has the power of speech we are allowed a glimpse of their highly developed subjectivity. Tolkien emphasises this subjectivity by having it grow when horses are related to with care and understanding. As Sam says of Bill the pony, 'That animal can nearly talk [...] and would talk, if he stayed here much longer' \textit{(FR, II, iii, 280)}. Though the horses cannot speak, they have their own language which others can learn, to some extent. When Hasufel and Arod encounter Shadowfax they whinny and neigh. Legolas' later comments on this encapsulate the difficulty of putting aside an anthropocentric focus and seeing things from a non-human position: 'But for the darkness and our own fear I should have guessed that they were beasts wild with some sudden gladness. They spoke as horses
will when they meet a friend that they have long missed’ \((TT, \text{III}, \text{v}, 488)\). That Legolas describes them as ‘speaking’ is telling, but he acknowledges the distorting influence of his own emotional state. He senses an emotion and attitude, but not words or meaning. With Shadowfax and Gandalf the relationship between human and animal is one of equals.\(^{419}\) Shadowfax understands Gandalf’s speech and even something of his plans and needs. Gandalf, for his part, defers to Shadowfax’s greater knowledge of the topography of Rohan:

Gandalf spoke now to Shadowfax, and the horse set off at a good pace \([...]\).

After a little while he turned suddenly, and choosing a place where the banks were lower, he waded the river, and led them away due south \([...]\).

There was no sign of road or track, but Shadowfax did not stray or falter. \((TT, \text{III}, \text{v}, 505; \text{emphasis added})\)

Allowing Gandalf to bring Shadowfax to the Undying Lands may have been soft-heartedness on Tolkien’s part but it also parallels Legolas and Gimli’s refusal to be separated because of the great love between them \((RK, \text{Appendix A, iii, 1081})\), placing Shadowfax on the level of friend rather than possession. Through horses in general and Shadowfax in particular Tolkien implies humans and animals can relate and communicate not just in a hierarchical relationship of affection but in the equality of friendship.

Tolkien did not, however, limit personhood to animal and plant life. There exist in his works natural features with a personality of their own. The most obvious of these is Caradhras. Tolkien, admittedly, leaves open the possibility that the snow storm on Caradhras may be Sauron’s doing \((FR, \text{II, iii, 288})\) but Gimli’s argument is persuasive: ‘Caradhras was called the Cruel, and had an ill name \([...]\) long years ago, when rumour of Sauron had not been heard in these lands’ \((FR, \text{II, iii, 289})\). For all its aggression,

\(^{419}\) ‘You do not ride Shadowfax: he is willing to carry you – or not’ \((TT, \text{III, xi, 596})\).
Caradhras is animated in a relatively understated way. Nothing happens which might not happen with a mountain in the primary world; the company may have encountered snow storms and rock slides through simple misfortune. After the final rockslide the narrator comments, ‘And indeed with that last stroke the malice of the mountain seemed to be expended, as if Caradhras was satisfied that the invaders had been beaten off, and would not dare to return’ (FR, II, iii, 293). Here the demystification of ‘seemed’ and ‘as if’ exists in tension with the personification of ‘malice’ and ‘satisfied’. However, as Aragorn points out, a ‘natural’ explanation does not preclude intention on the part of the mountain:

‘We cannot go further tonight,’ said Boromir. ‘Let those call it the wind who will; there are fell voices on the air; and those stones are aimed at us.’

‘I do call it the wind,’ said Aragorn. ‘But that does not make what you say untrue.’ (FR, II, iii, 289)

The timing and limited area of the snow storm argues against coincidence. As Legolas reports, ‘the drift was little wider than a wall. And on the other side the snow suddenly grows less, while further down it is no more than a white coverlet to cool a hobbit’s toes’ (FR, II, iii, 292). While it is to be expected snow would be deeper further up the mountain, its sudden end below the fellowship’s camp and the clearing of the weather as soon as they turn back implies Caradhras possesses a personality comparable to the Old Forest around the Withywindle. At these two points natural occurrences become overly improbable and begin to imply sentient, but non-human, will, if not quite the presence of Old Man Willow.

Though Caradhras’ hostility has the immediate effect of jeopardising the fellowship’s quest, Caradhras is not easily labelled as a servant, or even ally, of Sauron. Aragorn comments:

There are many evil and unfriendly things in the world that have little love for those that go on two legs, and yet are not in league with Sauron, but
have purposes of their own. Some have been in this world longer than he.

(*TT*, II, iii, 289)

The language of this quote echoes Bombadil describing the Old Forest and serves to parallel the mountain and the forest.\(^{420}\) Both passages acknowledge, especially through the term ‘unfriendly’, the difficulty of communication between the natural world and humanity given the gulf of difference between their subjective experiences. The forest and the mountain resent humanity’s mobility in particular. They cannot move to avoid the unthinking destructiveness of humanity but must perforce engage with humanity. Their anger and hostility are reactions to being treated as commodities rather than persons; most of the Old Forest was felled and Caradhras was mined for mithril.\(^{421}\) They are now forcing anyone who would act upon them to engage with them. Their ‘speech’ is, however, inarticulate. Just as most of Old Man Willow’s speech was inarticulate, Caradhras does not speak to the company in terms they can understand: ‘They heard eerie noises […] shrill cries, and wild howls of laughter’ (*FR*, II, iii, 289). They are more concerned with making themselves heard than in engaging in dialogue. Denied personhood, they now care only to impose their will on their own small domains. To reach this point of empathy with the non-human world, while recognising the difficulty of communication with it, Tolkien had to take from, and reinterpret a long tradition of animate and personified descriptions of the natural world.

\(^{420}\) Cf. Bombadil’s words about ‘things friendly and things unfriendly, cruel things and kind things […] filled with a hatred of things that go free upon the earth’ (*FR*, I, vii, 129–30).

\(^{421}\) ‘Time was when a squirrel could go from tree to tree from what is now the Shire to Dunland west of Isengard’; ‘The lodes lead away north towards Caradhras’ (*FR*, II, ii, 265; II, iv, 317).
Animate Nature: Sources and analogues

Personified and animate nature has been part of the Western literary tradition since its beginning. As William Anderson writes, 'The tree that speaks has a long history in Western literature: from Virgil to the Wood of the Suicides in Dante’s Inferno, from Spenser’s Faery Queen to Paul Valéry’s poem to the Plane, from George Macdonald’s Phantastes [...] to Tolkien’s Lord of the Rings.' To survey the precursors and analogues of Tolkien’s highly animate depiction of the natural world would be a study in its own right. Further, the natural world of Middle-earth is animated by more than a superficial prosopopoeia. Tolkien assumes a real subjectivity and self-awareness behind the animation and accepts this natural subjectivity as equal to that of humanity and independent of human norms of subjective experience. Tolkien’s ecocentrism not only recognises individuals in the natural world alongside ‘human’ individuals but has these two communities meet and fitfully communicate their respective subjective experiences. Tolkien is thus involved in a reinterpretation of previous modes of personification and animation.

This openness to non-human subjectivities may have been influenced by a similar feature in certain medieval literatures, particularly Old English literature and to a lesser extent Old Norse-Icelandic literature. Tolkien’s personification of the natural world also has similarities with more modern writers, though he develops it further. Though it has affinities with the frequent use of personification by the Romantics, nature’s personhood in Tolkien’s work does not however easily fit a Romantic model. It has closer connections with Tolkien’s contemporary in the field of science fiction: Olaf Stapledon. As well as literary comparisons there are useful connections to be drawn with theories prominent in

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Tolkien’s contemporary intellectual environment that would have discouraged the separation of the human and non-human worlds, chief among these being Darwinian evolution. The following is necessarily selective, focusing on literary texts Tolkien is known to have read. Where Tolkien’s direct experience of a text is unknown, influence should not be assumed.

Old English poetry frequently displays a free movement of perspective between human and non-human subjects. One example occurs in the poem *The Whale*, an extract from the *Physiologus*. Here the relief of the sailors who think they have landed on an island is juxtaposed with the malice of the whale that will deliberately submerge itself and drown them:

> When, skilled in deceit, he feels the travellers are securely settled on him, occupying the camp in pleasant weather, then suddenly into the salty waves he daringly goes down with them, the demon of the sea.423

Tolkien worked the scene into his poem ‘Fastitocalon’ where he made the creature a turtle as in the original Greek text. His Fastitocalon smiles as he dives, sharing the whale’s malice.424 A more extensive example is *Christ III* where the poet interprets the portents that surround Christ’s death as the Creation mourning:

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423 *ponne gefeled facnes craeftig*  
*þæt him þa ferend on fæste wuniþþ,  
wc weardian wedres on luste,  
ðonne semninga on sealne wæg  
mid þa noþer niper gewiþþ*  
garseges guæst*, *The Whale* (24–9a) in Krapp and Dobbie (eds), *The Exeter Book*, pp 171–4 at 172. This scene is complicated by the whale’s dual role as both natural creature and, in the guise of Leviathan, as symbol of Satan.  
The voiceless Creation, Earth all-green and the sky above, fearfully felt the
Lord's suffering, and mourned with sorrow, though they were not alive,
when murderers seized the Creator with sinning hands.\(^{425}\)

The sun extinguishes itself, the veil of the temple tears itself, stones fall through fear, the
sea churns in anger, and Earth and Hell render up the bodies and souls of the righteous
dead (1132b–1163a). The empathy of the Creation is contrasted with the blindness and
heartlessness of humanity. While humans, *modblinde* 'blind of heart' and *flintum heardran*
'harder than flints', do not recognise God, trees weep for the crucified Lord: 'Then bloody
tears ran under the bark of many a tree, red and thick.'\(^{426}\) This perplexes the narrator of the
poem, who can only interpret this sudden emotional animation as a miracle, intended by
God to emphasise the shameful insensitivity of humans. The narrator stresses that humans
cannot understand how 'the inanimate Creation, which cannot feel, experienced the Lord's
suffering.'\(^{427}\) They conclude that although the natural world of its nature has no
understanding, it miraculously sensed when Christ departed from his body.\(^{428}\) This poet
could only see expressions of subjectivity by apparently inanimate objects as a miraculous

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\(^{425}\) *Gesegun þa dumhan gesceaf,
eordan ealgrene ond uprodor,
forhte gefelan frean browinga,
ond mid cearam cwiddun, þeah hi cwice næron,
þa hyra scyppend sceafan onfegenon

\(^{426}\) 'Da weard beam monig blodigum tearum / birunnen under rindum, reade ond picce' (1174–5).

\(^{427}\) *þæt asecgan ne magun
foldhuende þurh froð gewit,
hu fela þa onfundun þa gefelan ne magun
dryhtnes browinga, deade gesceafie' (1176b–1179).

\(^{428}\) *þeah hi ferðgewit
of hyra æbelum ægnig ne cuehen,
wendon swa þeah wundrum, þa hyra waldend for
of lichoman' (1183b–1186a).
sign rather than the natural state of Creation. The mourning of the supposedly voiceless world exists to stand in apposition to the human voices raised in scorn against the Lord. This is a limited shift in perspective; the emotions of the physical world are described by an external observer rather than expressed through the Creation speaking in its own voice, or voices. The reader however is not compelled to accept the poet’s explanation.

*The Dream of the Rood*, by contrast, deals with the same topic, the Creation mourning the Crucifixion, but assigns a far greater degree of subjectivity to the natural world.\(^{429}\) It does this by allowing Creation to speak through the voice of the Cross itself. This Cross is not merely a man-made instrument of torture but is still a living tree. It remembers when long ago ‘I was cut down from edge of the wood, severed from my stem. Strong enemies seized me.’\(^{430}\) In the poem the world’s reactions to Christ’s death are witnessed by the Cross whose own reaction is emphasised: ‘I dared not bow or break there, against my Lord’s wish, when I saw the surface of the earth tremble.’\(^{431}\) There is as much, if not more, emphasis on the physical and emotional suffering of the Cross as on Christ’s Passion. The Cross even goes so far as to parallel their suffering: ‘They pierced me through with dark nails, on me the wounds are visible, open malicious wounds [...] They mocked us both together.’\(^{432}\) Like Christ, the Cross bears its own stigmata (7b–9a). The disciples do not take Christ down from the Cross unaided: rather the Cross lowers the body to them: ‘I was oppressed with sorrow, yet humbly bowed to the hands of men, and

\(^{429}\) Tolkien lectured on this poem on several occasions; see Scull and Hammond, *J.R.R. Tolkien Companion and Guide*, i, pp 167, 175.


\(^{431}\) ‘ðær ic þa ne dorste ofer dryhtnes word / bugan oððe berstan, þa ic bǐfan gesiæh / eordan sceatas.’ (35–37a).

\(^{432}\) ‘Purhdrifan hi me mid deorcan neeglum. On me syndon þa dolg gesiæh, / opene inwidhlemmas. [...] / Bysmeredon hie unc butu ætædæere’ (46–48a).
willingly." The implicit parallels with Christ are followed by an explicit parallel with the Blessed Virgin. The Cross sees itself as ‘honoured over the trees of the forest’ just as God’s mother was ‘honoured over all woman kind’. This gives the Cross, a tree, a crucial role in the economy of salvation. As the Cross itself puts it, ‘I opened the true path of life for the speech-bearers.’ While the juxtaposition of human cruelty and natural compassion in Christ III served to emphasise human sinfulness, in The Dream of the Rood the suffering of the Cross parallels and reinforces the compunction of the narrator experiencing the vision, with the emotional experience of each given equal weight.

Very different in style but no less important as sources of Old English poetic subjectivity are the riddles of the Exeter Book. Sometimes the puzzle arises from the narrator’s indirect description of an object but frequently the inanimate object conceals its identity by describing itself. Storms, cuckoos, onions, mail-coats, ploughs, reeds, and Creation itself are all given voices of their own. Several of these speeches are merely descriptive and reveal nothing of the inner life of the object. For example, the swan says: ‘My dress is silent when I step on the earth, or reside at home, or disturb the waters.’ But occasionally the object demonstrates a subjectivity that is more than superficial. The shield describes itself as such:

I am a solitary one, wounded by iron, injured by sword, weary of war-deeds, exhausted by sword-edges. I often see battle, bold ones fighting.

\footnote{\textit{Sare ic weas sorgum gedrefed, hnak ic hwaêre ðam secgum to handa, eaðmod elne mycle.} (59–60a)}

\footnote{\textit{Hweat, me ða geweorðode wuldræs ealdor / ofer holmwegu, […]} Swylce swa he his modor eac. Marian sylfe.[…] geweorðode ofer eall wifæ cynnm’ (90–94).}

\footnote{\textit{ic him lifes weg / rihtne gerymde, reordberendum’} (88b–89).}

\footnote{\textit{Hraegl min swigad, bonne ic hrasan trede, / ofhe ða wic hige. ofhe wado drefe.’} (1–2), Riddle 7 in \textit{Krapp and Dobbie (eds), The Exeter Book}, p. 184.}
don’t expect that comfort or relief will come to me of battle-strife before I wholly perish among men.  
This is not by any stretch a fully developed ecocentrism. Riddle 47 plays upon the bookworm’s lack of consciousness, being fed by words but not understanding them: ‘The thieving guest was not a whit the wiser because he swallowed the words’. But taken as a whole the riddles demonstrate the willingness of the Anglo-Saxon poets Tolkien studied to circulate perspective through multiple personalities, not necessarily human. This perspectival freedom could have reinforced Tolkien’s own tendencies to see natural objects as subjects.

Old Norse-Icelandic literature does not have the same emphasis on subjectivity, but it seems to recognise an essential similarity between trees and humans, and in Snorri’s Edda suggests a shared origin. The sons of Bor discover two trees on the sea shore and from them create the first humans:

The first gave them spirit and life; the second intelligence and motion; the third, form, speech, hearing and sight. They gave them clothes and names.

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437 *Ic eom anhaga iserne wund,  
bille gebennad, beadoweorca sæd,  
ecgum werg. Ofi ic wig seo.  
frecne feohtan. Frafre ne wene,  
þæt me geoc cyme guðgewinnes,  
aþr ic mid ælendum eal forwurðe* (1—6), Riddle 5, ibid., pp 183–4.
438 Though several riddles mention the suffering of the natural world, see especially Riddles 1, 9, 15, 53, ibid., pp 180, 185, 188, 207.
The man was called Ask [Ash-tree] and the woman Embla [elm]; and from them mankind was begotten, who were given a home in Midgárð.\textsuperscript{441} The three stages of development are reminiscent of the continuum between trees, Huorns and Ents. Edward Pettit has suggested the Old Norse word \textit{tremadr}, tree-man, may have helped to inspire the Ents.\textsuperscript{442} The term appears to refer to wooden idols carved into human form. \textit{Trémann} feature in the eddic poem \textit{Hávamál} and in the 14\textsuperscript{th} century \textit{Flateyjarbók}.\textsuperscript{443} In \textit{Ragnars saga Lóbrókar} the retainers of Ogmund the Dane discover a \textit{trémann} forty ells tall and covered in moss, standing guard over the island of Samsø.\textsuperscript{444} Incidentally, Treebeard may take his name from the character Þórir Tréskegg (Thorir Treebeard) in \textit{Orkneyinga saga}.\textsuperscript{445}

As well as the connection between trees and humans, Old Norse-Icelandic literature recognised a certain subjectivity in the natural world in the form of the \textit{landvættir}. The Old Norse \textit{veittir}, cognate with Old English \textit{wight}, ‘being’, are spiritual beings; the \textit{landvættir} in particular being the guardian spirits of a place or country, comparable to the Latin \textit{genii loci}.\textsuperscript{446} One of these \textit{landvættir} may appear in \textit{Hrafnkels saga}. In the saga Hrafnkel's father Hallfred had built a farm at Geitdal. In a dream an unidentified figure appeared to Hallfred and advised him to move west past Lagarfljót. The
same day that Hallfred moved, his old farm was destroyed by a landslide.\textsuperscript{447} The Code of Ulfliot orders sailors approaching Iceland to remove the carved prows from their ships so as not to frighten the \textit{landvættir}.\textsuperscript{448} Humans are evidently capable of communicating with the \textit{landvættir}, for good or ill. They mediate between the human and natural world much as Tom Bombadil and Treebeard do in \textit{The Lord of the Rings}.

Tolkien’s influences were of course not just medieval. More than one scholar has commented on his complicated relationship with the Romantics.\textsuperscript{449} He read Keats and Blake as a young man, and was surprised by the similarities between his emerging mythology and that of Blake.\textsuperscript{450} Tolkien’s engagement with Coleridge in ‘On Fairy-stories’ has already been addressed (see \textit{OFS} 59–66). He expressed disapproval of Wordsworth’s poetry (\textit{Letters} 353), but, as can be seen from Tolkien’s relationship with Shakespeare, disapproval did not preclude interest and influence.\textsuperscript{451} In ‘On Fairy-stories’ Tolkien connects recovery of a clear view of natural objects as things independent of us with a renewal of our own health (\textit{OFS} 67). This has similarities with H.W. Piper’s interpretation of Wordsworth’s understanding of imagination:

[Imagination is] the power to recognize, in his contemplation of them, the life of natural objects and hence to enter into a relationship with them in


\textsuperscript{448} Grimm, \textit{Teutonic Mythology}, ii, p. 877.


which all their qualities as living things could be experienced – qualities of character, emotional significance and moral reassurance.452

In *Tintern Abbey* Wordsworth writes, ‘with an eye made quiet by the power / Of harmony, and the deep power of joy, / We see into the life of things’ (48–50).453 One difficulty with studying the depiction of nature’s personhood in Wordsworth’s poetry, however, is the problem of separating nature and natural objects as subjects in their own right from nature as the conduit of a transcendent subjectivity. As Geoffrey Hartman puts it, ‘In certain Romantic poems we find landscape playing a dual role: the poet represents it as animated both by its own and by a transcendent spirit.’454 In Wordsworth nature is charged with a pantheistic life force, ‘A motion and a spirit that impels / All thinking things, all objects of all thought, / And rolls through all things’,455 yet at the same time, the Wanderer in *The Excursion* teaches the Solitary:

[...] living Things, and Things inanimate,

Do speak, at Heaven’s command, to eye and ear,

And speak to social Reason’s inner sense,

With inarticulate language.456

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455 *Tintern Abbey* (101–3).

This implicitly recognises a subject behind the voice, but by making it dependent on ‘Heaven’s command’ Wordsworth blurs the distinction between the natural subject and the transcendent subject animating it.\(^{457}\) That its language is inarticulate, possibly unspoken, problematises a sense of the natural world as subject. Either its language cannot be understood by the human subject or is only heard through the filter of humanity’s language.

William Blake is not easily categorised and is hardly a nature poet in the same sense as Wordsworth. Yet, despite his Idealist or even Gnostic reputation,\(^{458}\) Blake was not insensitive to the rights of the natural world. In ‘Auguries of Innocence’ he articulates the suffering of animals into a cry for justice on Creation’s part:

\begin{quote}
A Robin Red breast in a Cage

Puts all Heaven in a Rage [...]

A Horse misused upon the Road

Calls to Heaven for Human blood.\(^{459}\)
\end{quote}

Creation as a whole has sympathy for the suffering of animals even if humanity does not. More than this, animal suffering is placed on an equal footing with that of the most innocent humans. The abused horse cries to heaven just as Abel’s blood does in Genesis 4:10. In ‘The Fly’ Blake gives the fly’s life as much significance as his own:

\begin{quote}
Am not I

A fly like thee?

Or art not thou
\end{quote}

\(^{457}\) In this regard the poem is similar to Christ III, discussed above.


A man like me?
For I dance
And drink and sing,
Till some blind hand
Shall brush my wing.\textsuperscript{460}

This is not just a projection of Blake's own sense of mortality onto the fly, but a recognition that their respective experiences of the universe are fundamentally finite, and therefore similar. As well as raising the possibility of natural subjectivity, this poem has affinities with Tolkien's preoccupation with the experience of mortality by different species.

The Romantic whose writing most resembles Tolkien's, however, is John Clare. In 'The Lament of Swordy Well' Clare allows the landscape to directly express its grievances against its human exploiters just as Tolkien allows the trees of the Old Forest and Fangorn to express their anger:

\begin{quote}
Im swordy well a piece of land
Thats fell upon the town
Who worked me till I couldnt stand
And crush me now Im down [...] 
Though Im no man yet any wrong
Some sort of right may seek
And I am glad if een a song
Gives me the room to speak
Ive got among such grubbing gear
And such a hungry pack
\end{quote}

If I brought harvest twice a year
They’d bring me nothing back. (21-4, 41-8)\footnote{1971, 1979.1}

This is not a displaced critique of agricultural poverty or a lament that the landscape is no longer picturesque. It directly voices the experiences that only the land itself can have, implicitly recognising a subjectivity innate to the landscape.

Olaf Stapledon, an author contemporary with, and read by, Tolkien is also relevant to the topic of non-human subjectivities. Henry Gee has plausibly argued that a major source for the Ents is the ‘plant-men’ of Stapledon’s *Star Maker* (1937).\footnote{Henry Gee, *The Science of Middle-earth*, p. 89. Tolkien also read Stapledon’s *Last Men in London* (1932); see *Sauron*, pp 175, 215. Stapledon’s *Sirius* (1944), about a dog with human levels of intelligence, was published too late to have fundamentally influenced *The Lord of the Rings*.} On a world where vegetable and animal functions have not separated into distinct organic types, the narrator encounters plant-animals, who look equally like vegetation and animals. ‘They had a definite number of limbs and a definite form of body; but all their skin was green, and they bore here or there, according to their species, great masses of foliage.’\footnote{Olaf Stapledon, *Star Maker* (London: Millennium, 1999), p. 113.}

The most intelligent, and most ‘human’, of these organisms are more grotesque than the Ents but occupy the same position between plants and homo sapiens. These plant-men are erect and mobile yet have foliage growing from their heads. They also differ from most terrestrial animals by not being bilaterally symmetrical:

Three many-faceted eyes looked out from under the crest. Beneath these were three arm-like manipulatory limbs, green and serpentine, branching at their extremities. The slender trunk, pliable, encased in hard rings which

\footnote{‘The Lament of Swordy Well’, (21-4, 41-8) in Eric Robinson and David Powell (eds), *John Clare*, Oxford Authors (Oxford: OUP, 1984), pp 147–52 at 147–8. This edition retains Clare’s erratic punctuation, spelling, and capitalisation. Clare’s posthumous reputation was ‘fitful’ but began to revive in the early twentieth century with a critical edition of his poems published in 1935, ibid., pp xix, 505. I have been unable to establish whether Tolkien directly encountered Clare’s work.}

\footnote{This edition retains Clare’s erratic punctuation, spelling, and capitalisation. Clare’s posthumous reputation was ‘fitful’ but began to revive in the early twentieth century with a critical edition of his poems published in 1935, ibid., pp xix, 505. I have been unable to establish whether Tolkien directly encountered Clare’s work.}
slid into one another as the body bowed, was divided into three legs for locomotion.464

The plant-men are nocturnal, spending the days photosynthesising in a trance-like state. This results in a tension between their animal and vegetative natures, reminiscent of the Ents' tendency to become 'treeish'. The plant-men lurch from constant activity fuelled by artificial photosynthesis to passivity and unconsciousness.465 Gradually they give less and less time to animal pursuits and lose their animal intelligence, becoming trees. Their life support systems fail through lack of maintenance, and these 'trees' sicken and die.466 Like the Ents, the plant-men are a species doomed to extinction.

These parallels with the Ents are not Stapledon's only possible influence on Tolkien's eco-centrism. Near the end of the book, having encountered a multitude of species with above-human intelligence, the narrator makes a startling discovery: stars are sentient. Stars which had been girdled with inhabited planets had begun to explode into novas or devastate their planets with fiery plumes.467 The Society of Worlds, the telepathic union of all intelligent species, gradually comes to realise that stars are acting defensively and finally succeeds in establishing telepathic contact.468 Without distorting a star's physical make up, Stapledon's narrator is able to reinterpret it in biological terms, saying, 'Stars are best regarded as living organisms, but organisms which are physiologically and psychologically of a very peculiar kind.'469 The outer and middle layers of a star are described as 'tissues' woven from currents of incandescent gases. These gaseous tissues

464 Ibid., p. 116.
465 Ibid., p. 120. Stapledon's critique of the industrialised society of the plant-men parallels Tolkien's own concern for the psychological and spiritual effects of industrialisation.
466 Ibid., pp120–1.
467 Ibid., pp 183–4.
468 Ibid., pp 186–7.
469 Ibid., p. 187.
maintain the star's consciousness by intercepting part of the energy that escapes from the interior of the star. The innermost of the 'vital layers' is described as a kind of digestive apparatus which transmutes the crude radiation of the star's core into forms the star can use for the maintenance of its life. Outside the digestive area is a 'co-ordinating layer', which the narrator suggests 'may be thought of as the star's brain.' The outermost layers, including the corona, respond to the stimuli coming from the star's cosmic environment.

Just as Tolkien's trees are first and foremost trees, described with scientific accuracy, these stars are, in physical terms, the stars of our primary world. The difference between Tolkien and Stapledon is that Stapledon explains exactly how these sentient stars work, while Tolkien seems deliberately to blur the nature of Huoms. This reflects a generic difference between science fiction and fantasy. The innovation of Stapledon, and Tolkien, is to imagine these beings from within their own subjective experience. Like Tolkien, Stapledon acknowledges the difficulty of understanding another creature's consciousness when that creature has a vastly different subjective experience. Stapledon's narrator acknowledges that the Society of Worlds had to accustom themselves to an entirely new way of regarding physical events. They could not distinguish between the star's normal physical movement as studied by science and the voluntary motor activity of the star. The narrator comes to understand that stars are 'aware' of the gravitational influence of the whole galaxy, especially their near neighbours:

To these [gravitational] influences the star responds by voluntary movement, which to the astronomers of the little minded worlds seems

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470 Ibid.
471 Ibid., p. 188.
472 Ibid.
purely mechanical; but the star itself unquestioningly and rightly feels this movement to be the freely willed expression of its own psychological nature.473 Communication and understanding brings the ‘war’ between the stars and the planets to an end and eventually leads to a symbiotic society of stars and planetary systems.474 Despite using different discourses, science fiction and fantasy, Stapledon and Tolkien were engaging in very similar speculations about the possibility of rational subjectivity under very different conditions of existence.475 Neither imposed ‘human’ consciousness on a non-human subject but attempted to draw out the different consciousnesses these non-human subjects would possess given their different physical make up.476

More difficult to categorise than Tolkien’s literary forebears, but equally important, is Tolkien’s contemporary intellectual environment. Tolkien predated, and to a degree pre-empted, the modern environmental movement.477 But there were already intellectual currents that challenged a firm distinction between humanity and the rest of the natural world. Perhaps the most influential of these was Darwin’s theory of evolution. As argued earlier, Tolkien was well aware of modern science. That he did not choose to make evolution an explicit element of his mythology does not necessarily mean that he was ignorant of or unaffected by the paradigm shift Darwin had effected in the natural sciences

473 Ibid.
474 Ibid., p. 198.
475 Stapledon is engaging with the long tradition of the personification of celestial bodies. Among his contemporaries, see the star Ramandu’s comment that a ball of flaming gas is ‘not what a star is but only what it is made of’ in C.S. Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* in *The Chronicles of Narnia* (London: HarperCollins, 2001), pp 419–541 at 522.
476 There is the complication that Elves taught Ents to speak and learned their ‘tree-talk’ (*TT*, III, iv, 468), suggesting a sharing of mental categories. The language exchange between Ents and Elves requires further consideration. I hope to pursue this in later work.
and human self-knowledge more generally. In fact, there are noticeable similarities between Darwinian evolution and Tolkien’s own field of comparative philology. Darwin himself described his theory using terms reminiscent of comparative philology:

I look at the natural geological record, as a history of the world imperfectly kept, and written in a changing dialect [...]. Each word of the slowly-changing language, in which the history is supposed to be written, being more or less different in the interrupted succession of chapters, may represent the apparently abruptly changed forms of life, entombed in our consecutive, but widely separated, formations.

Darwin was himself interested in subjectivity in the natural world. His notebooks contain questions to himself such as ‘have plants any notion of cause & effect [?]’ and ‘Has the oyster necessary notion of space [?]’. But Darwin’s relevance arises mainly from two insights: first, that species are not stable categories and, second, that humanity exists in, rather than apart from, the natural order.

While Darwin recognised that species boundaries approximately correspond to the fertility or sterility of cross-breeds, The Origin of Species indicates a common origin for most, if not all, species. In the last paragraph of the book Darwin suggested all life evolved from a few original forms, or even from one. In the Darwinian view, every living organism exists in a continuum which encompasses every other organism that lives,

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478 Though he does mention extinctions (FR, II, vi, 460). Tolkien hated the use of evolution to buttress the idea of inevitable ‘progress’ and so satirised it somewhat in Mythopoeia (TL 89).


481 Ibid., pp 199–225.

482 Ibid. p. 396.
or has ever lived. The unspoken implication of this is that humanity is also part of this continuum. Darwin was unprepared to make this explicit in 1859 but by the time he published *The Descent of Man* in 1871 he felt sufficiently confident to draw such a conclusion. This had the effect of both naturalising humanity and humanising other life forms. While Darwin recognised the admittedly great differences between humanity and other animals, he was clear that these were differences of degree rather than of kind:

[T]he senses and intuitions, the various emotions and faculties, such as love, memory, attention, curiosity, imitation, reason, etc., of which man boasts, may be found in an incipient, or even sometimes in a well-developed condition, in the lower animals.\(^4\)

Darwin's discoveries are by no means the only basis for modern ecocentric thinking, but they cannot but exert a profound influence in virtually any modern attempt to relate humanity to the natural world. Even if Tolkien never read him, Darwin's legacy is part of the mental furniture of modern humanity.

The potential impact of Darwinian evolution on an environmentally minded and deeply religious thinker like Tolkien can perhaps be developed through a comparison with another thinker equally concerned with both the physical world and his own religious faith; the Jesuit, palaeontologist, and theologian Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881–1955). Most of de Chardin's work was published posthumously and too late to have influenced Tolkien. Therefore, he serves not as a possible source but as an example of a slightly older contemporary faced with similar intellectual challenges. De Chardin sought not just to reconcile evolution with Christian theology but also to express theology in distinctly evolutionary terms. One of his central beliefs is that anything that has evolved was already

present *in potentia* in the state from which it evolved. He claimed that a coherent perspective on the world required that life be seen as assuming a ‘pre-life’ as far back as the eye can see:

In the world, nothing could ever burst forth as final across the different thresholds successively traversed by evolution (however critical they be) which has not already existed on earth from the first moment at which it was possible, it would never have begun later.\(^484\)

The corollary of this view is that non-human life, or even inorganic matter, must possess some form of pre-consciousness, or some form of internality that could evolve into consciousness. De Chardin claimed, ‘we have every reason to think that in animals too a certain inwardness exists, approximately proportional to the development of their brains. So let us attempt to classify living beings by their degree of “cerebrelisation”’.\(^485\) The notions of subjectivity among animals and a ‘pre-life’ in the inorganic world are compatible with Tolkien’s thought but the idea of progression and development in the term ‘cerebrelisation’ marks the point where their interests diverge.

All of de Chardin’s thought is inherently teleological. The evolution of more complex forms eventually capable of intelligence and self-reflection is part of an evolutionary progression involving the whole universe. The physical world (the lithosphere) inevitably produces organic life (the biosphere) and eventually conscious life (the noosphere).\(^486\) Conscious life is the tip of an arrow pointing to a final cosmological union, the Omega Point, at which the created universe will reach perfection and union with


\(^{485}\) Ibid., p. 144.

\(^{486}\) Ibid., p. 181.
This relentlessly optimistic vision of the universe where humanity must infallibly reach its cosmological goal is clearly different from Tolkien’s understanding of history, whether terrestrial or cosmic. Though Tolkien defended the importance of a ‘happy ending’ to fairy-stories, his concept of *eucatastrophe*, the sudden joyous turn, has as its essential quality that it is not guaranteed and cannot be predicted (*OFS* 75–6). Tolkien did not subscribe to a pseudo-Darwinian trust in progress. Instead, as can be seen from hints of the Ents’ eventual extinction, Tolkien was more closely allied with the sombre face of Darwinism, the knowledge that the vast majority of all things that have lived on this earth are now extinct. Mortality is, after all, the subjective experience common to all life. Nevertheless, Tolkien, like de Chardin, believed in the new heaven and new earth to come. Their end goals meet by different routes, a difference based upon personality and focus rather than an essential difference of belief.

Tolkien’s openness to non-human subjective experiences may owe something to literary and cultural predecessors but Tolkien goes further than any of them by suggesting that these subjectivities, which we may never be able to understand, are as valid as our own. The animated nature of his world is not a reflection of the emotions of his ‘human’ characters, nor can their subjective experiences always be assimilated to human terms. Instead they challenge us to reconsider our literary use of personification and focalisation and the distinctions we draw between the human and non-human, the animate and inanimate. Tolkien used a sub-creation to convey a clearer representation of the primary world as he saw it.

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487 Ibid., pp 224ff.

488 Cf. Tolkien’s claim that the real theme of *The Lord of the Rings* was ‘Death and Immortality’ (*Letters* 246).
Mediating other subjects

John Clute and John Grant comment that if fantastic literature has a purpose other than entertainment, it is to force readers to question their perceptions of reality. Tolkien’s texts require a reassessment of our perception of the world. More specifically, they challenge readers to relate not just to other people but to all other beings on different terms. Tolkien primarily exposes us to non-human subjectivities through the mediation of two figures, Tom Bombadil and Treebeard. Through the information they give, their relationship to the natural world, and their own ontological status, Bombadil and the Ents break down the artificial divisions between the human and non-human worlds, and allow these two poles of subjective experience to communicate with one another on terms approaching equality. This openness to the subjective experiences of others is not limited to obviously sentient species but is encouraged between all creatures capable of interiority. An appreciation of the inherent value and rights of the natural world is as important as empathy and solidarity between the different races of Middle-earth. This is not to claim that The Lord of the Rings is an overtly didactic work. Tolkien offers a vision of a world in which receptiveness to the experiences of others has moral and practical benefits but the applicability of the text still lies in the freedom of the reader.

In ‘On Fairy-stories’ Tolkien emphasised ‘Recovery’ as one of the essential qualities of fairy-stories, and implicitly of fantasy in general:

Recovery (which includes return and renewal of health) is a re-gaining – a regaining of a clear view. I do not say ‘seeing things as they are’ and involve myself with the philosophers, though I might venture to say

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‘seeing things as we are (or were) meant to see them’ – as things apart from ourselves. *<em>OFS* 67*

We have grown unable to see things clearly because of ‘possessiveness’ and ‘appropriation’ (<em>OFS* 67*). The objects we encounter in the world have been reduced to possessions through an arrogance based on familiarity. Tolkien argues that having been attracted to these objects by their beauty we have laid claim to them and locked them in a hoard where, having acquired them, we cease to look at them (<em>OFS* 67*). He tracks a progressive descent, arguing that having been attracted to the beauty of an object we descend to appropriating it and cease to notice its beauty any more. The qualities that drew us to the object in the first place can only be appreciated while the object is separate from and independent of us. When we dominate an object and cease to see it as external from ourselves we diminish ourselves as well as our experience of the world.  

According to Tolkien fantasy offers an antidote to this. Building on his prior claim, central to his theory of fantasy, that ‘Fantasy is founded upon the hard recognition that things are so in the world as it appears under the sun’, Tolkien asserts, ‘Fantasy is made out of the Primary World’ (<em>OFS* 65*, 68*). Writers of fantasy must engage directly with the world, with objects external to themselves. Fantasy does not emerge from the writer’s independent mind; it comes from careful observation of the singularity and strangeness of objects experienced in the primary world. In so doing it engenders a respect for things which exist independently of us: ‘By the forging of Gram cold iron was revealed; by the making of Pegasus horses were ennobled; in the Trees of the Sun and Moon root and stock, flower and fruit are manifested in glory’ (<em>OFS* 68*). This recovery of vision is granted not only to the writer of fantasy but to the reader. We share in their appreciation of

<sup>490</sup> This applies to objects we make ourselves, as in Fëanor’s relationship with the Silmarils (<em>S* 83–4*).
the external world, and especially of the quotidian world which we would otherwise not dignify with consideration. Tolkien claimed, ‘It was in fairy-stories that I first divined the potency of the words, and the wonder of the things, such as stone, and wood, and iron; tree and grass; house and fire; bread and wine’ (*OFS* 69). Fantasy ought to instil humility in us as perceiving subjects so that we see the various parts of the external world as existing in their own right, free from our observation.

Though Tolkien is specifically addressing ‘things’, his thought can be applied to any existence external to ourselves, whether subject or object. The domination of other subjects, their reduction to objects, has been a major concern of twentieth-century philosophical and literary thought, from Simone Weil to Edward Said.\(^{491}\) This is related to the critical term ‘the Other’.\(^{492}\) To apply such a term to Tolkien’s thought is not to subject him to modern critical fashion as he used this exact term when discussing the relationship of observing subject to observed object. Writing about Tom Bombadil Tolkien described him as ‘a particular embodying of pure (real) natural science: the spirit that desires knowledge of other things, their history and nature, because they are ‘other’ and wholly independent of the enquiring mind’ (*Letters* 192, Tolkien’s emphasis). While the term is given various meanings by the different writers who use it, it can be broadly defined as ‘one pole of the relationship between a subject and a person or thing defined or constituted as a non-self that is different or other.’\(^{493}\) The Other can be a threatening or a reassuring figure. It can challenge the autonomy and freedom of the subject, forcing us to engage in relationships which always contain the possibility of antagonism, competition, and


\(^{492}\) This term is problematic in its application. In practical terms, anything that is not ‘I’ could be called the Other. As such, the term must be carefully delimited when used if overgeneralisation is to be avoided. This is not even to attempt to address the use of the term ‘Other’ in Lacanian psychoanalysis.

domination. But the Other can also be encountered with positive results for the subject. The Other challenges our self-assurance and our isolation, and in so doing makes possible relationships constructed upon compassion, respect, and solidarity. The Other does not simply act upon us as passive subjects; we are inevitably also doing things to the Other. Some theorists, particularly in postcolonial theory, stress our construction of the Other through a process of ‘othering’. This constructed Other, far from being a subject in its own right, is reduced to the status of the passive object of our subjective vision and domination. Although expressed in different terms, this is essentially Tolkien’s idea of the Other as possession.

Perhaps nothing has been subjected to the process of ‘othering’ more than the natural world. Dominated physically by agriculture and industry, it has also been dominated discursively through literature, scientific writing and environmental non-fiction. Whether idealised in the mode of the pastoral or held in contempt as the opposite of civilisation and culture, nature has been treated as something for humanity, and human society, to define itself against. As Kate Soper puts it:

Employed as a metaphysical concept, [...] ‘nature’ is the concept through which humanity thinks its difference and specificity. It is the concept of the non-human, even if [...] the absoluteness of the humanity-nature demarcation has been disputed [...]. But in a formal sense, the logic of ‘nature’ as that which is opposed to the ‘human’ or the ‘cultural’ is

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494 Jean-Paul Sartre is perhaps the best example of this misanthropic attitude towards the Other, concisely expressed in the famous line ‘Hell is ... other people.’ Huis Clos in Jean-Paul Sartre, Huis Clos and Other Plays, trans Kitty Black and Stuart Gilbert (London: Penguin, 2000) pp 177–223 at 223.

495 See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (eds.), Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), pp 271–316. This involves a more precise definition of the Other as a figure of denigration and domination used to define ourselves favourably by contrast.
presupposed to any debates about the interpretations to be placed on the
distinction and the content to be given to the ideas. One is invoking the
metaphysical concept in the very posing of the question of humanity’s
relation to nature. 496

Given this ‘othering’ of the natural world, it becomes philosophically and ethically
important for environmentally-conscious writers such as Tolkien to challenge this process
by stressing the interrelation and interdependence of humanity and the natural world. At
the same time Tolkien’s strong sense of the independent purpose of the non-human
universe required recognising nature and its constituent parts as independent subjects equal
to the humans carrying out this ‘othering’.

In his fiction Tolkien invites his readers to come to see those Others we have
ignored or abused as subjects in their own right. To adopt the terminology of Martin
Buber, Tolkien moves us from an I-It relationship with the natural world to an I-Thou
relationship. Through the lens of Tolkien’s fantasy our encounter with the natural world
changes from that of seeing and experiencing a passive object to relating to another
subject. Buber held that an I-Thou relationship could exist not only between human
subjects, or between a human and the Divine subject, but between human subjects and
such non-human subjects as animals and trees:

I consider a tree. I can look at it as a picture [...]. I can classify it in a
species and study it as a type in its structure and mode of life. [...] In all
this the tree remains my object, occupies space and time, and has its nature
and constitution. It can, however, also come about, if I have both will and

496 Kate Soper, What is Nature? (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), p. 155. Soper is clear that this ‘metaphysical’
categorisation of nature is one option among several, including ‘realist’ and ‘lay’ ideas of nature; see ibid.,
pp 155–6.
grace, that in considering the tree I become bound up in relation to it. The tree is now no longer it.\textsuperscript{497} Tolkien brings about a similar shift in perspective in \textit{The Lord of the Rings}, principally through Tom Bombadil and the Ents as they mediate the subjectivity of the non-human world for us.

Bombadil’s lack of need for ownership makes him particularly open to the subjectivity of others.\textsuperscript{498} He may be ‘Master of wood, water, and hill’ (\textit{FR}, I, vii, 124) but he does not own them. He may recover treasure from the barrow but he then leaves it ‘free to all finders, birds, beasts, Elves or Men, and all kindly creatures’ (\textit{FR}, I, viii, 145), a gesture of generosity that extends to the non-human as well as the human world.\textsuperscript{499} His attitude gives him direct experience of the lives and thoughts of the non-human world which allows him to relate those subjective experiences back to the hobbits. Bombadil can lay bare the hearts of trees because he has engaged with them as partners to be learned from rather than objects to be used. He recognizes their right to exist, for their own sake, and for their place in an interactive whole. In a letter Tolkien implied Bombadil’s pacifism in the War of the Ring and disengagement from the wider matters of Middle-earth ought to reinforce the depiction of his interest in and concern for other creatures:

[I]f you have [...] renounced control, and take your delight in things for themselves without reference to yourself, watching, observing, and to some extent knowing, then the question of the rights and wrongs of power and control might become utterly meaningless to you, and the means of power quite valueless. (\textit{Letters} 179)


\textsuperscript{498} Goldberry comments on the ‘burden’ of treating objects as possessions (\textit{FR}, I, vii, 124).

\textsuperscript{499} While he does take a broach he does so only in order to give it away again immediately as a gift to Goldberry (\textit{FR}, I, viii, 145).
Bombadil is presented as tremendously powerful but is devoid of the will to power.\footnote{Bombadil's curious position – of being something of a guiding force in the natural world and yet identifying with it and seeking to care for it – is reminiscent of several Saints' Lives. The most obvious example is Francis of Assisi who tamed the wolf of Gubbio with his words and preached to the birds, but there are similar stories told about Anthony of Egypt, the Irish saints Ciarán and Kevin, and perhaps most relevant to Tolkien, the Anglo-Saxon Guthlac. These individuals were accorded this trust, and therefore governance in Creation, as their sanctity and humility had restored them to their proper relationship with Creation similar to that enjoyed by Adam in Eden. See David Farmer, \textit{The Oxford Dictionary of Saints}, 5\textsuperscript{th} ed. (Oxford: OUP, 2004), pp 28, 30, 107, 204.} It is not so much that he has power over other things, though he does, but that other things do not have power over him, his immunity to the Ring being the clearest expression of this.\footnote{‘Say rather that the Ring has no power over him. He is his own master’ (\textit{FR}, II, ii, 265).} Bombadil is practically incapable of entering into an I-It relationship with anything. Even when he uses the power of his song to rescue the hobbits from Old Man Willow and the Barrow-wight he knows, as if from direct experience, the state they ought to be in. He knows that Old Man Willow would normally be eating earth and drinking water (\textit{FR}, I, vi, 120) and that ‘the barren lands far beyond the mountains’ are the proper home of the Barrow-wights (\textit{FR}, I, viii, 142). Bombadil is primarily a mentor to the hobbits, not an actor in the great events of the end of the Third Age. This leaves him to perform the role of exemplar of an attitude towards the world. He trusts the hobbits to apply what they have learned from him, allowing them the same freedom Tolkien allows his readers.

The encounter with Tom Bombadil then can be interpreted as a rite of passage for the hobbits. Bombadil teaches them lore, and an attitude, before sending them on a testing journey through the Barrow-downs with the fairy-tale-like injunction to pass barrows only on their west side (\textit{FR}, I, vii, 134), perhaps a reference to the traditional advice not to travel widdershins. He also gives Frodo the opportunity to prove himself in the barrow. Just as Gandalf had allowed Bilbo to grow in stature by leaving him and the Dwarves to cross Mirkwood on their own, Bombadil allows the hobbits to face the Barrow-downs...
alone before returning to assist them once Frodo has made the crucial decision to stay and face the Barrow-wight rather than abandon his friends. Bombadil also arms the hobbits for the rest of their journey. Alison Milbank interprets Bombadil’s role in the book to be that of a gift-giver (the fairy-godmother or old beggar who assists the protagonist in a Proppian schemata of a folktale).\textsuperscript{502} The gift he gives the hobbits is not just the swords, however, but also knowledge: of the Old Forest they have just passed through, the Barrow-downs they will soon enter, and the distant history of Middle-earth, including Bombadil’s place in it (\textit{FR}, I, vii, 129–31). They must understand the journey they have undertaken walks through the history of Middle-earth as much as its physical landscape. That history is the product of more than Elves, men, and hobbits. Bombadil’s fascination with things for their own sake is presented as essential to the growth of Tolkien’s characters. He offers a renewed perception of the world, suggesting to us that we only understand our own history in this broader context.\textsuperscript{503}

Tom Bombadil’s liminality places him as an obvious mediator. As Alison Milbank notes, he connects the Shire and the world of men, the ancient past and the present, and nature and culture. His name, from a doll owned by Michael Tolkien, and his stomping, singing, and dancing, connects the worlds of childhood and adulthood.\textsuperscript{504} Even the position of Bombadil’s house, on the edge of both the Old Forest and the Barrow-downs, reinforces this liminality. As such, he can interpret the Old Forest and the Barrow-downs

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\textsuperscript{503} One problem with this, or any, interpretation of Tom Bombadil is the highly varied reaction he invites from readers. Bombadil was from the beginning a puzzling figure for readers, see (Letters 178–9, 191–2), a status he has retained. Matthew Dickerson and Jonathan Evans propose that Bombadil’s discordant position is a consequence of his status as a concrete embodiment of the natural world: ‘He does not \textit{fit into} Middle-earth because he \textit{stands for} it.’ Dickerson and Evans, \textit{ Ents, Elves and Eriador}, p. 19.

\textsuperscript{504} Milbank, \textit{Chesterton and Tolkien as Theologians}, p. 154.
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for the hobbits. He can also help them to transition from naive to informed and well-prepared travellers. Bombadil destabilises boundaries and undermines certainties. Before his introduction the power of the Ring to confer invisibility is presented as an established fact, yet it neither renders Bombadil invisible nor masks Frodo from his sight (FR, I, vii, 133). He forces the hobbits to reconsider what they knew up to that point. Bombadil's arresting strangeness also prepares readers to revise their assumptions and see things in a new light. His brief laying bare of the hearts of trees foreshadows the further blurring of boundaries introduced by the Ents.

The Ents complement Bombadil's account of the experiences of the non-human world by directly expressing the vegetative point of view. Old Man Willow forces the hobbits to see that trees have an inner life, and Bombadil can relate some of that inner life to the hobbits, but it is only with the Ents that we have a direct expression of the inner life of trees, and by extension other plants. The Ents' anger at Saruman is directly proportional to their love for the trees he has felled. For the Ents these trees were not timber, they were loved ones:

Many of those trees were my friends, creatures I had known from nut and acorn; many had voices of their own that are lost for ever now. And there are wastes of stump and bramble where once there were singing groves. (TT, III, iv, 474)

The Ents can relate the voices of the trees to Merry and Pippin more effectively than Bombadil could because the Ents know what it is like to live as a tree. Treebeard knows what it means to root oneself, if only for a time, as a tree among trees. He tells the hobbits, 'I used to spend a week just breathing' (TT, III, iv, 469). Later when Quickbeam describes

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505 Curiously, though Treebeard is interested in everything they have seen, including Bombadil, Merry and Pippin do not connect the two figures (TT, III, iv, 472).
the rowan groves Saruman has clear-cut as a place of death, it is not a metaphor but an accurate expression of his understanding of the place: ‘I came and called them by their long names, but they did not quiver, they did not hear or answer: they lay dead’ (*TT*, III, iv, 483). Only an Ent could honestly describe deforestation like this, and only Quickbeam could mourn rowan-trees in this way. After all, Quickbeam is another name for the rowan-tree. When Quickbeam says of the rowans that ‘there are no trees of all that race, the people of the Rose, that are so beautiful to me’ (*TT*, III, iv, 483), he is referring to his own people, the genus *sorbus* in the family *Rosaceae*. Quickbeam feels the death of the rowans personally because in a very real sense he is one. While Ents and trees cannot be completely collapsed into the same category, their shared features and commonality of experience allow the Ents to speak for the arboreal world.

This liminality is central to the Ents’ ability not just to speak on behalf of the natural world but also to directly vocalise its subjective experience. As outlined earlier, Ents straddle the divide between the human and the non-human, between plant and animal. No stable definition can separate Ents, Huorns, and trees. This is not just a biological fact; it is also expressed in the psychology of Ents. Treebeard contrasts Ents with Elves and humans:

> For Ents are more like Elves: less interested in themselves than Men are, and better at getting inside other things. And yet again Ents are more like Men, more changeable than Elves are, and quicker at taking the colour of the outside, you might say. (*TT*, III, iv, 468)

Ents actively seek to see the world as other creatures do and recognise that they are fundamentally changed by their experience of the lives of others. As quoted earlier, ‘Sheep

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506 An Elf would feel for the trees but could not avoid a certain difference, even if only in terms of physiology.
get like shepherd and shepherds like sheep' \((TT, \text{III, iv, 468})\). This liminal position allows the Ents to act as mediators between the animal and plant worlds. At the same time, Treebeard’s existence questions the division between humanity and nature.

Bombadil and Treebeard are, in a sense, *genii loci*, which helps them to mediate the region they represent.\(^{507}\) This is much more apparent with Bombadil. On one occasion Tolkien described him as ‘the spirit of the (vanishing) Oxford and Berkshire countryside’ \((Letters 26)\). Bombadil seems to have limited himself to a specific geographical region. When the hobbits beg him to accompany them to Bree he answers, ‘*Tom’s country ends here: he will not pass the borders*’ \((FR, I, \text{viii, 148, original emphasis})\), and at the Council of Elrond Gandalf says, ‘now he is withdrawn into a little land, within bounds that he has set, though none can see them, waiting perhaps for a change of days, and he will not step beyond them’ \((FR, \text{II, ii, 265})\). His absolute identification with a place allows him to represent not just the inhabitants of that place, whether animal, plant, or other, but the land itself.\(^{508}\) Galdor actively identifies Bombadil with the landscape: ‘Power to defy our Enemy is not in him, unless such power is in the earth itself’ \((FR, \text{II, ii, 266})\). The Old Forest may lie under some shadow of the Great Darkness of Morgoth’s rule \((TT, \text{III, iv, 468})\) and the Barrow-downs may have become infested with shadows out of Angmar \((FR, I, \text{vii, 130})\), but Bombadil was there before:

> Tom was here before the river and the trees; Tom remembers the first raindrop and the first acorn. He made paths before the Big People and saw

\(^{507}\) A *genius* can be defined as ‘the personification of the active force of a being, a thing or a place, as it was constituted at the moment of its birth or creation.’ John Scheid, *An Introduction to Roman Religion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), pp 165–6.

\(^{508}\) Of all the answers offered to ‘Who is Tom Bombadil?’ perhaps the one that least strains the evidence of the text is that he is Middle-earth, or more likely part of Middle-earth, come to consciousness of itself. His status has caused endless, and occasionally acrimonious, debate among Tolkien fans to the extent that asking the question is now considered deliberately inflammatory.
the little People arriving. When the Elves passed westward, Tom was here already, before the seas were bent. He knew the dark under the stars when it was fearless – before the Dark Lord came from Outside. (FR, I, vii, 131)\textsuperscript{509}

Bombadil was here before Old Man Willow or the Barrow-wights altered the region. In the original draft for the chapter ‘In the house of Tom Bombadil’ Bombadil calls himself an ‘Aborigine’ (Shadow 121). He is even more essential to the place than the trees or river. Only the earth is as old as him and he is coterminous with that earth. To encounter Bombadil is to encounter the embodied personality of the Old Forest, the Withywindle, and downs beneath the barrows.

Treebeard is a genus loci in a more metaphorical sense. While there is one Bombadil for the Old Forest and the Barrow Downs, Treebeard is one Ent among others, though he is the oldest. He is not bound to Fangorn Forest, having wandered as far afield as the highlands of Dorthonion (TT, III, iv, 469). And yet he represents Fangorn even more emphatically than Bombadil represents the area around the Old Forest, for Treebeard and Fangorn are the same word. Tolkien has Legolas ask Gandalf, ‘But Treebeard: that is only a rendering of Fangorn into the Common Speech; yet you seem to speak of a person. Who is this Treebeard?’ (TT, III, v, 499).\textsuperscript{510} Gandalf replies ‘Treebeard is Fangorn, the guardian of the forest’ (TT, III, v, 499). Treebeard is not a manifestation of Fangorn Forest but through his role as protector of the forest he has become intimately identified with it. Through him the forest is given a voice to protest its mistreatment and through his leadership of the Ents Fangorn Forest is given the ability to defend itself against its attractions.

\textsuperscript{509} This presumably refers to the period, during Arda’s shaping, when Melkor was driven from it for a time before returning (S 10–11). This would make Bombadil coeval with the physical existence of the Earth.

\textsuperscript{510} Both Treebeard and Bombadil prompt this question. In neither case can it be answered easily.
tormentors. The march of the Ents is Fangorn Forest going to war.\textsuperscript{511} In their complementary roles as genii loci Bombadil and Treebeard each give a voice to an entire bioregion.

The relation of person to place is also central in two other instances where the natural world reveals something of its inner life: Hollin and Lothlórien. It is no coincidence that Elves lived in these two regions. As mentioned above, Tolkien claimed Lórien was beautiful because its trees were loved (\textit{Letters} 419). This draws an understandable connection between the flourishing of the natural world and its treatment by sentient creatures. Once a reciprocal relationship is established between Elves and a place the good effects linger on in the region even after the Elves have left. In Hollin Gandalf comments on the wholesome air about the place, noting, ‘Much evil must befall a country before it wholly forgets the Elves, if once they dwelt there’ (\textit{FR}, II, iii, 283). Legolas responds:

‘That is true’ [...] ‘But the Elves of this land were of a race strange to us of the sylvan folk, and the trees and grass do not now remember them. Only I hear the stones lament them: \textit{deep they delved us, fair they wrought us, high they builde d us; but they are gone.’} (\textit{FR}, II, iii, 283–4)

Although we only hear Legolas’ words rather than the voices of the stones directly,\textsuperscript{512} by drawing a distinction between the forgetfulness of the plants and the memory of the stones Legolas clarifies that it is the stones’ own lament for Elves who valued them rather than his projection onto them. Note also that Legolas can audibly articulate the voice of the stones while Gandalf, apparently, only perceives an unspecified ‘wholesome’ quality in the

\textsuperscript{511} In a comment on the invention of the Ents Tolkien mentions his ‘bitter disappointment and disgust from schooldays with the shabby use made in Shakespeare of the coming of “Great Birnam wood to high Dunsinane hill”: I longed to devise a setting in which trees might really march to war’ (\textit{Letters} 212).

\textsuperscript{512} Cf. Merry relaying the voice of Old Man Willow (\textit{FR}, I, vi, 118).
land. Later, in Lothlórien, Frodo encounters a tree and shares with it a completely new experience:

[H]e laid his hand upon the tree beside the ladder: never before had he been so suddenly and so keenly aware of the feel and texture of a tree’s skin and of the life within it. He felt a delight in wood and the touch of it, neither as forester nor as carpenter; it was the delight of the living tree itself. (*FR*, II, vi, 351)

Frodo has experienced a moment of ‘recovery’, seeing and feeling the tree again as if for the first time.\(^{513}\) The final clause is ambivalent: is the delight that of Frodo, or of the tree, or both? In either case Frodo has come to see the tree not as timber but as a living creature, delightful in the mere fact of its existence. While Tolkien implicitly contrasted Lothlórien with the more animated Fangorn,\(^{514}\) it is possible that in the safety of Lothlórien the trees do not need to be ‘roused’ but can exist in a semi-conscious, ‘treeish’ serenity. After all, as Treebeard tells the hobbits, ‘Elves began it, of course, waking trees up and teaching them to speak and learning their tree-talk. They always wished to talk to everything, the old Elves did’ (*TT*, III, iv, 468). The fully conscious and articulate trees of the Old Forest and Fangorn are only possible because of the Elves’ love of trees.\(^{515}\)

This process of recognising the validity of non-human subjective experiences is part of a larger process of reinterpreting the Other, in all its forms, not as a threatening stranger but as a self in its own right, different from but equal to us, and one from whom...

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\(^{513}\) ‘All that he saw was shapely, but the shapes seemed at once clear cut, as if they had been first conceived and drawn at the uncovering of his eyes’ (*FR*, II, vi, 350).

\(^{514}\) ‘Elsewhere forests are represented as awakening to consciousness of themselves’ (*Letters* 419).

\(^{515}\) As Treebeard says, ‘it was the Elves that cured us of dumbness long ago’ (*TT*, III, iv, 472).
we can learn.\textsuperscript{516} Tolkien does not use his presentation of the natural world, and the developing relationship between it and his characters, as an allegory of human relationships. At the same time he does not avoid or ignore the constant ‘othering’ which characterises human societies. He faces this head on in his charting of the growing relationship between Gimli and Legolas. Hostility between Elves and Dwarves goes back to the murderous struggle between Thingol and the Dwarves of Nogrod in the First Age (\textit{S 279–83}). As a rule Dwarves are not permitted to enter Lothlorien. The Elves would have Gimli alone led blindfolded while Aragorn would have the whole company share this indignity. The brief bickering of this scene undercuts any sense that Gimli is being treated fairly, and the blindfolding of the entire company cannot but suggest the blindness such prejudice engenders.\textsuperscript{517} Galadriel, however, cuts through this hostility, first by having their blindfolds removed (\textit{FR, II, vi, 350}) and then by addressing Gimli in his own language, a language few outsiders know:

\begin{quote}
She looked upon Gimli, who sat glowering and sad, and she smiled. And the Dwarf, hearing the names given in his own ancient tongue, looked up and met her eyes; and it seemed to him that he looked suddenly into the heart of an enemy and saw there love and understanding. Wonder came into his face, and he smiled in answer. (\textit{FR, II, vii, 356})
\end{quote}

From that moment Gimli is devoted to Galadriel. Likewise, the Elves can no longer see the Dwarves as grasping and ungracious when he forgoes any material gift in favour of a single strand of her hair as a ‘pledge of good will between the Mountain and the Wood

\textsuperscript{516} If this reading is accurate it challenges the argument that \textit{The Lord of the Rings} harbours covert racism. One of the most nuanced recent discussions of this topic is Dimitra Fimi, \textit{Tolkien, Race, and Cultural History: From Fairies to Hobbits} (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp 131–59.

\textsuperscript{517} The Elf Haldir recognises the self-defeating nature of this prejudiced law: ‘Indeed in nothing is the power of the Dark Lord more clearly shown than in the estrangement that divides all those who still oppose him’ (\textit{FR, II, vi, 348}).
until the end of days' (FR, II, viii, 376). From his entering to his leaving Lothlórien, Gimli and the Elves progress from suspicion and hostility to courtesy and friendship.

The rapprochement between Elves and Dwarves is furthered by the developing friendship between Gimli and Legolas. This becomes more than a comradeship born of shared experiences and hardships and grows into a sharing of their deepest subjective experiences of the world. Legolas is deeply moved by Fangorn Forest just as Gimli is by the Glittering Caves of Aglarond (TT, III, v, 491; III, viii, 547–8). More importantly, they can explain this personal reaction to each other and have the other understand. Gimli is comforted and prepared to enter Fangorn Forest because of Legolas’ enthusiasm, despite his fear (TT, III, v, 491). Likewise, Gimli’s description of the wonders of the Glittering Caves makes Legolas regret he has not seen them (TT, III, viii, 548). They are able to express themselves in each other’s terms: ‘Do you cut down groves of blossoming trees in the springtime for firewood? We would tend these glades of flowering stone, not quarry them’ (TT, III, viii, 548). Their friendship is sealed by a promise to see the forest and the caves together. When the weight of ethnic grievances between Elves and Dwarves is considered, the symbolic importance of Legolas and Gimli’s friendship becomes immense. This overcoming of ingrained, traditional prejudice and a new co-operation between formerly divided peoples is presented as essential to the successful defence of Middle-earth against Sauron.

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518 Tolkien considered making this gesture even more pointed by reporting a rumour Galadriel had refused to give a strand of her hair to Fëanor. See (UT 296).
One of Tolkien’s long-term concerns was that his mythology should express different and varying perspectives. *The Book of Lost Tales* originally was to have at least nine narrators apart from Eriol (*Lost Tales I* 52, 98, 140, 207, 229; *Lost Tales II* 7, 70, 149, 221). These narrators were all Elves and the elder tales of the legendarium never lost an emphasis on Elven perspectives. As Tolkien added later legend to his earlier mythology, however, it came to have human and hobbit narrators, and translators. Humans had served as narrative focalisers since the tales of *Turambar and the Foalókë* and *The Nauglafring* (*Lost Tales II* 69–115, 22–41) but with *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* the range and diversity of focalisers increased. This reaches a peak in the latter work where Tolkien allows his readers to encounter, if not always share, the perspective of trees, mountains, and animals. In so doing Tolkien builds upon a complex history of personification and animation of the natural world, drawing on often contradictory philosophies. But he directed this heritage towards exploring previously unrecognized and neglected subjectivities. The sub-creative process paradoxically served his vision of reality through the means of fantasy, allowing us to see, not only again, but, on some levels, for the first time.
Chapter Four

Creation, Creativity, and Evil

Evil and sub-creation

Every attempt to describe an ordered cosmos must provide some explanation of how disorder and chaos enter into it. For western Christianity since the time of Augustine this has involved understanding evil as a privation of good, originating in misused freedom; the Fall of Adam and Eve, and before them that of Satan. The Devil, fallen angel and tempter of humankind, is central to the iconography of evil, if not always to theodicy. Individual literary and artistic representations of the Devil always depend upon the conception of God to which they relate. Milton’s Satan differs from the Devil of the Old English Genesis just as Milton’s God differs from the Anglo-Saxon Metod. Having defined God primarily as artist and Creator, Tolkien’s preeminent satanic figure, Melkor, understandably takes on some of the qualities of the artist. A connection between the artist/maker and the demonic was hardly original to Tolkien. Just as artists may participate in divine inspiration, they may also, willingly or unwillingly, experience diabolical interference: apocryphal legends extend from King Solomon compelling demons to assist in the construction of the Temple, to the eighteenth-century sculptor Franz Xaver Messerschmidt being accused of a Faustian pact. The Romantic reappropriation of Satan as a political and moral revolutionary, as well as the Romantic promotion of the artist as

self-destructive and at odds with society, further connected artists with the Devil.\textsuperscript{521} Tolkien's fictional Devil is a fallen artist. He is not, however, pathological in exactly the same way as the more morbid members of the Romantic tradition. Melkor’s darkness is not that of the tormented, possibly manic-depressive, Romantic artist who can brook no authority.\textsuperscript{522} Rather Tolkien innovatively updates the older, medieval and Miltonic, Satan by having Melkor seek the power to create. By presenting the personification of evil as a fallen sub-creator, Tolkien addressed evil in his own terms and located the potential for evil in every action he took as a sub-creator in his own right.\textsuperscript{523}

**Melkor and the Satanic Tradition**

Satanic characteristics are evident in several of Tolkien’s evil characters: Sauron, the Nazgûl, and particularly Melkor, perhaps the clearest product of Tolkien’s engagement with the traditional Christian personification of evil. On occasion Tolkien openly identified him with the Christian Devil, referring to him as ‘Devil’ and ‘Diabolus’ (*Letters* 191, 195, 283, 376). There are obvious similarities between Melkor and Satan: both are created not just good but the most splendid of their kind; both conceive a rivalry to the Divinity, rebel,

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\textsuperscript{523} Tolkien’s connection of evil and sub-creativity may have been supported by observing the rapid growth in the destructive power of human inventions during his lifetime. Cf. the goblins’ ‘ingenious devices for killing large numbers of people at one’ (*H*, iv, 59).
and descend from light and glory to darkness and self-destructive malice. Christian interpreters of Tolkien’s works have not been slow to draw connections between them. Randel Helms compared Melkor’s eminent position among the Ainur to the ‘anointed cherub’ of Ezekiel 28:13–16 and his downfall to that of Satan as described in 1 Samuel 5:3 and Revelations 12:9–12, 20:1–3. Joseph Pierce sees a parallel between Melkor and Lucifer in their change of names. Just as Lucifer is renamed Satan, Melkor forfeits his original name after the rape of the Silmarils and is renamed Morgoth, ‘The Black Enemy’, by Fëanor (S 23). But Melkor resembles Satan in many other, more subtle, ways. A comparison of their respective origins and falls will clarify their similarities. The following focuses on Melkor’s fall and its consequences for his relationship with Creation. In writing Melkor, Tolkien drew upon the literary and theological history of the Devil to explore both the nature of evil and the temptations Tolkien knew sub-creators faced. Far from being merely an external force, Melkor reveals Tolkien’s concerns with the potential for misuse always present in artistic sub-creation.

The two most common explanations for Satan’s fall are pride and envy; Aquinas claimed these were the only sins spiritual beings were capable of committing. Though pride became the preferred explanation in Christian theology, envy was favoured by some of the earliest Church Fathers. Irenaeus of Lyons and Cyprian of Carthage identified Satan’s fault as envy, basing their arguments on Wisdom 2:24 (‘But by the envy of the

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524 There are also numerous minor similarities of detail; e.g. the Devil enthroned in the north and Melkor enthroned in Utumno and later Angband, Melkor chained by Angainor and the Devil chained in Hell. These two motifs have their origins in Isaiah 14:13 and Jude 1:6 respectively.


devil, death came into the world').\(^{529}\) Origen appears to be the first Christian theologian to make pride the motive of Satan’s fall.\(^{530}\) Augustine took up this interpretation and through him it became standard in western theology.\(^{531}\) The precise nature of his pride or envy was never dogmatically defined. Satan’s pride could mean he desired to be like God or to be God. His envy may have been towards God, Christ, or humanity.\(^{532}\) Christian tradition never entirely disentangled the two motives or made one or the other an article of faith.\(^{533}\)

This theological uncertainty, rather than hindering literary treatments of Satan’s fall, allowed and encouraged speculation and elaboration. In English the two most sustained literary narratives of the fall of the angels are the Old English *Genesis* and Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. That Tolkien knew them is incontrovertible. He lectured on *Genesis* and a translation of *Genesis B* survives in his papers in the Bodleian.\(^{534}\) At the very least he would have been exposed to Milton’s works during his secondary education, even if he did not discuss Milton with C.S. Lewis while the latter was writing his *Preface*

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\(^{532}\) See Russell, *Mephistophèles*, p. 94.


\(^{534}\) Bodleian MS Tolkien A/29 a, fol. 137r ff.
to *Paradise Lost*. It is not unreasonable to suspect or suggest these depictions of Satan may have influenced the shape Melkor took in the *Ainulindalë*. More to the point here is the extent to which both poems emphasise pride and envy as motives while developing them in different directions. Tolkien used traditional accounts of Satan’s fall for the fall of Melkor but likewise innovated when elaborating his motives. Tolkien’s departures from *Genesis* and *Paradise Lost* will prove to be as important as his similarities.

The Old English *Genesis* retells the Book of Genesis as well as certain essential elements from Christian apocrypha, including almost two hundred lines on the fall of the angels. ‘Envy and pride’, ‘æfst and oferhygd’ (29a), are early on declared to be the motives of their fall. Their pride is then repeatedly emphasised. ‘For pride’ they were ‘divided in error’, ‘for oferhygde / dael on gedwilde’ (22b–23a); ‘out of self-love, they turned away from God’, ‘hie of siblufan / godes ahwurfon’ (24b–25a). Their fall is announced by their great boast that they might condescend to share heaven with God (25b–27). They are described as a ‘proud race’, ‘of erhidig cyn’ (66a) and this pride becomes self-deceptive, foolish elation: ‘hie hyra gal beswac, / engles oferhygde’ (327b–328a). When the fallen angels reach hell they realise their torment had come about ‘through their great haughtiness and through God’s might, and most of all through pride’, ‘purh heora miclan

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536 In both *Genesis* and *Paradise Lost* Satan’s envy of Adam and Eve’s happiness in Paradise is foregrounded. This envy, however, arises after his original fall and is a result of it rather than a cause. As with Melkor when Satan falls is as important as why he falls. Their envy of much weaker creatures can be read as a sign of their decline in stature; from envy of God to envy of mortal creatures. See Evans, *Paradise Lost and the Genesis Tradition*, pp 230–1.

537 Eduard Sievers demonstrated that *Genesis B* (235–851) was older than, and originally separate from, the rest of the poem, *Genesis A*; an Old English translation of an Old Saxon original. See A.N. Doane (ed.), *The Saxon Genesis*, pp 7–8. All references to *Genesis B* are to this edition. All references to *Genesis A* are to A.N. Doane (ed.), *Genesis A: a new edition* (Madison and London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978).
While their pride can hardly be questioned, the envy of the angels, taken as a group, is not developed.

Satan’s envy on the other hand is implicitly connected to his pride, which is even greater than that of his fellow angels. Though the angels may fall as a group, Satan is always their leader. He is arguably the most developed character in the whole poem. In lines 28–31 the emphasis shifts from the fallen angels as a group to Satan as the individual instigator of the rebellion. We are told of ‘this angel’s mind, who first set out to perform the evil plot, contrive and encourage it’, ‘pas engles mod / he bone unraed ongan ærest fremman, / wefan and weccean’ (29b–31a). It is his envy and pride which are the catalysts of the collective fall. This pride is connected to his exalted state in heaven. The poet lingers on his greatness for seven lines (252–8), comparing him to the light of the stars, ‘gelic wæs he þam leohtum steorum’ (256). But this splendour only leads him to pride, ofermod, a pride which could not be concealed from God (262–3). This pride of self expresses itself in the proud words which shatter the peace of heaven, ‘ofermede micel […] healic word’ (293b–294; cf. 272b–273a). We are told that his mind, especially his pride, was led astray, ‘his hyge forspeon / and his ofermetto ealra swidost’ (350b–351) and after his fall he is named the proud king ‘se ofermoda cyning’ (338a). The emphasis on Satan’s pride is almost overwhelming but, in Genesis, it cannot be entirely separated from his envy.

Satan’s pride is expressed as a rivalry with God, through constant comparisons of his strength and glory with that of his Creator. We are told ‘he could not find it in his mind’ to serve God because ‘it seemed to him, that he had more strength and skill than the

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538 A word Tolkien drew attention to in The Homecoming of Beorhnoth, where he translated it as ‘overmastering pride’. See J.R.R. Tolkien, The Homecoming of Beorhnoth Beorhthelm’s Son in The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays, pp 121–50 at 143.
holy God', 'ne meahtie he æt his hige findan [...] þuhte him sylfum / þæt he magyn and cæst maran hæfde / ponne se halga god' (266b, 2689–270a). He claims his strength and skill would allow him to make a 'stronger throne', 'strenglican stol', the 'highest in heaven', 'heahran on heofonum' (273a, 274a). While he is boasting of the great wonders his hands can work and the power he possesses (279b–280), he also boasts of his 'strong companions' 'strange geneatas' (284a). These boasts would mean more in the mouth of a Germanic lord but here they only emphasise Satan's limitations as a would-be divinity. He is not self-sufficient and depends upon the strength of these companions. Satan may dwell on his power 'geweald' (280, 368, 388, 411) but God's geweald was sufficient by itself to create heaven in the first place (10–11). Satan can only mimic God. At best he can hope to carve out a principality in God's greater kingdom. As A.N. Doane notes:

Satan does not wish to displace God and become God, but only to become like God, another parallel God. Even his deepest thought of glory is but a secondary and mimetic dependency on God. He can only conceive of aping God over to one side of the universe, not creating anew.\(^{539}\)

Satan's pride is not just a consequence of his own glorious form; it arises in reaction to and imitation of the glory of God. His rebellion is less an attempt to assert his independence and more an attempt to replicate God in miniature, though he may not entirely realise this. A political rather than ontological rebel, he is essentially a treacherous retainer seeking to break his oaths of loyalty and set up his own military following. He desperately wants power equal to God's and in his pride comes to believe he can claim it.

This combination of pride and envy is repeated, with innovative differences, in Milton's Satan. In Book V of Paradise Lost Raphael recounts Satan's fall to Adam:

[He], great in power,

\(^{539}\) A.N. Doane (ed.), The Saxon Genesis, p. 120.
In favour and pre-eminence, yet fraught
With envie against the Son of God, that day
Honoured by his great Father, and proclaimed
*Messiah* King anointed, could not beare
Through pride that sight, and thought himself impair'd.\(^{540}\)

Pride and envy form equal parts of Raphael's account. This links back to the opening lines of the poem where Satan's pride and envy were pointed out. 'Th' infernal Serpent; hee it was, whose guile / Stirred up with Envy and Revenge, deceiv'd / The Mother of Mankinde, what time his Pride / Had cast him out from Heav'n' (I.34–7). Between these two passages Milton emphasises Satan's pride more than his envy. He looks about Hell 'Mixt with obdurat pride' (I.58) and tells Beëlzebub he rose against God 'from sense of injur'd merit' (I.98). In Book II when Satan speaks from his gilded throne, he displays 'His proud imaginations' (II.10). When Satan sees the sun he hates it because its radiance reminds him of the glorious state he once possessed 'Till Pride and worse Ambition threw me down' (IV.40). Milton has prepared the reader to focus on Satan's pride. When we come to the description of his fall, however, Satan's envy is given significant weight.

Satan's sense of injured merit finds its direct source in the exaltation of the Son by the Father (V.600–15). The Son was to be appointed head of the angels (V.606) and this Satan could not endure. His refusal to bend the knee may originate in his pride but this pride is brought to a head by his envy of the Son's new position (V.662). It appears Satan himself wishes to be head of the angels. Even as he incites the other angels to rebellion, promising them liberty and equality, he inserts a proviso: 'Orders and Degrees / Jan not with liberty, but well consist' (V.792–3). While this may inadvertently undermine his own

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motive for rebellion, it serves to prepare the other angels for his assumption of pre-eminence. Satan's speech to the fallen angels takes pains to justify his position as their leader, drawing attention to the same envy which led to his own rebellion:

[...] The happier state

In Heav'n, 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 aime' (II.24–9)

He is trying to control the envy he earlier drew upon from the other angels but in so doing he reveals his own envious desire for a position of pre-eminence. In attempting to forestall a recapitulation of the angelic revolt, he reveals an important detail of his own rebellion.

Another suggestive aspect of Satan's fall is the nature of his argument with the faithful angel Abdiel. Satan claims to be 'self-begot, self-rais'd' (V.860). Since the angels do not remember being created, why should they accept the Father's account? (V.856–8). If he actually believes this, as opposed to using it for the sake of his argument, it could be a sign of his overmastering pride; a refusal to accept not merely the limits of his being but of his knowledge. But the claim does more than this. Satan is claiming to be a self-existent being, enlivened by his own 'quick'ning power' (V.861), rather than a dependant being, one of God's creations.541 By denying his own creatureliness, he also denies God's role as Creator. Satan asserts parity with God through questioning his creation by God. If he, like God, is self-existent, God can claim no ontological priority over him and God's rule becomes one of might rather than natural hierarchy. This involves either, whether honestly

541 C.S. Lewis, while pointing out the contradictions in Satan's thought processes, put stress on Satan's claim to be self-existent, describing it as 'the root of his whole predicament'. C.S. Lewis, A Preface to Paradise Lost (Oxford: OUP, 1960), p. 97.
or otherwise, a reinterpretation of the nature of God, as just another self-existent being among many, or an envious claim to share God’s necessarily existent nature. If the latter, Satan’s speech to Abdiel could be read as an expression of desire to be like God in a very specific way; to share his position as self-creator, a being capable of giving Being, with equal power and glory implied. This has interesting similarities with Melkor’s fall in the *Ainulindalë*.

**Melkor’s Fall**

To turn to Melkor, it is immediately apparent that the traditional Satanic motifs of pride and envy are present. The accounts of his fall in the developing versions of the *Ainulindalë* show an essential continuity though there are, however, important developments. Melkor’s fall is described in two passages, one in the *Ainulindalë* at the moment he introduces discord into the Music, cited below as the ‘Fall Passage’, and again in what would become the *Valaquenta*, cited as the ‘Recapitulation Passage’. The ‘Fall Passage’ remained relatively stable; the ‘Recapitulation Passage’ underwent significant expansion. Some of this material would be moved from the *Ainulindalë* to the *Valaquenta* or the chapter ‘Of the Beginning of Days’ in later versions. Melkor’s pride and envy are, however, present from the earliest version, *The Music of the Ainur*, though they receive amplification and clarification over time. Unfortunately Christopher Tolkien did not print the material making up each version of the ‘Recapitulation Passage’. With that caveat in mind, the following tables record the textual history of both passages.\(^{542}\)

\(^{542}\) The full texts of the relevant passages are reproduced in Appendix C, pp 260–4.
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<td>He seeks to increase the power and glory of his role</td>
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<td>Fared often alone into the dark places and the voids seeking the Secret Fire</td>
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<td>Impatient of the Void’s emptiness</td>
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The Recapitulation Passage: continuity and development

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<td>Great might given by Ilúvatar</td>
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<td>Coëval with Manwë</td>
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<td>Had part of all the powers of the other Valar</td>
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<td>Coveted the world and all that was in it</td>
<td>Coveted the world and all that was in it</td>
<td></td>
<td>Coveted Arda and all that was in it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desired the lordship of Manwë and the realms of all the Gods</td>
<td>Desired the lordship of Manwë and the realms of all the gods</td>
<td></td>
<td>Desired the lordship of Manwë and dominion over the realms of his peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pride, jealousy and lust grew ever in his heart, till he became unlike his brethren</td>
<td>Pride, jealousy and lust grew ever in his heart, till he became unlike his brethren</td>
<td></td>
<td>Fell from splendour through arrogance to contempt for all things save himself, a spirit wasteful and pitiless.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrath consumed him, and he begot violence, destruction and excess</td>
<td>Wrath consumed him, and he begot violence, destruction and excess</td>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>In ice and fire was his delight</td>
<td>In ice and fire was his delight</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td>Understanding he turned to subtlety in perverting to his own will all that he would use, until he became a liar without shame</td>
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<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td>Desired Light, but when he could not possess it for himself alone, descended</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In *Ainulindalë* B, Melkor’s introductions to the Music are given an explicit motive in his seeking ‘to increase the power and glory of the part assigned to himself’ (*Lost Road* 157). This puts Melkor’s pride at the beginning of the narrative of his fall. His envy of the other Ainur and of the Children of Ilúvatar is also developed, first implicitly and later explicitly. He is ‘wroth’ at the gifts of Elves and humans, later ‘jealous’ of them, and finally depicted ‘envying’ them. Melkor’s desire ‘to usurp the power of the other Ainur’ becomes a desire to usurp their realms and eventually a desire for ‘dominion over the realms of his peers’ in the *Valaquenta* (*S* 23). To his envy of Elves and humans is added a wish for subjects and servants and mastery over other wills in *Ainulindalë* C. *Ainulindalë* C also expands upon Melkor’s envy of the other Ainur once they enter Eä and begin to shape the Earth (*Morgoth* 16). Here he appears to envy the habitation the Valar have made for themselves:

Then Melkor saw what was done, and that the Valar walked on Earth as powers visible, clad in the raiment of the World, and were lovely and glorious to see, and blissful, and that the Earth was becoming as a garden for their delight, for its turmoils were subdued. His envy grew then the greater

| Darkness he used most in all his evil works, and turned it to fear and a name of dread | Darkness he used most in all his evil works, and turned it to fear and a name of dread | Darkness he used most in his evil works upon Arda, and filled it with fear for all living things |

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543 Cf. (*Morgoth* 9) and (*S* 4).

544 *Ainulindalë* C is actually later than *Ainulindalé C* but identical to it for the description of Melkor’s fall. For ease of reference C will be cited as it is reproduced in full in *Morgoth’s Ring.*
within him; and he took visible form, but because of his mood and the
malice that burned in him that form was dark and terrible. (S 11)

We were told shortly before that Melkor had coveted the Earth and claimed it for his
kingdom but had been denied by the other Valar (S 10). He envies the kingdom which they
have and he wanted. But the growth of Melkor’s envy and the Valar’s taking on of visible
form are two halves of the one sentence, implying a causal connection. When the Valar
took forms, they adopted the likeness of the Children of Ilúvatar out of love. His envy of
the Valar’s visible forms may therefore refer back to his envy of the Children. Melkor
adopts a form in imitation and envy of the Valar but implicitly also in envy of the
Children.

Melkor’s envy is next mentioned in the Valaquenta where we are told he ‘spent his
spirit in envy and hate, until at last he could make nothing save in mockery of the thought
of others, and all their works he destroyed if he could’ (S 18). Melkor’s envy and
destructiveness are again linked in the summary of his fall at the end of the Valaquenta.
After describing how he squandered his power and knowledge in violence and tyranny, it
explains: ‘For he coveted Arda and all that was in it, desiring the kingship of Manwë and
dominion over the realms of his peers’ (S 23). From the Quenta Silmarillion of the 1930s
onwards, Melkor envies not only the bliss of the Valar in Arda as it existed before his
assault, but also covets Arda itself and the realms within it which each of the powers had
adopted as their own (Lost Road 206). His envy is reinforced in the published Ainulindalë:
‘He began with the desire of Light, but when he could not possess it for himself alone, he
descended through fire and wrath into a great burning, down into Darkness’ (S 23).

This transition from an essentially creative to an entirely nihilistic impulse will be addressed
below.

545 This presumably derives from the Later Quenta Silmarillion (Morgoth 203).
While Tolkien emphasises Melkor's envy more than his pride, the second diabolic motive is also present. Though Tolkien does not use the word 'pride' to describe the fall of Melkor, he does use its near synonym 'arrogance'. The *Valaquenta* recounts, 'From splendour he fell through arrogance to contempt for all things save himself' (S 23). This 'through' is polysemous: it could be instrumental, spatial, or temporal. Arrogance could be the cause of Melkor's fall from splendour to contempt or it could be seen as an emotional state through which he moves on his downward trajectory. Whether arrogance is the efficient cause of Melkor's fall or not, it is intimately bound with Melkor's turn inwards away from others, and especially from Ilúvatar. Augustine's exploration of a fall through pride is relevant here. He understood it as a turning away from the supreme being of God to the angel's own self, which does not have the same degree of being, asking 'What else can we call this defect save pride?'

He describes the first evil act of a creature as arising from that creature becoming more enamoured of their will's own works than the work of God:

> On the other hand, the first evil act of will, preceding, as it did, all evil works in man, was rather a falling away from the work of God to the will's own works than any one work; and those works were evil because they followed the will's own pattern and not God's.

Compare this with: 'it came into the heart of Melkor to interweave matters of his own imagining that were not in accord with the theme of Ilúvatar; for he sought therein to

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546 'Cum uero causa miseriae malorum angelorum quaeritur, ea merito occurrit, quod ab illo qui summe est auersi ad se ipso conuersi sunt qui non summe sunt; et hoc uitium quid aliud quam superbia nuncupetur?' De *civitate Dei*, XII.6, CCSL 48, pp 359–60, *City of God*, iv, pp 22–5.

increase the power and glory of the part assigned to himself" (S 4). This is the first reference to Melkor in the *Ainulindalë* and it encapsulates both his nature and the nature of his fall. At his first appearance in the text, he turns from Ilúvatar and seeks his own aggrandisement.

The ‘Fall Passage’ in every version of the *Ainulindalë* begins with Melkor introducing discord into the Music by interweaving matters of his own imagining that are not in accord with the theme of Ilúvatar (*Lost Tales I* 53; *Lost Road* 157; *Morgoth* 9; S 4). It must be stressed that adding his own thoughts and designs may mark the moment of Melkor’s fall but is not in itself an evil act. Ilúvatar had specifically invited the Ainur to improvise, saying: ‘It is my desire [...] that ye exercise your minds and powers in adorning the theme to your own thoughts and devising’ (*Lost Tales I* 53; cf. S 3). Melkor’s fault lies not in adding to the Music but in what those additions are and why they were introduced.548 As already mentioned, *Ainulindalë* B introduces the comment that Melkor was attempting to increase the power and glory of his part in the Music (*Lost Road* 157). In every subsequent version of the *Ainulindalë*, this forms part of the reader’s first impression of him.

Augustine summarised the fall as seeking ‘to leave God and to have being in oneself’, which equally describes Melkor’s fall.549 Melkor ‘had gone often alone into the void places seeking the Imperishable Flame; for desire grew hot within him to bring into Being things of his own’ (S 4). At this point he realises he does not have the power to create. He is seeking a creator’s role and rejecting his natural role as sub-creator. This is

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548 Melkor takes his delegated, sub-creative authority to excessive lengths. For the idea that Satan’s fall may have originated in the excessive use of a natural good see Anselm of Canterbury’s *De casu diaboli* in Franciscus Salesius Schmitt (ed.), *Anselmi Opera Omnia*, 6 Vols (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson, 1946–61), i, pp 231–76.

present from the earliest version of the *Ainulindalë*. As Christopher Tolkien has emphasised, the most significant development in the textual history of the *Ainulindalë* was the change from having the Music of the Ainur directly create the world, by Ilúvatar’s leave, to having the Music produce only a foreshadowing of the world which is then given being by Ilúvatar (*Morgoth 25–6*). This clearly and firmly separates creative from sub-creative actions. Yet as early as *The Music of the Ainur*, when the Ainur’s creative role was less sharply distinguished from Ilúvatar’s, Melkor already sought the Secret Fire which he assumes is the power of creation. From *Ainulindalë B* onwards Melkor had the added motive of his impatience at the Void’s emptiness (*Lost Road* 157). Melkor believes Ilúvatar ‘took no thought for the Void’ (*Lost Road* 157), something he intends to remedy.\(^{550}\) By seeking to supplement, complete, or perhaps even rival Ilúvatar’s act of creation, Melkor is at the very least second-guessing Ilúvatar and claiming an equality of insight, if not actually challenging Ilúvatar’s creative role outright. This moves Melkor from being an excessively ambitious sub-creator to challenging the Creator in person.

Looking for the Imperishable Flame in the Void, however, reveals Melkor’s essential misunderstanding of Ilúvatar and the act of creation. ‘[H]e found it not, for it dwelleth with Ilúvatar, and that he knew not till afterwards’ (*Lost Tales I 53–4*).\(^{551}\) Each Ainu understands fully only the part of the mind of Ilúvatar from whence they came (*S 3*):

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\(^{550}\) This notion that Creation is incomplete and requires the creative activity of creatures to fully achieve it has similarities with certain trends in German Romanticism. Writers such as Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis held that Creation was still unfolding and human artistic creation was intimately connected with the fulfilment of the immanent creative impulse in nature. Tolkien would clearly have sympathised with these sentiments. He would, however, have stressed the necessity for harmonious cooperation between Creator and sub-creator. Melkor’s impatience at the emptiness of the Void, which begins his slide into evil, could be seen as this Romantic impulse taken to its extreme. See John A. McCarthy, ‘Forms and objectives of Romantic criticism’ in Nicholas Saul (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to German Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp 101–18 at 110–11.

\(^{551}\) This has a certain echo of John 1:5.
they grow in knowledge by attending to the Music and the part each of their companions contributes to it. Melkor's corruption develops out of his rejection of interdependence and the wisdom that can only be gained in harmonious cooperation. ‘But being alone he had begun to conceive thoughts of his own unlike those of his brethren’ (S 4). By rejecting the community of his peers Melkor is also rejecting Ilúvatar. The more the Ainur communicate with each other, the more they learn about Ilúvatar (S 3). The mind of Ilúvatar is further revealed by the introduction of the Children, as ‘[they] learned yet a little more of his wisdom, which otherwise had been hidden even from the Ainur’ (S 7), but Melkor immediately hates and envies the Children, thereby rejecting Ilúvatar who made them. Melkor’s mistake, and the occasion of his sin, is in thinking Ilúvatar’s creative power is separate from and independent of Ilúvatar’s nature. Ilúvatar is the only being who can grant ontological Being and so the only true Creator. Melkor falls by attempting to become a creator in his own right. Separating himself from Ilúvatar, and the Ainur, he seeks to be Ilúvatar. Melkor went ‘alone’ into the Void in order to create ex nihilo, attempting to mimic Ilúvatar’s position before the creation of the Ainur. Pride and envy are at the heart of Melkor’s rebellion but they are specifically envy of Ilúvatar’s creative power and pride in believing he can also be a creator. Tolkien’s depiction of the origin of evil arises from questions of creation and sub-creation, distinguishing Melkor’s fall from previous accounts of Satan’s fall, which focused on power or status. As such, it has significant consequences for an understanding of the nature and effects of evil in Tolkien’s work.

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552 This idea is introduced in *Ainulindalë* B. See (Lost Road 156).
553 Ralph C. Wood has commented on the importance of community for authentic existence throughout Tolkien’s legendarium. Wood, *The Gospel According to Tolkien*, p. 49.
554 Ilúvatar’s other name, Eru, means ‘He that is alone’ (S 396), a name he retains even after he creates others because he is still in all ways unique.
The Perils of Sub-creation

Milton’s Satan can make war upon God because Milton’s Heaven is already militarised. The culture of the Ainur, by contrast, is one based on artistic creativity. Brian Rosebury has suggested Melkor’s fall may have had to be artistic in nature ‘given the artistic nature of the angelic culture Ilúvatar has created.’\footnote{Rosebury, \textit{Tolkien: A Cultural Phenomenon}, p. 189.} This point is worth developing. Unlike traditional accounts of Satan’s fall, where Satan envies God’s power and glory, Melkor falls through envying God’s creativity. As with any Christian thinker, Tolkien’s understanding of the Devil is based upon his conception of God; and Tolkien defines God not so much as Ruler or Judge but as Creator. That said, if the highest good is associated with artistic creativity, so too is the origin of evil. Melkor’s pride derives from his power of making, his envy from the limitations of that power. Evil still has its source in pride and envy but finds its first expression in an act of attempted artistic creation. Tolkien saw danger and the potential for corruption in the same artistic impulse he also celebrated. As he wrote to Milton Waldman:

[T]he creative (or as I should say, sub-creative) desire [...] is at once wedded to a passionate love of the real primary world, and hence filled with the sense of mortality, and yet unsatisfied by it. It has various opportunities of ‘Fall’. It may become possessive, clinging to the thing made as ‘its own’, the sub-creator wishes to be the Lord and God of his private creation. He will rebel against the law of the Creator – especially against mortality. Both of these (alone or together) will lead to the desire for Power, for making the will more quickly effective – and so to the Machine (or Magic). (Letters 145)
Here Tolkien places sub-creation on the same level as mortality in terms of its tendency to turn from a gift of Iliúvatar to the source of creaturely evil. Even in his passionate defence and validation of sub-creation in ‘On Fairy-stories’ and *Mythopoeia*, he recognises its capacity for misuse and outright evil. While defending fantasy as a valid literary technique, Tolkien acknowledges its potential for misapplication in terms which can be applied to sub-creation more broadly defined.

Fantasy can of course, be carried to excess. It can be ill done. It can be put to evil uses. It may even delude the minds out of which it came. But of what human thing in this fallen world is that not true? Men have conceived not only of elves, but they have imagined gods, and worshipped them, even worshipping those most deformed by their author’s own evil. (*OFS* 65–6)\(^{556}\)

This is an objection raised to be countered but it is an acknowledged objection nevertheless. *Mythopoeia* is even more forceful in its defence of sub-creation, though it too acknowledges its scope for misuse:

Though all the crannies of the world we filled
With elves and goblins, though we dared to build
Gods and their houses out of dark and light,
and sow the seeds of dragons, ‘twas our right
(used or misused). The right has not decayed.

We make still by the law in which we’re made. (*TL* 87)

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\(^{556}\) Cf. ‘When we can take green from grass, blue from heaven, and red from blood, we already have an enchanter’s power […]. It does not follow that we shall use that power well upon any plane. We may put a deadly green upon a man’s face and produce a horror; we may make the rare and terrible blue moon to shine; or we may cause woods to spring with silver leaves and rams to wear fleeces of gold, and put hot fire into the belly of the cold worm’ (*OFS* 41–2). This acknowledgement of the dangers is of course drowned out, presumably deliberately, by the rhetorical force of the passage.
The poem even adopts a tone of defiance: ‘I bow not yet before the Iron Crown, / nor cast my own small golden sceptre down’ (*TL* 89). There is no need to further stress Tolkien’s love of sub-creation. Far from banishing the poets from his republic, Tolkien gives them a place in Paradise and assures us there will still be makers in the New Jerusalem (*TL* 89). ‘On Fairy-stories’ and *Mythopoeia*, written as defences of sub-creation, especially fantastic sub-creation, downplay Tolkien’s concern for the perils it posed. *The Silmarillion*, while it celebrates sub-creation in the Music of the Ainur, the Two Tree, the Silmarils, the cities, songs and stories of Beleriand, also forcefully presents the dark side of sub-creation, again and again depicting makers and sub-creators going badly wrong: first Melkor, followed by the falls, greater or lesser, of Aulë, Fëanor, Éol, Turgon, Celebrimbor and many others.  

One of Tolkien’s greatest sub-creators comes very close to following in Melkor’s footsteps. In both the *Ainulindalë* (*S* 8) and the *Valaquenta* Aulë is connected with Melkor, with the latter text specifying, ‘Aulë was most like him in thought and in powers’ (*S* 18). Both ‘desired to make things of their own that should be new and unthought of by others, and delighted in the praise of their skill’ (*S* 18). Aulë serves to show what Melkor could have been; a sub-creator taking joy in sub-creation. But Melkor also shows what Aulë could have become; a would-be-creator, turned destroyer in defiance of Ilúvatar. Aulë’s creation of the Dwarves embodies the precarious balance between good and evil sub-creation. He desired the coming of the Children so he could teach them but he was unwilling to wait for the fullness of Ilúvatar’s designs (*S* 37). He acted alone and in secret (*S* 37) just as Melkor had done. The difference between Aulë and Melkor lies in Aulë’s response when Ilúvatar questions him. While Melkor was ‘filled with shame, of which came secret anger’ (*S* 6), Aulë immediately recognises he has ‘fallen into folly’ (*S* 38) and freely offers to destroy his handiwork. To some extent Aulë and Melkor are the two poles

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557 This list could be expanded to include Sauron and Saruman.
of the spectrum of sub-creation: Aule delights in ‘the deed of making and in the thing made’, while Melkor, by implicit contrast, delights in ‘possession’ and ‘his own mastery’ (S 8). Yet they both attempt to move from sub-creation to creation. Aule lacks the pride and envy to turn this creative presumption into open rebellion, but evil will still come of it. Iluvatar warns Aule, ‘often strife shall arise between thine and mine’ (S 38) and Yavanna recognises that because Aule hid his thoughts of the Dwarves from her, they will be ignorant of her sub-creation and deficient in love for the things she loves. ‘Many a tree shall feel the bite of their iron without pity’ (S 39). The dwarves are limited by Aule’s limited knowledge of the Music and the thoughts of the other Ainur. Whatever innate lack they have has the same source as that of the creatures of Melkor. Aule’s final words to Yavanna, that the dwarves will have need of wood, further hints at the limitation of Aule’s thought. If he is not fallen, neither is he perfect.

Among the Children of Iluvatar, Fëanor is the clearest example of a corrupted sub-creator. Fëanor’s fall is also from a position of pre-eminence, being described as ‘the most subtle in mind and the most skilled in hand’ of all the Noldor (S 64). As with Melkor, Fëanor had a tendency towards isolation, ‘working ever swiftly and alone; and he asked the aid and sought the counsel of none’ (S 67). This isolation arises from fear, moves through secrecy, to distrust, a habit which becomes more pronounced as his fall continues. Though he would wear them openly at great feasts (S 70), the making of the Silmarils was a ‘secret labour’ (S 68). Later, when the lies of Melkor had caused the Noldor to forge weapons, Fëanor made a secret forge, known only to his immediate family (S 71). Fëanor became less and less willing to share the sight of the Silmarils with others and came to love them ‘with a greedy love’ (S 70). From sharing them grudgingly, he locks them in a

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558 Verlyn Flieger has pointed out how his ‘subtlety’ is reminiscent of the serpent in Genesis 3. Flieger, Splintered Light, p. 104.
deep chamber in his hoard (S 70). Fëanor’s fault is two-fold. Like Melkor, he comes to think of the Silmarils as his own creation, forgetting they are sub-creations. We are told: ‘he seldom remembered now that the light within them was not his own’ (S 70). This is more than just possessiveness. It marks a failure to understand the dependent nature of sub-creation. His other characteristic fault is an over-identification with his sub-creation. When asked to relinquish the Silmarils so that the Two Trees can be revived, he protests, ‘It may be that I can unlock my jewels, but never again shall I make their like: if I must break them, I shall break my heart, and I shall be slain; first of all the Eldar in Aman’ (S 83). Fëanor’s objection that he cannot reproduce his greatest act of sub-creation is valid; Yavanna and the Teleri make the same claim (S 82, 93). His claim that he cannot survive their passing, however, is clearly a sign his relationship with his sub-creation has become corrupted. He loves a sub-creation more than anything, save his father (S 84). It is a selfish love, in that he needs his sub-creation more than Arda needs the light of the Trees, while also over-identifying him with his work and his role as maker, considering his life not worth living without the Silmarils. This is far from the unfallen sub-creativity Aulë displays at his best, loving the act of making and giving freely the things made. Tolkien expresses sympathy for Fëanor’s position by having Aulë remind the Valar quite how much they ask of Fëanor (S 82), but the scene is implicitly critical of Fëanor and stresses the connection between his state of mind and his later actions. Fëanor’s most evil acts, his oath and the kinslaying at Alqualondë, arise from a sub-creator’s jealous love of his sub-creation. His sub-creation is more important to him than all of Creation.

A further connection between sub-creativity and evil is often overlooked because the particular character involved is seldom recognised as a sub-creator, namely

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559 The Dark Elf Êol mimics Fëanor’s fall. He seeks to be alone and begrudges his family any contact with the outside world, coming to see them almost as possessions. See (S 153–60).
Ungoliant.\textsuperscript{560} It is easy to view Ungoliant as an entirely destructive figure; her main role in *The Silmarillion* is to help Melkor kill the Two Trees (S 76–81). Her origin is obscure, adding to the sense of her as a being from outside the world of creation and sub-creation. In *The Book of Lost Tales* the narrator, in this tale the Elf Lindo, recorded how even the Valar did not know whence she came, and recalled her many names among the peoples of the Earth (*Lost Tales I* 151). Lindo suggests:

Mayhap she was bred of mists and darkness on the confines of the Shadowy Seas, in the utter dark that came between the overthrow of the Lamps and the kindling of the Trees, but more like she has always been

(*Lost Tales I* 152)

The 1930s *Quenta Silmarillion* suggests she came ‘from the Outer Darkness, maybe, that lies beyond the Walls of the World’ (*Lost Road* 230). The second phase of the *Later Quenta Silmarillion* (c.1958–60) introduced an alternative explanation which became that of the published *Silmarillion*. It records how among the Elves it is said that ‘in ages long before she had descended from the darkness that lies about Arda, when Melkor first looked down upon the light in the kingdom of Manwë. But she disowned her master’ (*Morgoth* 284; cf. *S* 76). The implication here is that she is a fallen Maia who then rebelled against Melkor. Despite their differences, each version serves to connect her with darkness and absence. This may also explain her hunger. She is described as ‘feed[ing] her emptiness’ (*S* 76), being ‘famished’ (*S* 77), even thirsting despite having drained the sap from the Trees and drunk the wells of Varda dry (*S* 80). Having escaped with Melkor, she still complains of hunger and devours all the jewels he has stolen, save the Silmarils (*S* 85). Finally it is rumoured that ‘in her uttermost famine she devoured herself at last’ (*S* 86). In

\textsuperscript{560} I am grateful to Corey Olsen for bringing this to my attention.
the text of the published *Silmarillion* she is perhaps the character most clearly associated with unmaking, more so even than Melkor.

Yet for all this she too is a frustrated sub-creator; indicated by the form she assumes. Whatever Tolkien’s personal feelings about spiders, they are of their nature creative beings, a connection acknowledged in the Greco-Roman myth of Arachne.\(^{561}\) Considered as sub-creators, spiders suggest the moral ambivalence of sub-creation; they make only to kill. Ungoliant is a weaver, perhaps once a companion of Vairë, the Weaver (cf. *S* 19), with one of her earliest names being Wirilomë, the ‘Gloomweaver’ (*Lost Tales I* 152–3). Ungoliant sub-creates; her sub-creations are her webs. She hungers for light but from this light she makes her own work. ‘There she sucked up all light that she could find, and spun it forth again in dark nets of strangling gloom, until no light more could come to her abode; and she was famished’ (*S* 77). Just as Melkor will decline from a creative to a destructive impulse, Ungoliant connects the creative and destructive. Desiring light only for herself, she too descends down into darkness (cf. *S* 23). Unlike Fëanor she does not make something which can store and share light: rather she consumes it, making a barrier to further light. As well as her webs, she actively produces darkness, not merely the absence of light but an ‘unlight’, a tangible sub-creation in its own right. ‘A cloak of darkness she wove about them [...] an Unlight, in which things seemed to be no more, and which eyes could not pierce, for it was void’ (*S* 77). When she drinks the sap of the Trees and the light from the Wells of Varda, she ‘belched forth black vapours’ (*S* 80), a darkness neither Manwë nor Varda could penetrate. Ungoliant has not merely removed light, leaving shadow in its place: she has made visible darkness. But her sub-creations give her neither pleasure nor fulfilment. She wished to possess light and made webs to capture it

but only drives it away from herself. Her sub-creation is based upon a possessiveness and
self-obsession which can never be satisfied and so her works become merely means to an
unattainable end. In this regard Ungoliant rivals Melkor in terms of the absolute corruption
of her sub-creativity. Perhaps even more than Melkor, she shows the destructive potential
in frustrated sub-creation.

Not only do Tolkien’s sub-creators repeatedly go wrong, but they do so in very
similar ways. Whether Melkor in the Void, Fëanor in his forge beneath Formenos, or Êol
in the woods of Nan Elmoth, they isolate themselves and reject the need of others.
Unfallen sub-creators give their works away freely, such as the Noldor sharing their gems
in Eldamar (S 60), while fallen sub-creators place their sub-creations above their
responsibilities to kin and community, as when Fëanor and his sons place the Silmarils
before any bond of loyalty (S 88–9). In Tolkien’s work, cooperative sub-creation leads to
the highest works of art: Menegroth, built by Elves and Dwarves, is described as ‘the
fairest dwelling of any king that ever has been east of the Sea’ (S 102), while Gondolin is
built by a mixed population of Noldor and Sindar (S 136, 144–5). Corrupted creativity
forgets that sub-creation is essentially cooperative in nature and turns to possessiveness.
Even if they do not participate in outright collaboration in the act of making, all of
Tolkien’s sub-creators depend on the natural materials of Arda, the work of the Ainur
under Iluvatar. Melkor embodies the potential destructiveness of the sub-creative impulse
when it is divorced from a commitment to interdependence, cooperation and humility.
Ulmo’s warning to Turgon to ‘love not too well the work of thy hands and the devices of

562 The Nauglamir, made by the Dwarves using gems provided by Finrod, is described as ‘the most renowned
of their works in the Elder Days (S 130). For much of his adult life, Tolkien was a writer in a community of
writers, whether the TCBS or the Inklings, not a solitary and jealous artist. Further, as Diana Pavlic Glyer
points out, none of the collaborative works involving the Inklings was more extensive than that of Tolkien
and his son Christopher. Glyer, The Company They Keep, p. 151.
thy heart’ (S 144) can be taken as Tolkien’s warning to makers but, implicitly, there is an even stronger warning throughout: remember you are a sub-creator, not a creator. *The Silmarillion* challenges makers to identify themselves not as god-like figures creating alone in the Void but as sub-creators, working in a tradition of ideas and reworking the material of Creation through interaction with other sub-creators and their works.

**Melkor and Matter**

Having depicted Melkor as sub-creator, Tolkien had to address the implications this has for the effects of evil in the world. Melkor’s evil is ‘subcreatively introduced’ into the world before its creation. This has consequences for the relationship between evil and the material world. On one occasion Tolkien claimed his myth of the Fall differed from Christian mythology in just this regard:

> In the latter the Fall of Man is subsequent to and a consequence (though not a necessary consequence) of the ‘Fall of the Angels’: a rebellion of created free-will at a higher level than Man; but it is not clearly held (and in many versions is not held at all) that this affected the ‘World’ in its nature: evil was brought in from outside, by Satan. In this Myth the rebellion of created free-will precedes creation of the World (Eä); and Eä has in it, subcreatively introduced, evil, rebellions, discordant elements of its own nature already when the *Let it Be* was spoken. The Fall or corruption, therefore, of all things in it and all inhabitants of it, was a possibility if not inevitable. (*Letters* 286–7)

As Tolkien admits, some Christians before him made a connection between the fall of the angels and the corruption of the physical world. For example, water, salt, incense, and oil
intended for liturgical use were directly exorcised in several Christian rites. This ritual clearly indicates belief in Satan’s power over the material world as well as over fallen humanity; though as Jeffrey Burton Russell points out, Christian tradition was never consistent on this point. By endorsing this view, Tolkien accounted for natural evil without having to ascribe it directly to the Divinity. It did, however, carry the risk of giving Melkor power on a phenomenal, indeed cosmic, scale, suggesting an almost Manichaean cosmology. Tolkien recognised that it increased Melkor’s stature, and in his late writings noted to himself that ‘Melkor must be made far more powerful in original nature’ (Morgoth 390). Another implication of this myth of the Fall is that Melkor takes as much, or more, interest in the domination and reshaping of the physical world as he does in the enslavement and corruption of the Children of Ilúvatar. While Christian mythology focuses upon humanity’s fall, Tolkien places it in a larger context of an angelic fall which is intimately bound up with the ‘Fall’ of the world in its nature.

In the late 1950s Tolkien elaborated on the connection between Melkor’s fall and the flawed state of the physical universe in a manuscript titled ‘Some notes on the “philosophy” of the Silmarillion’, expanded as ‘Notes on motives in the Silmarillion’ (see Morgoth 394). In outlining the difference between the motives of Melkor and Sauron, Tolkien offered a number of insights into Melkor’s motivation, and attitude towards Arda. This can, broadly speaking, be grouped under five headings:

563 ‘I exorcise thee, creature salt [...] that this creature salt may in the name of the Trinity become an effective sacrament to put the Enemy to flight.’ Quoted in Jeffrey Burton Russell, Lucifer: The Devil in the Middle Ages (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1984), p. 125.
564 Ibid.
565 That Ilúvatar never engages in battle with Melkor challenges a Manichean reading. The contest between the two musics is between Melkor and the other Ainur (S 4–5), differing from the battle of the angels in Book VI of Paradise Lost by being a contest of sub-creativity rather than force.
(1) Melkor desired to dominate Arda and sought to do so by imbuing the physical constituents of the Earth with his own being.

(2) To carry out this design, Melkor became irrevocably incarnate – with both physical and psychological consequences.

(3) While Sauron desired to control the wills of creatures in Arda, Melkor wanted mastery over the very being of everything in Arda.

(4) In the Music Melkor paid little attention to beings and objects not of his own devising and later came to be angered by their existence.

(5) This aggressive isolation became a fully formed nihilism as Melkor's corruption progressed.

Before addressing the individual components of these notes, however, it is first necessary to raise the question of how to relate such analytic writings to the evolving text of the 'Silmarillion'. Christopher Tolkien noted an analytical turn in Tolkien's writings on Arda from the late 1950s:

Meditating long on the world that he had brought into being and was now in part unveiled, he had become absorbed in analytic speculation concerning its underlying postulates. Before he could prepare a new and final Silmarillion he must satisfy the requirements of a coherent theological and metaphysical system, rendered now more complex in its presentation by the suppositions of obscure and conflicting elements in its roots and its traditions. (*Morgoth* x)

Writings such as these notes on motives are, unlike the *Athrabeth*, not presented as part of the legendarium but as Tolkien's commentary upon it. This commentary is, however, upon a work Tolkien was still in the process of writing. As such, new ideas developed in the commentary can be seen as feeding back into the work, shaping the subsequent direction it
took. When considering these notes, the question of how much they represent a new
departure or the elaboration of pre-existing, implicit, material must always be borne in
mind.

The recapitulation of Melkor's fall in the Valaquenta notes that 'he coveted Arda
and all that was in it, desiring the kingship of Manwë and dominion over the realms of his
peers' (S 23). Here Melkor's desire for dominion is expressed primarily in terms of the
material world. His envy of Manwë's kingship is bookended by his concern for control of
the world, first considered as Arda and secondly as the realms of the Valar. The 'realms'
could theoretically just refer to Valinor and its constituent parts but the terms 'Arda' and
'the kingship of Manwë' indicate universal ambitions on Melkor's part. He does not just
want power over others; he wants the governance of those aspects of the material world
entrusted to them. In this context, Manwë's kingship appears to be less his seat upon
Taniquetil and more a symbol of the rule of the world in total. In his 'Notes on motives'
Tolkien describes how Melkor sought to achieve such control:

To gain domination over Arda, Morgoth had let most of his being pass into
the physical constituents of the Earth — hence all things that were born on
Earth, and lived on and by it, beasts or plants or incarnate spirits, were liable
to be 'stained'. (Morgoth 394–5)

He explains that Melkor attempted specifically to identify himself with the physical matter
of Arda (Morgoth 399). This has obvious similarities with Sauron's forging of the One
Ring in order to control the other Rings of Power; something Tolkien noted. He describes
Melkor's actions as 'A vaster, and more perilous, procedure, though of similar sort to the
operation of Sauron with the Rings' (Morgoth 400).\footnote{The fullest account of the forging of the One Ring, and Sauron's intentions, occurs in Of the Rings of
Power and the Third Age. See (S 341–66 at 344).} Tolkien's 'Notes on motives'
postdate *The Lord of the Rings* and are to some extent a rereading of Melkor in light of Sauron’s development in that work. Yet Melkor’s concern for control of the physical world was implicitly present much earlier.

The fully formed notion of Arda as tainted with Melkor’s spirit, Middle-earth as ‘Morgoth’s Ring’, arose only after the writing of *The Lord of the Rings*. But as early as *The Book of Lost Tales*, Tolkien had presented Melko as controlling the physical forces of the world, implying a fixation on mastery over matter. When the Valar go to the North to chain Melko he ‘shook the earth beneath them; and he made snow-capped heights to belch forth flame’ (*Lost Tales I* 101). Once Melko is imprisoned in the vaults of Mandos, the world as a whole becomes less geologically violent. The tumult of the seas abates, volcanic activity ceases, earthquakes come to an end, and the ice sheets advancing from the north and south poles recede (*Lost Tales I* 105–6). This is much less subtle than the insidious control of the physical world Tolkien attributes to Melkor in his later writings, a controlling of catastrophic natural forces rather than a corruption of matter itself, but it does display an incipient connection between Melko and what humans perceive as natural evil.

In Tolkien’s subsequent writings, the idea of Melkor pervasively controlling matter is linked to Melkor’s physical presence in Arda. To identify himself with matter, ‘Melkor incarnated himself [...] permanently. He did this so as to control the hroa, the ‘flesh’ or physical matter of Arda’ (*Morgoth* 399). By permanently taking on a physical form, Melkor united his nature with that of Arda just as Sauron did with the Ring; and just as this left Sauron vulnerable to the Ring’s destruction, Melkor was now vulnerable to physical injury. Although the other Valar are described as experiencing weariness (*S* 28), Melkor is the only one shown to receive a bodily injury. This is connected with another quality

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567 The term is Tolkien’s, see (*Morgoth* 400).
which distinguishes Melkor from the Valar, his fear. Tolkien notes, 'Morgoth at the time of the War of the Jewels had become permanently 'incarnate': for this reason he was afraid, and waged the war almost entirely by means of devices, or of subordinates and dominated creatures' (Morgoth 395). The permanency of Melkor's incarnation sharply differentiates him from the other Valar whose form comes from 'their knowledge of the visible World rather than of the World itself; and they need it not, save only as we use raiment' (S 11). By comparison, Morgoth's hands are burned permanently black by the Silmarils and he is never again free of the pain of that burning (S 86). The fear which accompanies Melkor's incarnation can be seen in Morgoth's cry when Ungoliant turns on him (S 85) or more fully in Morgoth's duel with Fingolfin (S 178–80). This duel clearly articulates Morgoth's fear of any injury to his assumed bodily form. When Fingolfin challenges him to come forth, Morgoth delays and the narrator reports 'it is said that he took not the challenge willingly; for though his might was greatest of all things in this world, alone of the Valar he knew fear' (S 178). The outcome of the duel was never in doubt: Fingolfin entered it 'filled with [...] despair' (S 178) and Morgoth's overwhelming power is emphasised. Even so, Morgoth is afraid. The most plausible explanation is that he fears not death at Fingolfin's hands but physical injury, however slight. This is well founded, for with his last stroke Fingolfin cut Morgoth's foot, causing his black blood to

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569 The narrator comments that 'alone of the Valar he knew fear' (S 178). The 'terror' that accompanies the destruction of the Two Trees (S 80) could be attributed solely to the Elves rather than to the Valar. Yavanna's 'fear' that the Silmarils would be destroyed (S 86) is qualitatively different in that she fears for the Silmarils, and not for herself.

569 It is even more striking given that Tolkien revised the other Valar to make them less physical as discussed above.

570 The duel was in existence as early as the Quenta Noldorinwa (c.1930) and already contained all of its essential features. See (Shaping 106–7). As such, Morgoth's physicality should be seen as an element retained through later versions rather than a new invention following later thoughts.
gush forth (S 179). Morgoth is then injured a second time when Thorondor, king of the Eagles, mars his face while retrieving Fingolfin’s body (S 179). The indelibility of these wounds is recorded: ‘Morgoth went ever halt of one foot after that day, and the pain of his wounds could not be healed; and in his face was the scar that Thorondor made’ (S 180). Far from being a ‘raiment’ Morgoth could adopt or discard at will, his body is so bound to his spirit that it can resist his will. He cannot heal himself and must carry his scars and pain ever after. This contrasts strikingly not just with the other Valar but with the depiction of the relationship between the feäar and hröar of the Elves in the Athrabeth, where Elves have significant powers of physical recuperation due to the control of their spirit over their bodies. With Morgoth the opposite is the case: he has become so physical that his spirit cannot will his own body to heal itself.

The narrator attributes the maiming not merely of Morgoth’s body but of his being to his expenditure of himself upon controlling his subjects: ‘in the domination of his servants and the inspiring of them with lust of evil he spent his spirit’ (S 87). The desire to control other wills is a motive he shares with Sauron, but despite the parallelism of Melkor and Sauron in the ‘Notes on motives’ Tolkien also contrasts them. They both desire to control other wills, but the means and scope of his ambition is different and greater. To focus first on the similarities: Sauron explicitly forged the Ring to control the wills of the other Ringbearers (FR, I, ii, 51) while Melkor entered Arda with designs upon the Children of Êlëuvatar because ‘he wished himself to have subjects and servants, and to be called Lord, and to be a master over other wills’ (S 7–8). Working on the principle that Sauron, having modelled himself on Morgoth, reflects Morgoth in turn, the description in ‘The

571 That Morgoth bleeds strongly emphasises his corporeality.
572 [T]hey were not subject to diseases; they healed rapidly and completely after injuries that would have proven fatal to Men’ (Morgoth 341).
Field of Cormallen' of the effects of Sauron's will upon his subjects may illustrate something of Morgoth's dominion as well. This passage immediately follows the destruction of the Ring and the passing of Sauron:

[T]heir enemies were flying and the power of Mordor was scattering like dust in the wind. As when death smites the swollen brooding thing that inhabits their crawling hill and holds them all in sway, ants will wander witless and purposeless and then feebly die, so the creatures of Sauron, orc or troll or beast spell-enslaved, ran hither and thither mindless; and some slew themselves, or cast themselves in pits, or fled wailing back to hide in holes or dark lightless places far from hope. (RK, VI, iv, 949)

Sauron's 'death' removes his will from his subjects. Without him they are gravely diminished: the orcs and trolls are not simply leaderless but deprived of their internal control and motivation. However, the men of Rhûn and Harad react differently. Though most flee or sue for mercy, many fight on, motivated by their own hate, pride and courage (RK, VI, iv, 949). Though pledged in service to Sauron, their wills were not wholly dominated. They cooperated rather than being truly controlled. The orcs and trolls may have had a 'natural' inclination towards Sauron, being the 'creatures', though not true creations, of Morgoth, but humans, though frequently Sauron's most loyal servants (the Nazgûl, the Mouth of Sauron) are not corrupted in quite the same way. They had turned their wills to Sauron's service but their wills were still their own to give. Morgoth's influence on creaturely will was on a deeper and more profound level; he sought to control their complete nature, both physical and spiritual.

573 Cf. the greater determination of the armies of Mordor when the Witch-king is present, as reported by Boromir (FR, II, ii, 245).
Matter and Spirit

Tolkien’s ‘Notes on motives’ were not written in isolation but appear after and in relation to a body of works composed c.1958–60. Some of these works are fictions, including debates, while others are Tolkien’s commentary on his world as he attempted to answer philosophical and theological questions arising from innovations introduced either in *The Lord of the Rings* or the revisions to the ‘Silmarillion’ that immediately followed it. Some of these texts seem to have been written in response to the growing number of questions from readers of *The Lord of the Rings* who wanted to know more about aspects of Middle-earth, and their implications. Tolkien’s replies to these letters frequently became short essays in their own right and were likely the catalyst for the more discursive, analytical turn in Tolkien’s writing in the late 1950s and early 60s. This body of work is united by a number of shared concerns: the cosmology of Eä, the nature (and effects) of evil, and the relationship between matter and spirit or body and soul. Christopher Tolkien has commented upon the difficulty of establishing the date and order of several of these works (those contained in the section ‘Myths Transformed’ of *Morgoth’s Ring*), but by focusing on those texts which deal with the subject of body and soul the following order of composition seems likely:

1. *The Story of Finwê and Miriel*
2. *Laws and Customs Among the Eldar*
3. *Athrabeth Finrod ah Andreth*
4. *The Converse of Manwê and Eru*
5. ‘Reincarnation of Elves’
6. Tolkien’s commentary on the *Athrabeth*
7. ‘Notes on motives’

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574 For example, his 1958 letter to Rhona Beare (*Letters* 277–87).
Tolkien’s ‘Notes on motives’ cannot be precisely related to the other texts in this sequence, but its use of the term hrôa indicates it was among the last to be composed. While the ‘Notes on motives’ are equally concerned with the three topics of cosmology, evil, and matter, they can usefully be viewed as growing out of Tolkien’s discussion of the relationship of body and soul. The enlargement of the story of Finwë and Miriel (c.1958–60) had caused Tolkien to reconsider the wider ramifications of Elvish reincarnation.

The narrative itself – Miriel dies having given birth to Fëanor and her spirit refuses to return to its body, forcing the Valar to address the practicalities of Elvish death and rebirth – produced an extended commentary, situated within the fictional world itself: Laws and Customs Among the Eldar. Tolkien’s position up to this point had been that Elves, if killed, were reborn as children. This stance went back to The Book of Lost Tales which recorded that ‘dying they are reborn in their children, so that their number minishes not, nor grows’ (Lost Tales I 59, cf. 76). Laws and Customs reports that a ‘houseless fëa that chose or was permitted to return to life re-entered the incarnate world through childbirth. Only thus could it return’ (Morgoth 221). The reborn Elf would experience a second childhood and gradually recover the memory of their past life as they matured (Morgoth 221). By the time Tolkien wrote The Converse of Manwë and Eru, Elvish rebirth was still canonical but had been joined by the possibility of the restoration of the Elf’s original body: ‘Eru answered: “Let the body that was destroyed be re-made. Or let the

575 The term developed through the drafts from hrôn > hrondo > hrôa. See (Morgoth 300, 304, 361) for Christopher Tolkien’s dating of these works.

576 Its full title is Of the Laws and Customs Among the Eldar Pertaining to Marriage and Other Matters Related Thereto: Together with the Statute of Finwë and Miriel and the Debate of the Valar at its Making which reflects its position as a quasi-legal text within the narrative world. See (Morgoth 209).

577 In the 1930s Quenta Silmarillion, Tolkien raised the possibility Elvish fëar could leave Mandos without bodies and dwell in Aman as spirits but does not appear to have retained this suggestion elsewhere. See (Shaping 246).

578 Tolkien notes that Miriel was an exception (Morgoth 221).
naked fëa be reborn as a child’’ (Morgoth 362). At some point between writing the Converse and composing the commentary on the Athrabeth, Tolkien’s thoughts changed further. A hastily written manuscript entitled ‘Reincarnation of Elves’, which is unfortunately not reproduced in full by Christopher Tolkien, marks the apparently final development of Tolkien’s thoughts on Elvish reincarnation. There Tolkien notes a ‘fatal objection’ to the idea that Elvish fëar are reincarnated in new-born children of different parents: ‘it contradicts the fundamental notion that fëa and hrōa were each fitted to the other: since hrōar have a physical descent, the body of rebirth, having different parents, must be different’ (Morgoth 363). What became Tolkien’s ‘firm and stable view of the matter’, in Christopher Tolkien’s words, is that disembodied fëar under the instruction of the Valar were permitted to rebuild their hrōar from memory and be re-housed in this restored body (Morgoth 364). As Christopher Tolkien writes, Note 3 to the commentary on the Athrabeth, which addresses reincarnation, makes no mention of ‘rebirth’ at all (see Morgoth 339, 364).

The Athrabeth itself may be the point where Tolkien’s opinions began to change. Coming between the old certainty of Laws and Customs and the doubts, or at least complications, of The Converse of Manwë and Eru, the Athrabeth places an emphasis on the natural union of fëa and hrōa which would be central to Tolkien’s thoughts in ‘Reincarnation of Elves’. When Finrod suggests that the fëar of unfallen humans would have abandoned their hrōar willingly at the point of death, Andreth answers:

Nay [...]. For that would be contempt of the body, and is a thought of the Darkness unnatural in any of the Incarnate whose life uncorrupted is a union of mutual love. But the body is not an inn to keep a traveller warm for a night, ere he goes on his way, and then to receive another. It is a house made for one dweller only. (Morgoth 317)
Andreth stresses the essential unity of *fēa* and *hrōa*. If the body can be considered clothing she claims it is appropriate to speak of the wearer being fitted to the clothes as much as the clothes being fitted to the wearer. This essential unity is presented as natural not just for humans but for all ‘Incarnates’, something Finrod does not contradict. This is not to claim that Elves and humans have an identical relationship of *fēa* to *hrōa*. Already in *Laws and Customs*, Tolkien noted that the *fēar* of Elves were suited for near-immortal life:

Their *fēar* were tenacious therefore of life ‘in the raiment of Arda’, and far excelled the spirits of Men in power over that ‘raiment’, even from the first days protecting their bodies from many ills and assaults (such as disease), and healing them swiftly of injuries, so that they recovered from wounds that would have proved fatal to Men. (*Morgoth* 218–19)\(^579\)

Elves are more ‘spiritual’ and less ‘physical’ than humans but they are still by their nature incarnate creatures: ‘the thought of existence as *fēar* only was revolting to them’ (*Morgoth* 332). Nevertheless, the different, more bodily, nature of humanity, and the source of that body in the matter of Arda, has important implications for Tolkien’s philosophy and theology.

First, the connection between the relation of body and soul and Melkor’s attempt to corrupt and control the material basis of Arda must be clarified. It is through matter, in the form of bodies, that Melkor seeks to control the Children of Ilúvatar. In his commentary Tolkien emphasises:

[Melkor’s] attempt to dominate the structure of Eä, and all of Arda in particular, and alter the designs of Eru [...] had introduced evil, or a

\(^{579}\) Tolkien would repeat his comments on Elvish control of their bodies in his commentary on the *Athrabeth* (*Morgoth* 331, 341). The ‘fading’ of the Elves to the often insubstantial beings of folklore is too large a topic to be adequately addressed here, but suffice to say in *Laws and Customs* it is explained in terms of the ever increasing dominance of the *fēar* (*Morgoth* 219).
tendency to aberration from the design, into all the physical matter of
Arda. It was for this reason, no doubt, that he had been totally successful
with Men, but only partially so with Elves (who remained as a people
‘unfallen’). His power was wielded over matter, and through it. [...] But
by nature the fëar of Men were in much less strong control of their hrôar
than was the case with the Elves. (Morgoth 334)

The Silmarillion records the Elvish belief that humans ‘resemble Melkor most of all the
Ainur’ (S 36). While that belief, prejudiced or otherwise, addresses human sinfulness
quite broadly, here Tolkien grounds humanity’s connection with Melkor in a physical
bond. Humanity’s inability to control their own bodies is not a result of their fall but of the
infection of Arda by Melkor’s will. Melkor’s influence is present in all matter and so is
present in human bodies. Fëar on the other hand, whether human or Elvish, are held by the
Elves to be directly created by Eä and sent into Eä (Morgoth 336). Unlike Eä itself, fëar
are not achieved mediately by the Ainur and so are free from Melkor’s direct influence
(Morgoth 336). As Elvish fëar have more control over their bodies than humans have over
theirs, Elves are more resilient to Melkor’s corruption. The more corporeal nature of
humankind predisposes them towards Melkor from their creation but at the same time
human mortality offers them an escape from Melkor when they depart Arda through
death. In the Athrabeth, Tolkien linked this spiritual escape with an eventual bodily
escape, and even a bodily redemption.

580 Later the narrator comments: ‘To Hildórien there came no Vala to guide Men, [...] and Men have feared
the Valar, rather than loved them, and have not understood the purpose of the Powers, being at variance with
them, and at strife with the world’ (S 115–16). The last clause is intriguing. Are humans at strife with the
world because they must of their nature leave it or is the world turned against them because of their fall?
581 Elvish bodies are still made of the matter of Arda but as their souls form a greater proportion of their
being, they are correspondingly less influenced by Melkor. See (Morgoth 344).
582 Consider Húrin’s, apparently inspired, challenge to Morgoth that he is not the ruler of the world (UT 88).
Unlike most of the texts in this sequence, the *Athrabeth* is as concerned with human as with Elvish death. Andreth’s central argument, that humans did not originally die, poses the problem of what then would be the difference between humans and Elves and the point of their separate creation. Finrod’s counter argument is that humanity is, unlike the Elves, both psychologically and physically a pilgrim species in a world that is not their ultimate home: ‘To me the difference seems like that between one who visits a strange country, and abides there a while (but need not), and one who has lived in that land always (and must)’ *(Morgoth* 315). In order to resolve the paradox of humanity, which both does and does not belong to this world, while not violating the principle that by their nature *fēa* and *hrōa* are indissolubly wed, Finrod is forced to come to the conclusion that human *fēar* can bring their *hrōar* with them out of Arda. A *fēa*, which is by nature a traveller, is therefore bound to its *hrōa*. Each must fulfil its destiny without overriding the nature of the other.

Then this must surely follow: the *fēa* when it departs must take with it the *hrōa*. And what can this mean unless it be that the *fēa* shall have the power to uplift the *hrōa*, as its eternal spouse and companion, into an endurance everlasting beyond Eä, and beyond Time? *(Morgoth* 317–18)

This has potential consequences not just for humanity but for all of Arda. Finrod is aware the bodies of both Elves and humans, drawn and sustained by the matter of Arda, suffer the effects of Melkor’s malice *(Morgoth* 309). The health and stature of both are diminished and the Elves notice that outside Aman they find the effect of time and change on their bodies more noticeable *(Morgoth* 309). However, the notion that human souls could bring their bodies out of Arda, ‘assumption’ being the natural human fate, allows for an escape from Melkor’s influence and the healing, and even sanctification, of part of

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583 Cf. (S 35) and Augustine, *Confessionum*, I.1, CCSL 27, p. 1.
Arda, namely the human body. Finrod wonders if this would allow Arda, or at least part of Arda, to be healed of the taint of Melkor. He even speculates whether it would allow Arda to be released from the limits set for it in the ‘Vision of Eru’ (*Morgoth* 309):

> Is it, then, a vision of what was designed to be when Arda was complete – of living things and even of the very lands and seas of Arda made eternal and indestructible, for ever beautiful and new – with which the fear of Men compare what they see here? (*Morgoth* 309)

Then, just as Melkor’s corruption of Arda is achieved through matter, Arda’s liberation from Melkor’s control will be brought about through matter. From the vantage point of the Second Music, when Creation will be completed, matter would be seen to be not just the tool of evil but also the vehicle of redemption.

While keeping a clear distinction between matter and spirit, and making matter the conduit of much of Melkor’s evil, Tolkien was careful not to allow his legendarium to become dualist or Manichean. In a note to the commentary he stressed:

> ‘Matter’ is not regarded as evil or opposed to ‘Spirit’. Matter was wholly good in origin. It remained a ‘creature of Eru’, was still largely good, and indeed self-healing, when not interfered with: that is, when the latent evil introduced by Melkor was not deliberately roused and used by evil minds. (*Morgoth* 344)

Melkor did not create matter. Nor was it primarily his contribution to the Music; Aulë is the Vala most explicitly associated with ‘the fabric of Earth’ (*S 8*).\(^{584}\) Melkor’s corruption of matter is not total, nor is it uniform. In the ‘Notes on motives’, Tolkien writes that certain elements or conditions of matter had received Melkor’s particular attention for the part they could play in his plans and for that reason had an ‘evil’ tendency; he gives the

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\(^{584}\) Though, as already mentioned, that passage links Aulë with Melkor.
example of gold, as distinct from silver which remained largely uncorrupted (*Morgoth* 400). Water on the other hand was almost totally free of Melkor’s taint (*Morgoth* 401). The Elvish claim that ‘in water there lives yet the echo of the Music of the Ainur more than in any substance else’ (*S 8*) may either reflect or explain its independence from Melkor’s rule. Interestingly, the *Tale of Adanal*, the account of humanity’s Fall appended to the *Athrabeth*, depicts the immediate effect of the Fall as the revolt of the physical world against humanity:

Thereafter we were grievously afflicted, by weariness, and by hunger, and sickness; and the Earth and all things in it were turned against us. Fire and Water rebelled against us. The birds and beasts shunned us, or if they were strong they assailed us. Plants gave us poison; and we feared the shadows under trees. (*Morgoth 348*)

The physical world is already tainted by Melkor but it is only when humanity accepts Melkor as lord that they are exposed to the full effects of material corruption. The moral fault lies not in matter itself but in human volition and sin. Melkor’s fall begins with a creative impulse and ends with a destructive obsession but it is his frustrated interaction with matter which bridges these two points.

**Melkor’s Nihilism**

Tolkien’s ‘Notes on motives’ locate the final stage of Melkor’s fall in an all-consuming nihilism, arising from a hatred of the works, and even the existence, of all other beings. This slide towards nihilism and its connection with Melkor’s sociopathic self-obsession is not unique to this text but may be discerned in both the *Ainulindalë* and *Valaquenta*. There

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585 This is entirely orthodox: ‘Cursed is the earth in thy work; with labour and toil shalt thou eat thereof all the days of thy life. Thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to thee’ (*Gen 3:17–18*).
Melkor’s fall involves a rejection of relationships with others; an isolating self-obsession leading to a rejection of everything outside himself, ending in an absolute nihilism. This progress, inward and downward, is charted in the recapitulation of Melkor’s fall in the *Valaquenta*: ‘From splendour he fell through arrogance to contempt for all things save himself, a spirit wasteful and pitiless’ (*S 23*). In his unfallen state Melkor was, like Milton’s Satan, splendid, possessing the greatest gifts of all the Ainur. Splendour is not an individualistic quality: it implies at least one other person as an audience. But Melkor fell from splendour to arrogance. Arrogance implies an overreaching, an excessive confidence in the self’s own abilities. In particular it involves the dismissal of others, the defining feature of the arrogant being their refusal to heed advice, or to recognise need. It is a short road from arrogance to contempt. While the arrogant ignore or undervalue the contribution of others, the contemptuous actively despise others for seeking to draw the contemptuous into a reciprocal relationship. Further, the contemptuous can despise others for their very existence and the challenge it offers the self-sufficiency of the self-obsessed. Melkor’s contempt becomes the latter sort; a contempt ‘for all things save himself.’ The final two terms applied to Melkor, ‘wasteful’ and ‘pitiless’, point to where his fall has led. Wasteful, on the one hand, refers back to the previous paragraph and how Melkor ‘squandered his strength in violence and tyranny’ (*S 23*). Melkor’s self-diminishment, from ‘He who arises in Might’ to having his iron crown beaten into a collar (*S 303*), is central to his fall and is intimately connected with his self-emptying into matter, as discussed above. The term ‘wasteful’, however, refers outward as well as inward. Melkor will not just waste himself but will lay waste to the world around him. This is supported by the paired term ‘pitiless’. Melkor’s destructiveness is without restraint or limit. He accepts neither internal nor

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586 It is not so much the act of self-emptying as the motive behind it which corrupts.
external moral constraints, having placed his will above all other authorities. Without such restraints Melkor’s contempt for others can become nihilistic, as proves to be the case.

The *Ainulindalë*, on a more expansive scale, also charts the self-centred nature of Melkor’s fall. It describes two conflicting tendencies, towards interdependence among the Ainur (‘together’, ‘choirs’, ‘counsel’, ‘companions’) and towards solitude on the part of Melkor (‘his own’, ‘himself’, ‘alone’, ‘myself’). Melkor desires an independent rather than a collaborative role, but at this point his inventions are simply in order to increase the power and glory of ‘the part assigned to himself.’ At this stage he still thinks of himself as having a role and an assigned ‘part’ but wishes it to be enlarged as much as possible. This is Melkor’s state of ‘arrogance’ when he is still part of a community but chafes at his place within it. We are then told Melkor had frequently gone ‘alone’ into the void places. He deliberately separates himself from his peers. This separation is manifested in the structure of the *Ainulindalë* itself. Melkor is introduced in the process of falling. His first act of which we read is to create dissonance in the Music of the Ainur. Melkor is the only one of the Ainur to be named at this stage and the only Ainu to be differentiated from ‘the Ainur’ as a collective. The *Ainulindalë* is divided into twenty-five paragraphs. Melkor is introduced in the fifth and no other Ainu is named until Ulmo is first mentioned in the fifteenth. For more than half of the *Ainulindalë* Melkor is the only character, besides Ólóvatar, to be given individuality. The rest of the Ainur, at this stage, are still defined by their group identity. In the *Ainulindalë*, Melkor almost always appears acting alone.

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587 Cf. The importance of Bilbo and Frodo’s pity when given the chance to kill Gollum.
588 Cf. Ólóvatar who was alone but chose to create community as the first act of creation.
589 Admittedly Melkor immediately attracts followers but they are not named at this stage. They too are subsumed into a collective, though one of subservience rather than harmony.
Melkor’s fall is autocatalytic. By removing himself from communion with the other Ainur, he places himself in a position where he can stray further. With no equals to compare himself to, his pride becomes unchecked. He went into the Void desiring the power of creation and solitude reinforced his sense of separateness, moving his rebellion from thought to action. Once Melkor’s rebellion begins, however, he attracts followers. But this does not depart from the general contrast between isolation and community. Those Ainur who join Melkor lose their own individuality, which would have been maintained in a community of equals, and are absorbed into his theme, dominated by his intentions: ‘some began to attune their music to his rather than to the thought which they had at first’ (S 4). Melkor may also wish to turn the Children of Ilúvatar into subjects and servants but it is not to form an alternative community to the loyal Ainur: it is to increase his own position, to make himself ‘Lord’ (S 8). Melkor wishes to be ‘a master over other wills’; that is to take from those creatures that which makes them autonomous. Dominated by his will they would be merely extensions of himself. The Music of the Ainur by contrast does not entail the submergence of individual notes but their clarity and interaction. The interdependence of the participants still presupposes and requires their independence and individual satisfaction.

As discussed earlier, the Ainulindalé also emphasises Melkor’s envy, both of his equals and those less powerful. Melkor cannot accept that he, who had a share in all the gifts of the other Ainur, could be faced with creatures such as Elves and humans who could have gifts he would not possess. Melkor’s envy of the Children is thrown into sharp contrast with the reaction of the other Ainur who loved them precisely because they were beings ‘other than themselves’ (S 7). While the Ainur, as a group, welcome otherness,

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590 All of his followers are Maiar and at least in terms of power his inferiors, unlike the Valar who are his equals.
Melkor cannot stand it. As for Melkor’s envy of the other Ainur, this is obvious in the conflict that immediately breaks out upon their entering Arda. Melkor desires ‘dominion’ over Arda. Although each of the Ainur had a part in the Music and have a corresponding part in the governing of Arda once they enter it, Melkor claims dominion for himself alone. He will not cooperate with the Valar in the shaping of Arda for to do so would be to recognise their part in its creation. Instead he opposes everything they attempt. ‘They built lands and Melkor destroyed them; [...] seas they hollowed and Melkor spilled them’ (S 12).

Melkor does not create anything himself. In trying to assert full creative control over Arda, he only causes destruction, pushing it back towards formless chaos. Melkor, who had desired to bring into being things of his own, has become a purely negating force. He becomes so involved in destroying the sub-creations of others that he never sub-creates in a comparable way. Compare the depiction of Melkor in *Ainulindalë* C* who, having been driven from the Earth by Tulkas, resolves to destroy it rather than let anyone else have it: “I will rend the Earth asunder; and break it, and none shall possess it” (*Morgoth* 41). His selfishness and destructiveness are intimately linked. The petulant, almost childish, nature of his attitude – better break a thing than share it – expresses how far he has fallen. This change from a creative to a destructive impulse comes directly from his inability, or refusal, to relate to others. Refusing to accept that sub-creation cannot happen alone, he rejects it and embraces destructiveness instead.

Melkor’s self-willed isolation as the crux of his fall was already implicitly present in *The Music of the Ainur* (c.1919). He ‘interweaves matters of his own vain imagining that were not fitted to that great theme of Ilúvatar’ (*Lost Tales I* 53, emphasis added). He often went ‘alone’ into the dark places and the voids; and it is this ‘outer blackness’ which is credited as the source of his ‘secret thoughts’ with their dissonances (*Lost Tales I* 53–4). Melkor enters these void places out of his desire to ‘bring things into being of his own’
(Lost Tales I 53, emphasis added). His thoughts are not yet described as ‘unlike those of his brethren’ (cf. S 4), but he is already suspiciously secretive, withholding them even from Ilúvatar. His feigned desire to control the turmoil he instigated masks his purpose to ‘usurp the power of the other Ainur and make war upon Eldar and Men’ (Lost Tales I 57). ‘Usurp’ conveys his desire to replace the free cooperation of the other Ainur with his own ruthless monomania.

The features of Melkor’s fall implicit in the Ainulindalë and Valaquenta, his self-obsession, sociopathology, and eventual nihilism, are made explicit in Tolkien’s ‘Notes on motives’. After mentioning Melkor’s dispersal of himself into Arda’s matter, Tolkien contrasts Melkor and Sauron. Here we are presented with the claim that Sauron ‘probably knew more of the “Music” than did Melkor, whose mind had always been filled with his own plans and devices, and gave little attention to other things’ (Morgoth 395). This might seem surprising given the significant effect Melkor’s innovations had on the Music but it reflects the description of the Music in the Ainulindalë quite closely. The discord of Melkor arises in opposition to the first theme of Ilúvatar, not in conjunction with it. Melkor’s discord ‘contended with’ the second theme of Ilúvatar in a ‘war of sound’ (S 5). The separation between Melkor’s ‘theme’ and Ilúvatar’s is apparent from the line: ‘And it seemed at last that there were two musics progressing at one time before the seat of Ilúvatar, and they were utterly at variance.’ Melkor’s ‘theme’ ‘essayed to drown the other music by the violence of its voice’ (S 5). It is self-contained, having achieved a ‘clamorous unison’, and now seeks to supplant the other music if it cannot dominate it. The other music, Ilúvatar’s theme as interpreted by the faithful Ainur, is able, by contrast, to interact with Melkor’s discord, taking from it what it will: ‘it seemed that [the discord’s] most triumphant notes were taken by the other music and woven into its own solemn pattern’ (S
5). In the conflict between the two musics can be seen the essential difference between the atomised individualism of Melkor and the harmonious cooperation of the faithful Ainur.

In the ‘Notes on motives’ Tolkien further develops Melkor’s antipathy towards the other inhabitants of Arda by reflecting on his hatred of humans and Elves. Once he was incarnated in Arda as Morgoth and confronted by other wills and intelligences, he ‘was enraged by the mere fact of their existence’ (*Morgoth* 395). They represented something not of his making and outside his control. As such, he wished their utter destruction but was frustrated in that he could not ‘annihilate’ them and remove them from Arda altogether. He could not destroy their essential being, and certainly not their *féar*, but he could destroy their incarnate form. As Melkor himself became more incarnate this became ‘increasingly to his mind the only thing that was worth considering’ (*Morgoth* 395). Tolkien notes that as Melkor became more deeply involved in the habitual practise of fraud, he lied even to himself and began to think he could ‘annihilate’ Elves and humans (*Morgoth* 396). This attempt at total annihilation explained ‘his endeavour always to break wills and subordinate them to or absorb them in his own will and being, before destroying their bodies’ (*Morgoth* 396). As matter was within his control and wills apparently outside of it, dominating wills allowed Melkor to assert complete control over incarnate beings such as Elves and humans. Having removed the threat of their independence, Melkor could tell himself that these other beings were now safely consumed and destroyed. His nihilism became a way finally to overcome the bonds of relationships with others.

Tolkien’s discussion of Melkor’s thoughts ends with Melkor’s ‘final impotence and despair’. The difference between the Valar and Melkor is that they could still love ‘Arda Marred’, with all of Melkor’s corruption, while Melkor ‘could do nothing with Arda,

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591 Tolkien makes a distinction in these notes between Melkor and ‘the Morgoth’, his permanent incarnate form (*Morgoth* 390–1, 322).
which was not from his own mind and was interwoven with the work and thoughts of others' (*Morgoth* 396). Melkor’s self-obsession has reached such a degree that he cannot bear a world in which any other hand had a part in the making. Arda itself is a constant reminder of his creative limitations and of the independent existence of creations other than himself. Tolkien notes that Melkor could have raged until he had reduced the whole world to chaos but it would still have existed (*Morgoth* 396). The ability of the Valar to work with ‘Arda Marred’ and oppose the corruption of Melkor while seeking to protect Arda itself from further damage is demonstrated by the timing of their attacks on Melkor’s strongholds. They, especially Aulë, were reluctant to assault Utumno, knowing the damage it would cause to the fabric of Arda (*S* 47–8). Towards the end of the ‘Notes on motives’ Tolkien suggests that the War of Wrath may have been carefully timed to occur when Morgoth, locally triumphant, was neglectful of the rest of Middle-earth and so diminished in both strength and corruptive influence (*Morgoth* 402). The war, and its destruction, could be limited to Beleriand. This concern for the physical world highlights by contrast how far into nihilism Melkor had fallen; he would have had no Arda rather than an Arda shared. Unable to create, Melkor rejects Creation in its entirety.\(^{592}\) His nihilism is the mirror image of his original desire to create something of his own.

**Melkor’s fall begins with the desire to create and finds its nadir in a completely destructive contempt for all things save himself. He declines in stature from a being who sought to rival Ilúvatar to a coward suing for pardon and having his iron crown beaten into a collar**

\(^{592}\) Denethor echoes this with his speech from his pyre: ‘But if doom denies this to me, then I will have *naught*: neither life diminished, nor love halved, nor honour abated’ (*RK*, V, vii, 854).
for his neck (S 303). Arguably, the only things he succeeds in producing *ex nihilo* are his own evil intentions. In effect, much of Melkor’s later evil can be seen as a recapitulation of his first failed attempt at creation. As Corey Olsen has pointed out, the three things Melkor is most concerned with are described in curiously similar terms.\(^{593}\) Eä is described in its creation as ‘a cloud with a living heart of flame’ (S 9) which is echoed in the description of the Silmarils: ‘Yet that crystal was to the Silmarils but as is the body to the Children of Ilúvatar: the house of its inner fire, that is within it and yet in all parts of it, and is its life’ (S 68). From desire for Creation itself, to envy of creatures, to desire for the sub-creation of a single creature, Melkor declines from his original creative impulse but never entirely severs his connection with creativity, and the ability to enliven. His rape of the Silmarils is his attempt to possess the greatest example of sub-creation, and vicariously possess that sub-creative power. In Melkor, and the other fallen sub-creators of the legendarium, Ungoliant, Fëanor, Êol, Tolkien explored the psychological origins of evil and the nature of its effects upon the world in the way he knew best. By associating evil so clearly with sub-creativity, he, far from ignoring or simplifying the problem of evil, directly addressed it and recognised its presence even in his own love for the act of sub-creation.

Tolkien began his legendarium with a creation myth, incorporating the concept of sub-creation into both its themes and structures. Sub-creation permeated all the rest of his writings about Arda. It clarified and embodied his own conception of the divine, the purpose of Creation, and humanity’s part in the world. It defined his conception of the relation of fiction to primary reality. It shaped his understanding of the life of the world and the role of individual creatures in the drama of history. It allowed him to explore the perspectives of the beings who share Creation with us, and see anew humanity’s

relationship to the world around us. Yet, it also allowed him to see the dangers inherent in
sub-creation: possessiveness, myopia, even destructiveness. In sum, it gave his fantasy a
compelling reality.
Appendices

Appendix A

Ilúvatar's gift to humanity

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Music of the Ainur (c.1919)</th>
<th>Ainulindalë (1930s)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>[B]ut to Men I will appoint a task and give a great gift.' And he devised that they should have free will and the power of fashioning and designing beyond the original music of the Ainu, that by reason of their operations all things shall in shape and deed be fulfilled, and the world that comes of the music of the Ainu be completed unto the last and smallest. (Lost Tales I 61)</td>
<td>'But to Men I will give a new gift.' Therefore he willed that the hearts of Men should seek beyond the world and find no rest therein; but they should have a virtue to fashion their life, amid the powers and chances of the world, beyond the Music of the Ainur, which is as fate to all things else. And of their operation everything should be, in shape and deed, completed, and the world fulfilled unto the last and smallest. (Lost Road 163)</td>
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<table>
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<th>Ainulindalë C (c.1948)</th>
<th>The Silmarillion (1977)</th>
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<td>'But to Men I will give a new gift.' Therefore he willed that the hearts of Men should seek beyond the world and find no rest therein; but they should have a virtue to fashion their life, amid the powers and chances of the world, beyond the Music of the Ainur, which is as fate to all things else. And of their operation everything should be, in shape and deed, completed, and the world fulfilled unto the last and smallest. (Morgoth 21)</td>
<td>'But to the Atani I will give a new gift.' Therefore he willed that the hearts of Men should seek beyond the world and should find no rest therein; but they should have a virtue to shape their life, amid the powers and chances of the world, beyond the Music of the Ainur, which is as fate to all things else; and of their operation everything should be, in shape and deed, completed, and the world fulfilled unto the last and smallest. (S 35-6)</td>
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Appendix B

Fig.1. Keyword Frequency\textsuperscript{594}

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<td>Fate</td>
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Fig.2. Keyword Density

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### Appendix C

**Melkor’s Fall: Texts of the Fall Passage**

*The Music of the Ainur* (c.1919)

But as the great theme progressed it came into the heart of Melko to interweave matters of his own vain imagining that were not fitting to that great theme of Êluvatar. Now Melko had among the Ainur been given some of the greatest gifts of power and wisdom and knowledge by Êluvatar; and he fared often alone into the dark places and the voids seeking the Secret Fire that giveth Life and Reality (for he had a very hot desire to bring things into being of his own); yet he found it not, for it dwelleth with Êluvatar, and that he knew not till afterwards.

There had he nonetheless fallen to thinking deep cunning thoughts of his own, all of which he showed not even to Êluvatar.

*Lost Tales I 53–4*

*Áinulindalë* B (1930s)

But as the theme progressed, it came into the heart of Melko to interweave matters of his own imagining that were not in accord with the theme of Êluvatar; for he sought therein to increase the power and glory of the part assigned to himself. To Melko among the Ainur had been given the greatest gifts of power and knowledge, and he had a share in all the gifts of his brethren and he had gone often alone into the void places seeking the Secret Fire that gives life. For desire grew hot within him to bring into being things of his own, and it seemed to him that Êluvatar took no thought for the Void, and he was impatient of its emptiness. Yet he found not the Fire, for it is with Êluvatar, and he knew it not. But being alone he had begun to conceive thoughts of his own unlike those of his brethren.

*Lost Road 157*
But as the theme progressed, it came into the heart of Melkor to interweave matters of his own imagining that were not in accord with the theme of Ilúvatar; for he sought therein to increase the power and glory of the part assigned to himself. To Melkor among the Ainur had been given the greatest gifts of power and knowledge, and he had a share in all the gifts of his brethren; and he had gone often alone into the void places seeking the Imperishable Flame. For desire grew hot within him to bring into Being things of his own, and it seemed to him that Ilúvatar took no thought for the Void, and he was impatient of its emptiness. Yet he found not the Fire, for it is with Ilúvatar. But being alone he had begun to conceive thoughts of his own unlike those of his brethren.

(Morgoth 9)
## Texts of the Recapitulation Passage

### Quenta Silmarillion (1930s)

Last do all name Melko. But the Gnomes, who suffered most from his evil deeds, will not speak his name, and they call him Morgoth, the Black God, and Bauglir, the Constrained. Great might was given to him by Ilúvatar, and he was coëval with Manwë, and part he had of all the powers of the other Valar; but he turned them to evil uses. He coveted the world and all that was in it, and desired the lordship of Manwë and the realms of all the Gods; and pride and jealousy and lust grew ever in his heart, till he became unlike his brethren. Wrath consumed him, and he begot violence and destruction and excess. In ice and fire was his delight. But darkness he used most in all his evil works, and turned it to fear and a name of dread among Elves and Men.

 *(Lost Road 206–7)*

### Later Quenta Silmarillon (c.1951)

Last do all name Melkor. But the Gnomes [> Noldor], who suffered most from his evil deeds, will not speak his name, and they call him Morgoth, the black god [> the Black Foe], and Bauglir, the Constrained. Great might was given to him by Ilúvatar, and he was coëval with Manwë, and part he had of all the powers of the other Valar; but he turned them to evil uses. He coveted the world and all that was in it, and desired the lordship of Manwë and the realms of all the gods; and pride and jealousy and lust grew ever in his heart, till he became unlike his brethren. Wrath consumed him, and he begot violence and destruction and excess. In ice and fire was his delight. But darkness he used most in all his evil works, and turned it to fear and a name of dread among Elves and Men.

 *(Morgoth 146–7)*
**The Valaquenta (late 1950s)**

(Not reproduced by Christopher Tolkien)

Christopher describes the section, ‘Of the Enemies’, in which the Recapitulation Passage occurs as ‘almost entirely new’.

**Valaquenta (1977)**

Last of all is set the name of Melkor, He who arises in Might. But that name he has forfeited; and the Noldor, who among the Elves suffered most from his malice, will not utter it, and they name him Morgoth, the Dark Enemy of the World. Great might was given to him by Ilúvatar, and he was coëval with Manwë. In the powers and knowledge of all the other Valar he had part, but he turned them to evil purposes, and squandered his strength in violence and tyranny.

For he coveted Arda and all that was in it, desiring the lordship of Manwë and dominion over the realms of his peers.

From splendour he fell through arrogance to contempt for all things save himself, a spirit wasteful and pitiless. Understanding he turned to subtlety in perverting to his own will all that he would use, until he became a liar without shame. He began with the desire of Light, but when he could not possess it for himself alone, he descended through fire and wrath into a great burning,
down into Darkness. And darkness he used most in his evil works upon Arda, and filled it with fear for all living things. (S 23)
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