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The spiritual Tolkien milieu : a study of fiction-based religion

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The Spiritual Tolkien Milieu
A Study of Fiction-based Religion

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Abbreviations

A. Works by Tolkien

H	*The Hobbit or There and Back Again*, 5th edition 1995, London: HarperCollins. First published in 1937 by George Allen & Unwin.
HoMe[1]	*The History of Middle-earth*.
Letters	*The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, 1981, edited by Humphrey Carpenter with the assistance of Christopher Tolkien, London: George Allen & Unwin.
LROW	*The Lost Road and Other Writings: Language and Legend before 'The Lord of the Rings'*, *The History of Middle-earth* 5, 1987, Christopher Tolkien (ed.), London: Unwin Hyman.
LR	*The Lord of the Rings*, 2007, London: HarperCollins. This edition is based on the 50th Anniversary Edition, first published in 2004. Comprised of *The Fellowship of the Ring*, first published 1954, 2nd ed. 1965 by Ballantine Books; *The Two Towers*, first published 1954, 2nd ed. 1965 by Ballantine Books; *The Return of the King*, first published 1955, 2nd ed. 1965 by Ballantine Books.
LT I	*The Book of Lost Tales, Part One*, *The History of Middle-earth* 1, 1983, Christopher Tolkien (ed.), London: George Allen & Unwin.
LT II	*The Book of Lost Tales, Part Two*, *The History of Middle-earth* 2, 1984, Christopher Tolkien (ed.), London: George Allen & Unwin.
MR	*Morgoth's Ring*, *The History of Middle-earth* 10, 1993, Christopher Tolkien (ed.), London: HarperCollins.
PM	*Peoples of Middle-earth*, *The History of Middle-earth* 12, 1996, Christopher Tolkien (ed.), London: HarperCollins.
RS	*The Return of the Shadow*, *The History of Middle-earth* 6, 1988, Christopher Tolkien (ed.), London: Unwin Hyman.
S	*The Silmarillion*, 2nd ed., 1999, Christopher Tolkien (ed.), London: HarperCollins. First edition published in 1977 by George Allen & Unwin.
SD	*Sauron Defeated*, *The History of Middle-earth* 9, 1992, Christopher Tolkien (ed.), London: HarperCollins.
TL	*Tree and Leaf: Including the Poem Mythopoeia*, 1964, London: George Allen & Unwin.
UT	*Unfinished Tales of Númenor and Middle-earth*, 1980, Christopher Tolkien (ed.), London: George Allen & Unwin.
WJ	*The War of the Jewels*, *The History of Middle-earth* 11, 1994, Christopher Tolkien (ed.), London: HarperCollins.

[1] "*HoM*-e" would be more correct, but looks too ugly. The journal Tolkien Studies has no official abbreviation for *HoMe* which I can use as guideline.

B. Tolkien's invented languages

No	Noldorin. The language of the Noldor. An early from of Sindarin.
Qe	Qenya. Quenya in an early stage of its development. Used in some of the volumes of *HoMe*.
Qu	Quenya. The language of the High Elves (Quendi) of Eldamar. Used in Middle-earth only as archaic ritual language ('Elven Latin').
Si	Sindarin. The language of the Grey-elves (Sindar) of Middle-earth.
Va	Valarin (or Valinorean). The language of the Valar (demigods).

C. Main Tolkien spiritual groups[2]

EQD	Elf Queen's Daughters
ER	Elven Realities
IE	Indigo Elves
IV	Ilsaluntë Valion (Qe: The Silver Ship of the Valar)
MEP	Middle-Earth Pagans[3]
SE	Silver Elves (formerly Silvan Elves)
TS	The Tribunal of the Sidhe
T-e	Tië eldaliéva (Qu: The Elven Path)

[2] I am not sure whether I will abbreviate the names of these Tolkien groups. So far I do not. Perhaps I will use the full names in the main text, but sometimes these abbreviations in tables, figures and references.

[3] This group spells its name "Middle-Earth Pagans" with a capital E even though the correct spelling of Middle-earth is with the letter e in the lower case.

Introduction

During the last decade, scholars of religion have begun to pay attention to the interplay between speculative fiction and alternative religion.[4] It has been noted how fantasy fiction borrows motifs from pagan mythologies, how science fiction taps into the occult fascination with 'powers of the mind', and how horror fiction explores demons, revenants, and other aspects of the dark side of the supernatural (e.g. Ramstedt 2007a; Kripal 2011; Trompf and Bernauer 2012; Cowan 2008; 2010; Fry 2008). In turn, speculative fiction disperses alternative religion to a wide audience. What is more, the plausibility of these ideas is enhanced as speculative fiction invites people to immerse themselves in narrative worlds in which the supernatural is evidently real (e.g. Partridge 2004, ch. 6; 2008; Possamai 2005a; Harvey 2006; Schipper 2010; Hjarvard 2008; 2011; Mikaelsson 1999).

As a result, the religious convictions and values of our contemporaries are increasingly inspired and supported by films such as George Lucas' *Star Wars* (1977; 1980; 1983; 1999; 2002; 2005) and James Cameron's *Avatar* (2009), TV series such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003) and *Charmed* (1998-2006), and novels such as Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Mists of Avalon* (1983) and Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* (2003). In some of these cases the authors or directors deliberately convey specific religious ideas (e.g. Neo-Paganism[5] in Bradley's case) or a general religious sentiment (e.g. Lucas; Lucas and Moyers 1999). Others simply employ alternative religious motifs because they fascinate the audience (e.g. Brown). Regardless of the author's intention, fiction with religious motifs can be used, and is indeed used, as a resource for the construction of individual religious beliefs, practices, and identities. Some studies of the religious use of fiction have focused on teenagers (e.g. Clark 2003; Berger and Ezzy 2009; Petersen 2012), but the phenomenon is not restricted to the young. The religious use of fiction is an aspect of alternative spirituality in general.[6]

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[4] Speculative fiction is an umbrella term for fantasy, science fiction, horror, and other fantastic forms of fiction, including superhero fiction, apocalyptic fiction, and alternate history. I use alternative religion here as a shorthand for New Age, Neo-Paganism, and related movements that belong to the wider "cultic milieu" (Campbell 1972) or "occulture" (Partridge 2004, 68).

[5] I use the terms Neo-Paganism, contemporary Paganism, and Paganism (capitalised) interchangeably to refer to modern Pagan movement that begun with Wicca in the 1940s and adopted the self-identification as (Neo-)Pagan in the 1960s. When used in the lower case, 'paganism' refers to those pre-Christian religions, such as the ancient Egyptian, Celtic, and Germanic religions, which Neo-Pagans seek to revive.

[6] Fiction not only serves to disseminate religious ideas that are alternative. There exists also, for example, a genre of Christian fiction. Good examples of the genre are Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins's dispensationalist *Left Behind* series (1995-2007) (cf. Frykholm 2004; 2005; Shuck 2004; 2005), William Paul Young's *The*

The impact of speculative fiction on the real-life religious belief and practice of individuals did long escape academic attention because of its largely non-institutional nature. It has been discovered because the religious use of fiction sometimes crystallises into organised movements based on ideas, practices, and identities from particular fictional works or genres – movements that are immediately recognisable as religious. Such emerging religions have been variously qualified as "hyper-real" (Possamai 2005a; 2012a), "invented" (Cusack 2010; 2013), or "fiction-based" (Davidsen 2012a; 2013). Examples include the Neo-Pagan organisation Church of All Worlds which has taken its name and several ritual practices from Robert A. Heinlein's science fiction novel *Stranger in a Strange Land* (Cusack 2009a; 2010, ch. 3) and *Star Wars*-based Jediism whose members identify as Jedi Knights and believe in the Force (Possamai 2005a, 71-83; Davidsen 2010; 2011a; 2011b; 2014; McCormick 2012). Chaos Magicians inspired by Anton Szandor LaVey (1972, 173-201) invoke the monster gods from H.P. Lovecraft's horror cycle, the so-called Cthulhu Mythos (Hanegraaff 2007). Other examples of fiction-based religion are the Otherkin who believe to be 'other-than-humans', for instance Elves, Dragons, or Angels (Kirby 2009a; 2009b; 2012; 2013; Laycock 2012a), and the related Vampire community (Keyworth 2002; Hume 2006; Laycock 2009; 2012b). In these cases, religious communities have formed around a particular identity, supported by a fiction genre (e.g. the Vampire community around Anne Rice-type vampires) or around a particular fictional text and narrative universe (e.g. Jediism around *Star Wars*).

Especially Jediism, or more precisely the so-called Jedi Census Phenomenon, has been instrumental in opening the eyes of scholars of contemporary religion to the religious potential of fiction.[7] The Census Phenomenon took place during the 2001 census in Great Britain, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand when a new, but optional question about religious affiliation was introduced. The new question inspired the circulation of a chain email that urged people who had no affiliation or who felt that this matter was no business of the government to tick the 'other' box on the census form and fill in 'Jedi' as their religious affiliation.[8] More than 500,000 people answered the call, and Jediism came in as the fourth largest religion in Great Britain, more than 390,000 strong in England and Wales. Of all countries, New Zealand boasted the largest concentration of Jedi, no less than 1.3 % of the population (Porter 2006, 96-98). While the number of self-identified Jedi roughly halved in the following census in 2006, it remained stable between 2006 and 2011. According to the 2011 census, for instance, England and Wales still count 176,632

Shack (2008), and of course the *Chronicles of Narnia*, especially *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, by Tolkien's good friend and fellow Inkling, C.S. Lewis (1950).

[7] On the Jedi Census Phenomenon, see Possamai (2003b; 2005a, 71-73), Porter (2006), and Cusack (2010, 120-128).

[8] The original New Zealand email can be read at http://www.gonmad.co.uk/jedicensus/ [110712].

Jedi.[9] Furthermore, the *Washington Post* reported in the summer of 2009 that Jedi was the 10th most common religious self-identification globally on Facebook (Wan 2009).[10]

We do not know how many of the self-identified Jedi Knights in the censuses and on Facebook really practise a Force-based spirituality. The president of The Australian S*tar Wars* Appreciation Society estimated in a newspaper interview in 2002 that of the 70,000 Australian Jedi in the 2001 census, 50,000 had identified as Jedi just for fun, while another 15,000 had wanted to "give the government a bit of curry". He expected that only 5,000 "would be hard-core people that would believe the Jedi religion", though for the most part probably only "at a metaphorical level" (Possamai 2005a, 72-73). If we take the approximation that between 5 and 10 per cent of the self-identified Australian Jedi were serious practitioners/believers, generalise it across all the countries that participated in the census, and apply it to the 2011 census figures, we arrive at a speculative estimate of 15,000 Jediists in Great Britain, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand combined. To this figure should probably be added a greater number of American Jediists. While the numerical strength of Jediism remains to be determined, research inspired by the Jedi Census Phenomenon has demonstrated that behind the joke a real and serious religious movement exists which has had a well-organised presence online since the late 1990s, and which has been officially recognised as a religious body in several countries (Davidsen 2010; 2014).

0.1. A Spiritual Milieu Based on J.R.R. Tolkien's Literary Mythology

Besides Jediism and the other fiction-based religious movements mentioned above, a milieu of Tolkien spirituality[11] and an over-lapping movement of Tolkien-inspired, self-identified Elves exist as well. So far, however, nothing has been published on these movements.[12] Granted, scholars of contemporary Paganism have emphasised that *The*

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[9] For numbers and graphics, see http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/9737886/Jedi-religion-most-popular-alternative-faith.html [280313].

[10] The ten most common self-identifications were Christian, Islam, Atheist, Agnostic, Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Spiritual, Sikh, and Jedi. Since Christians tended to identify with particular Christian currents, Wan chunked together the following self-identifications under the category Christian: Catholic, Protestant, Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Methodist, LDS, and Mormon (Wan 2009).

[11] I use 'Tolkien spirituality' as a convenient shorthand for 'spirituality that integrates elements from Tolkien's Middle-earth corpus'. Since the shorthand might suggest otherwise, let me stress that Tolkien spirituality focuses on Tolkien's works rather than on his person, at least in the first instance. I use the terms 'Tolkien spirituality', 'Tolkien religion', and 'Tolkien-based spirituality/religion' synonymously. In general, I make no distinction in this thesis between religion and spirituality. I return to the definition of religion later in this introduction (and in section 5.1). The meaning of the term milieu in the phrase the "spiritual Tolkien milieu" will be treated in chapter 1.

[12] Not counting an article of my own in which some preliminary conclusions from this project have been presented (Davidsen 2012a).

Lord of the Rings and J.R.R. Tolkien's other fantasy writings about Middle-earth are widely read in Pagan circles and noted that these works have inspired contemporary Pagans on a spiritual level, partly due to the Celtic and other pagan sources that Tolkien drew on. Some have even argued that Tolkien was as important for the formation of the modern Pagan movement as Gerald Gardner, the founder of Wicca. Most scholars of Paganism, however, especially those who are themselves Pagans, are quick to denounce Tolkien's influence as merely general and metaphorical in character (e.g. Harvey 2000; 2007, 176-177; York 2009, 306). While it is indisputable that Tolkien provided significant inspiration for contemporary Paganism on a general and metaphorical level, this thesis shows that Tolkien's work has also been used by religious groups for whom Tolkien's writings are absolutely *central* and whose members believe that important parts of his mythology refer to *real* supernatural beings, events, and otherworlds in a non-metaphorical way.

In other words: this thesis is about religion based (partly) on J.R.R. Tolkien's *literary mythology*, especially *The Hobbit or There and Back Again* (*H*; first published in 1937), *The Lord of the Rings* (*LR*; first published in three volumes in 1954-1955), and *The Silmarillion* (*S*; first published in 1977).[13] *S* was published after Tolkien's death in 1973 by his son, Christopher Tolkien, who later edited and published also the *Unfinished Tales of Númenor and Middle-earth* (*UT*; first published in 1980) and the twelve-volume *History of Middle-earth* series (*HoMe*; first published 1983-1996) which contains a number of drafts of *LR* and *S* together with much other material.

H and *LR*, Tolkien's most well-known works, are both set in Middle-earth, the part of the narrative world inhabited by humans, Hobbits and some of the Elves. Both books take the point of view of the Hobbits, a race of small, hole-dwelling, and food-loving creatures. In *H*, the rather adventurous hobbit Bilbo Baggins by accident finds a golden ring while under way to recover an old dwarf-treasure from the dragon Smaug. In *LR*, the wizard Gandalf discovers that Bilbo's ring is the Ring of Power which was forged in ancient times by the evil Lord Sauron. Sauron has now returned and the fate of Middle-earth is in peril, for with the ring Sauron will be able to enslave the entire world. A fellowship is formed, and led by Gandalf it sets out to destroy the Ring. Eventually two hobbits, Frodo Baggins and his servant Samwise Gamgee, succeed by throwing the Ring into the Mountain of Doom where it was forged. Good prevails and Middle-earth is saved.

S is less well-known to the general public, but for the spiritual Tolkien milieu it is at least as significant as *LR*. This is so, because *S* provides the mythological background

[13] References to *H* are made to the fifth edition of 1995. Most corrections to the text were made to the third edition (the paperback edition of 1966) which brought *H* more in line with *LR*. References to *LR* are made to the one-volume 50th anniversary edition of 2007. Except for minor typographical corrections, this text follows the second (paperback) edition from 1965. Additional information on the publication history of *LR* can be found in Anderson (2007). References to *S* are to the second edition from 1999. Apart from a few small amendments, this edition differs from the first only by the inclusion of an excerpt from a letter on *S* from Tolkien to his publisher Milton Waldman.

to Tolkien's narrative world – his 'Legendarium' as Tolkien called it. The Legendarium opens with the creation of the world, Arda, by the one god, Eru. Hereafter, the demiurgical Valar – a pantheon of lesser gods or angelic beings – are installed as guardians of the created world. The bulk of *S* focuses on the Elves and recounts their creation, early migrations, and wars during the First Age of the world, long before the events of *LR*.

The *subject matter* of this thesis is religion that draws inspiration from Tolkien's literary mythology. Most of the text therefore consists of historiographical and (online) ethnographical case studies of Tolkien-based movements, groups, and rituals, covering the history of Tolkien-based religion from the 1960s till the present day. To get a better grip on its forty-five year long history, I make a rough distinction between a first and a second wave of Tolkien spirituality. The long first wave will be traced from the hippie and Neo-Pagan fascination of *LR* in the 1960s, over the first *LR*-based groups and self-identified Elves of the 1970s, to the establishment, after the publication of *S*, of successful Tolkien-based organisations (such as the Tribunal of the Sidhe) in the 1980s and the construction of elaborate Tolkien-based magical rituals in the 1990s.

The second wave of Tolkien religion took form on the Internet in the twenty-first century. One group of second wave 'Tolkien religionists'[14], which might be referred to as Reconstructionists, look to *HoMe* for the earliest, purest, and most original version of Tolkien's spiritual vision. Tolkien religionists of this kind also familiarise themselves with the collection of Tolkien's letters which were published in 1981 by Tolkien's biographer Humphrey Carpenter (*Letters*) and which provide much extra information about Tolkien's narrative world and Tolkien's view of it. Another group which was inspired primarily by Peter Jackson's movie adaptation of *LR* (2001-2003) seems to have largely fallen apart again, though it remains to be seen whether Jackson's three-part movie adaptation of *H* (2012-2014) will provide a new boost for this kind of Tolkien spirituality.

0.2. Earlier Approaches to Tolkien and Religion

Though religion based on Tolkien's literary mythology has not yet been treated in the literature, two research traditions have touched upon 'Tolkien and religion' in a broader sense. These are research on *LR* fandom and so-called Tolkien Studies. Let me briefly review those aspects of these research traditions that are relevant for the present project. I begin with search on *LR* fandom.

[14] For lack of better term, I refer to individuals engaged in Tolkien religion as 'Tolkien religionists'. I am aware that this use of 'religionist' departs from the term's most common meaning in the study of religion, namely as a qualifier for scholars who assume that the world includes a supernatural dimension and that human beings are religious by nature.

0.2.1. The Spiritual Dimension of *Lord of the Rings* Fandom

The reception of the book version of *LR* had been treated only in the context of the hippie counter-culture, and when fan studies emerged within cultural studies in the early 1990s, *LR* fandom was slumbering and failed to attract any attention.[15] This changed completely when the movies led to a massive reawakening of Tolkien fandom.[16] Most interestingly, a huge, comparative audience study (20 countries; *N*=24,739) was carried out around the release of *The Return of the King*. Several studies were published about the fans of the movies, the so-called Ringers.[17] The study documented that fans looked for values in the film narrative and tended to project their own moral and religious views onto it (de Kloet and Kuipers 2007; Barker 2008). The study also identified a minority of "spiritual fans" who perceived the movie as a "spiritual journey"[18], attributed a high level of importance and pleasure to viewing it, and were usually already fans of the books (Barker 2008). In a follow-up study in the Netherlands, Jeroen de Kloet and Giselinde Kuipers (2007) carried out group interviews with Dutch fans who had classified the movie as a spiritual journey. These individuals spoke of the movie in religious and moral terms and saw it as an *ad hoc* resource for personal, spiritual growth (de Kloet and Kuipers 2007). One interviewee even suggested that Middle-earth might exist in another dimension (de Kloet and Kuipers 2007, 313), but this suggestion seemed to be made in the heat of the moment rather than to reflect engagement in Tolkien-based religion. These studies demonstrate that Tolkien's literary mythology is actually experienced as having a spiritual dimension, but they say nothing about the long-term impact of Tolkien's narratives on people's religious practice and convictions.[19]

0.2.2. Tolkien Studies on the Theology of Tolkien's Literary Mythology

Following the publication of *HoMe*, and especially owing to the renewed interest in Tolkien after the movie adaptation of *LR*, Tolkien Studies has grown into an independent and very productive research field. Since 2004, the field has boasted its own peer-review-

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[15] The field defining work in fan studies is Jenkins (1992). Jenkins famously introduced the notion of fans as 'textual poachers' who actively engage with, transform, and co-create the fan text. The best theoretical treatment of fan cultures is Hills (2002).

[16] The many publications on the new, movie-driven fandom include Shefrin (2004), Hills (2006), Pullen (2006), Rosenbaum (2006), Jerslev (2006), and Mathijs and Pomerance (2006).

[17] See Barker, Egan, and Mathijs (2006), de Kloet and Kuipers (2007), and the contributions in Barker and Mathijs (2008).

[18] Besides spiritual journey, respondents could choose to categorise the movie as for example "epic", "quest", "good vs. evil", and "fantasy".

[19] Also pointing to the more or less religious character of Tolkien fandom, Istoft (2011) has compared tourism to the *LR* movie set in New Zealand with religious pilgrimage.

ed academic journal, also bearing the name *Tolkien Studies*.[20] Much of the research within Tolkien Studies is concerned with Tolkien and religion, focusing especially on Tolkien's own religious life, the religious character of his fiction, and the theological and mythological sources he drew on. Though this research does not treat the religious *use* of Tolkien's works, it is relevant for us because it points out some of those elements in Tolkien's narratives that make it possible to use them as religious sources. These 'religious affordances', as I shall call them, include various otherworldly beings and places, the reality of magic, the veracity of visions and prophecies, the working of fate and providence, a pantheon of demiurgical beings, and much more.

It is beyond dispute that Tolkien was a devout Roman Catholic, but it is also clear that he was fascinated by various occult subjects such as Atlantis and the Faery Otherworld. An uncanny dream of his further made Tolkien wonder whether it might be possible to re-experience vicariously significant events in the lives of one's ancestors.[21] Even if Tolkien did not actually believe in these things, he certainly incorporated (or attempted to incorporate) them into his literary mythology – just as he drew on Christian theology and on Classical, Celtic, and Norse mythology.[22] Furthermore, Tolkien's literary mythology developed over time. The first drafts of his so-called "Legendarium", written in the 1910s and 1920s, possessed characteristically 'pagan' traits. Most notably, the Valar constituted an anthropomorphic pantheon and were referred to as gods. Over the following decades, Tolkien gradually 'Christianised' his literary mythology, for example by emphasising the supremacy of the Creator god Ilúvatar vis-à-vis the Valar who now become referred to as angelic powers rather than gods.[23] The Christianisation process culminated when Tolkien, after the publication of *LR*, added a soteriological element to the Legendarium. In the dialogue *Athrabeth Finrod Ah Andreth*, the human Andreth tells the Elf Finrod of "the Old Hope", i.e. the belief of some Men that Ilúvatar will enter the Created World and redeem it (*MR* 321; cf. Whittingham 2008, 157). Even though it is

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[20] The yearly bibliographical overview in *Tolkien Studies* gives an indication of the field's vitality. In 2007, for example, 13 books and about 200 book chapters and articles on Tolkien's fiction, and to a lesser extent on his life and scholarship were published in English alone (Rea, Paar, and Drout 2009).

[21] The standard biography on Tolkien is Carpenter (1977), but see also the more or less biographical appreciations of Tolkien's work by Shippey (2003) and Zettersten (2011) who both knew Tolkien personally. Tolkien's occult fascinations have especially been pointed out by Flieger (1997; 2002; 2005a; 2006; 2007; Flieger and Anderson 2008) and will be discussed in chapter 15.

[22] The literature on the composition of Tolkien's literary mythology and on his mythological sources of inspiration is vast. Two pioneering studies that were carried out after the publication of *S* and later updated to take account of *HoMe* are Chance (1979/2001) and Shippey (1982/2003). Perhaps the most thorough and balanced account is given by Whittingham (2008). See also the contributions in Chance (2004). Flieger (1997) explores Tolkien's fascination with time and his failed attempt to reframe his mythology as a "mythology for England" by creating a frame story involving ancestral memory regression. For an overview of the literature, the reader is advised to consult the yearly bibliographical overviews published in *Tolkien Studies*.

[23] On the Christianisation of Tolkien's mythology, see Whittingham (2008, esp. 194-200).

undisputed that Tolkien's mythology evolved to become less pagan and more Christian over time, it must be emphasised that the change was relative. The Legendarium retained many 'pagan' features (besides the Valar, also Elves, magic, etc.), just as it had included Christian ones from the start (e.g. *creatio ex nihilo* and an Augustinian view of good and evil).

Unfortunately, many Tolkien scholars fail to acknowledge the co-existence of Christian and pagan/occult elements in Tolkien's narratives and seem more interested in claiming Tolkien's work (and its massive prestige) for their own religious tradition. In particular, Tolkien scholars with a theological agenda have seen *LR* as a Christian allegory and modern equivalent of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* or Dante's *Divine Comedy*.[24] Ignoring Tolkien's assertion that *LR* is no allegory (*LR* xxiv), these scholars have sought to demonstrate the essentially Christian nature and Biblical foundation of Tolkien's literary mythology to a degree that it cannot bear. Tolkien's literary mythology has also been appropriated by non-academic Christians,[25] and by academics who subject it other religious readings than a Christian theological one. The latter group manages to find both eco-spiritual, Jungian, Buddhist, and theosophical teachings hidden in Tolkien's text.[26] Throughout this work I will pay due heed to the religious affordances of Tolkien's literary mythology, but Tolkien's sources and his own religious convictions and experiences will enter the discussion only in so far as Tolkien religionists refer to them in order to legitimise their practice.

Both Tolkien Studies and research on *LR* fandom have demonstrated that Tolkien's literary mythology contains plenty of religious themes and elements, and that it has had a profound religious impact on many of Tolkien's readers (and viewers). Some Tolkien scholars even partake in the religious appropriation of Tolkien's narratives. The present study combines the analysis of the religious potentiality of Tolkien's texts (from Tolkien Studies) with the focus on the actual interpretation, use, and impact of the texts on Tol-

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[24] Theological appropriations of Tolkien's literary mythology include Ellwood (1970), Purtill (1984), Pearce (1998), Caldecott (2003), Wood (2003), Birzer (2003), Fleming (2004), Agøy (2011), and Testi (2013). See Kerry (2011) for a recent and very extensive overview of Christian approaches to *LR*. See also the heated exchange between Hutton (2006, ch. 6; 2011a; 2011b) and Agøy (2011) on the "Pagan" respectively "Christian" Tolkien. The strong mark of Christian theology on Tolkien Studies is reflected in the fact that the *J.R.R. Tolkien Encyclopedia* (Drout 2006) has entries on angels, Christ, Heaven, incarnation, penance, redemption, sin, and theology in *The Lord of the Rings*, but says relatively little about Tolkien's inspiration from pagan mythologies and nothing at all about his massive influence on contemporary Paganism.

[25] Sarah Arthur's Christian study-book *Walking with Frodo* (2003) links *LR* with quotes and insights from the Bible. Mark Eddy Smith explores the "ordinary virtues" of Tolkien's books after having thanked "the Father, Son and Holy Spirit" in his preface for having authored those same virtues (2002, 9).

[26] Eco-spiritual appropriations include Curry (2004) and Dickerson and Evans (2006). The American journal *Mythlore* is devoted to an essentially religious reading informed by C.G. Jung and Joseph Campbell of Tolkien and other authors of 'mythopoeic fiction'. McMahon and Caski (2003) look for Buddhist and Daoist themes in *LR*, and Robert Ellwood's *Frodo's Quest* (2002) explores *LR* as a shortcut to the "Ancient Wisdom" of Theosophy.

kien's audience (from audience and fan studies), but goes further than both by analysing the actual practices, beliefs, organisations, and dynamics of Tolkien-based religion.

0.3. Research Questions and General Approach

As already mentioned, some work has already been done on a variety of fiction-based religions. Unfortunately, however, most previous studies have only scratched the surface. Most of the studies mentioned above on page 17, my own work on Jediism included, build merely on cursory analyses of homepages, and do not move on to interview religionists about their fiction-based beliefs and practices, much less to do fieldwork among them.[27] As a consequence, we know how fiction-based religions present themselves online, but know very little about the actual beliefs and practices of fiction-based religionists. We know even less about how such beliefs and practices are developed and made plausible, and about the conversion careers of fiction-based religionists and the social dynamics of their groups. To bring the study of fiction-based religion forward, we need theoretically informed, in-depth studies based on interviews and, if possible, on fieldwork.

Aspiring that my thesis will constitute such an in-depth study, I devote the bulk of it to what might be called a *thick description* (cf. Geertz 1973) of Tolkien spirituality.[28] I use this term because my treatment of the spiritual Tolkien milieu is (a) based on diverse, qualitative data, (b) intertwines description with analysis and explanation, and (c) has a semiotic interest in the creation, constitution, and maintenance of meaning. It does not mean, however, that I subscribe to Clifford Geertz' assumptions and method completely. For instance, I do not adopt Geertz' definition of religion, for reasons given in section 0.3.3 below. Also, I do not share Geertz' position that the meaning which is the object of thick description is found only in the flow of social discourse (1973, 20). On the contrary, I hold that also texts (which are discourse, but fixed) are bearers of meaning, as are non-discursive practices and private beliefs (which flow, but are not discursive). Thick description must include all these loci of meaning as well as social discourse.

Needless to say, adopting the notion of thick description from Geertz does not imply that I have any illusions of equalling his ethnography. Indeed, with one possible

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[27] Two exceptions come to mind. The chapter on the Church of All Worlds in Cusack's *Invented Religions* (2010) builds on email interviews with the founders of the church, though no ordinary members have been interviewed for that project. Joseph Laycock's book on the Vampire Community in Atlanta (2009) is unique in its use of fieldwork, but marginal to the study of fiction-based religion as Laycock goes against the dominant position in scholarship on Vampirism and adopts his informants' position that they are not inspired by fiction. In chapter 11 on the Elven movement, I take up the more general issue of the role played by fiction in the various communities who claim to be other-than-humans.

[28] The notion of thick description is originally Gilbert Ryle's, but it was Geertz who made it famous within anthropology and the study of religion.

exception (cf. ch. 16), my case studies do not qualify as ethnography in a classic sense, for they do not build on extensive fieldwork. It is thus not the method, but the theoretical questions which frame my investigation of Tolkien spirituality. A fundamental question is this: how can it be that a spiritual milieu based on Tolkien's fictional mythology exists at all? Or more generally: *how is religion based on fiction constructed and maintained, semiotically and socially?*

Other questions flow from these. For instance: what exactly do Tolkien religionists believe and practice? Are they sincere or merely playing? Are there elements in Tolkien's narratives that make them more usable as religious texts than other fictional texts? Can Tolkien's literary mythology stand alone as a religious resource or must it be combined with other sources? How do Tolkien religionists legitimise the fact that their religion is based on a fictional text? Where do Tolkien religionists meet each other and how are they organised? What are their backgrounds and why did they engage in Tolkien spirituality?

Behind these questions about Tolkien spirituality specifically looms a larger, theoretical issue of great importance for the study of religion in general. That is the issue of religious belief. Of course, it has been studied extensively *what* members of different religious groups believe (or ought to believe according to their religious specialists). But we need to know more about the *dynamics of believing*. Studying the dynamics of believing means paying attention (1) to how people appropriate, combine, and adapt existing bits of religious ideas to create their own belief repertoires, (2) to how such beliefs are made plausible, and (3) to whether there exist different modes of believing. We need to know more about how beliefs are rationalised and legitimised and about the relations between religious belief and practice and between religious belief and authoritative texts. Another fundamental issue is how the conditions of religious belief in the West have been changed by processes of deinstitutionalisation and detraditionalisation. Obviously, this is not the place to tackle all of these large questions, but I list them here to make plain that the operationalised research questions which I formulate below are designed so that they, besides framing the analysis of Tolkien spirituality, may also help answering more general questions.

If the first aim of this thesis is to present a thick description of Tolkien-based religion in particular, the second aim is thus *to develop a theoretical and analytical framework that can be used to make sense of fiction-based religion, post-traditional religion, and individual religion in general*. The empirical and theoretical projects support each other. The empirical analysis which makes up the second part of the dissertation is made possible only by the theoretical tools developed in the first part. The theoretical framework, in turn, has been developed in the course of the empirical investigation and adjusted and refined in the process to fit the needs of the analysis.

For the purpose of this thesis, I use the term *post-traditional religion* (or trans-traditional religion) to refer to religion that is not embedded within a particular religious tradition, but characterised by a practice of religious bricolage and embedded directly

within secular culture (cf. Hanegraaff 1999b). *Individual religion* refers to both tradition-bound and post-traditional religion that takes place outside of religious organisations. Since individual religion is always situated within some sort of social framework, I refer to it as *sub-institutional* rather than non-institutional. Tolkien spirituality belongs to the cross-category of 'post-traditional individual religion' since it is embedded within the post-traditional and sub-institutional "cultic milieu" (cf. Campbell 1972).[29]

Fiction-based religion, in turn, is *religion in which fictional texts are used as authoritative texts*. That a text is authoritative in this sense means that it influences real life religious activity. Depending on the degree of this influence, one can distinguish between *fiction-inspired religion* that is influenced and supported by fiction in a general way, *fiction-integrating religion* which selectively adopts fictional elements and integrates them into an existing religious frame, and *fiction-based religion* (in a restricted sense) that takes a certain fictional text as its very foundation.[30] Inspired by Dorrit Cohn (1999) and Robert Scholes (1980), I define fiction as *any literary narrative which is not intended by its author to refer to events which have taken place in the actual world*[31] *prior to being entextualised*.[32] Fiction-based religion thus stands in contrast to religion whose authoritative narratives claim to be historical or non-fictional in the sense of referring to events that indeed *have* taken place in the actual world prior to their entextualisation, either in the historical or mythical past. It is the *claim* of factuality of the events (or the lack of such a claim) that determines whether a narrative is fiction or history, not the actual correspondence (or lack thereof) between text and reality.

My research questions concerning Tolkien-based religion are the following:

1. Which semiotic structures and processes are involved in the construction and maintenance of Tolkien-based religion?

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[29] Chapter 1 explores the notions of post-traditional religion and individual religion in detail.

[30] In an earlier article, I have used the term fiction-based religion in this restricted sense, defining a fiction-based religion as "*a religion that uses fictional texts as its main authoritative, religious texts*" (Davidsen 2012a, 202; emphasis in original). The notion of fiction-based religion is treated in chapter 2.

[31] The actual world is the real world. Following possible worlds theory as it has been developed in the field of modal logic (e.g. Lewis 1973) and applied to fiction theory (e.g. Ryan 1991), I contrast the actual world, itself a possible world, to various alternative possible worlds, including fictional worlds.

[32] This definition elaborates on Cohn's minimal definition of fiction as "a literary nonreferential narrative" (1999, 12). That fiction is non-referential in the sense of not claiming to tell the truth about the *actual world* does not mean that it does not refer at all. In Paul Ricoeur's words, fiction refers to a *fictional world* of its own creation by way of "productive reference" (1983, 181). In doing so, fiction distinguishes itself from non-fiction or "history" which *does* have the ambition to refer to the actual world (1983, 176). Furthermore, as Cohn points out, the non-referentiality of fiction does not mean that fiction *cannot* refer to the actual world, only that it does not have to do so and that such references are not bound to accuracy (1999, 15). My elaborated definition of fiction is mirrored on Robert Scholes' definition of history as "a narrative discourse [whose] producer […] affirms that the events entextualized did indeed occur before entextualization" (1980, 211).

a. Which religious affordances does Tolkien's literary mythology contain?
b. Which elements of Tolkien's literary mythology are actually used as models for religious practices, beliefs, and identities in the spiritual Tolkien milieu?
c. Which other sources besides Tolkien's literary mythology are used in religious blending within the spiritual Tolkien milieu, and in which ways is Tolkien material combined with material from these other sources?
d. To what extent do Tolkien religionists ascribe reality to those elements from Tolkien's literary mythology which they employ in their religious practice, and is there a difference between the level of reality ascribed in immediate religious practice (especially in rituals) and in *post hoc* rationalisations of this practice?
e. Do Tolkien religionists employ legitimisation or relativisation to construct and protect the plausibility of their fiction-based religious beliefs and practices, and in which ways?

2. Which social structures support the construction and maintenance of Tolkien-based religion?

   In which ways and to what degree does the social organisation of the spiritual Tolkien milieu and social and cultural structures outside the spiritual Tolkien milieu itself enhance (or challenge) the plausibility of Tolkien-based religion?

In section 0.4 below I outline in detail how the thesis proceeds to reach the two main objectives of (a) developing a theoretical and analytical toolkit for the study of fiction-based religion in general, and of (b) answering the research questions regarding Tolkien spirituality in particular. Before doing so, however, it is useful to make a number of comments on the research questions and on my general approach to the study of religion. Concretely, the following pages are devoted to the definition and explanation of some of the key terms that appear in the research questions (including religion, religious blending, religious affordances, elemental religion, and religious rationalisation) and thus sketch the contours of my approach.

0.3.1. Fiction-based Religion as Religious Blending

First of all, it should be made clear that what I call fiction-based religion is never based exclusively on fiction. It always draws on established religious traditions as well. These established traditions typically supply interpretive strategies and ritual scripts which are used to religionise the fiction. For instance, the Neo-Pagan notion that there exist magical otherworlds can be applied to Tolkien's literary mythology and used to claim that Middle-earth constitutes such an otherworld. Neo-Shamanistic ritual techniques can subsequently be used to take one to Middle-earth. Being obviously and recently constructed, and being subject to heated negotiation and rapid change, fiction-based religions are naturally approached from a processual viewpoint as outcomes of *religious blending*. Religious blending is typically referred to as syncretism or religious bricolage, but these

terms carry connotations of disapproval and scorn that reduce their analytical usefulness. For this reason, I use religious blending as my general term, though I will still use syncretism and bricolage to refer to particular types of religious blending.

Let me stress as forcefully as I can that it is not my intention to draw a distinction between *pure* religion, which is unblended and therefore authentic, and *syncretic* religion, which is blended and therefore impure and inferior. My perspective is different. Inspired by Fredrik Barth (1993; 2002), I take religious traditions to be repertoires of beliefs and practices which cluster together, but have weak boundaries. Furthermore, as Marshal Sahlins (1999) and Edward Shils (1981) have stressed, all traditions are dynamic and syncretic in character. Indeed, both the origin and development of cultures and religions are characterised by processes of blending. As Sahlins states, "all cultures are hybrid […] [they] are largely foreign in origin and distinctively local in pattern" (1999, 411, 412). I take this to be true of religions as well. As Shils furthermore points out (1981, ch. 6), an important drive in the development of traditions (including religious ones) is interaction with other traditions, interaction which includes acts of imitation, borrowing, and differentiation.

The consequence of this line of reasoning is that the very qualification 'syncretic' becomes meaningless; if all traditions are syncretic by definition, the notion of syncretic traditions loses its analytical value. This is a sound insight, but it has had the unfortunate effect on the study of religion that scholars have turned away from actual religious blending to study instead how people accuse each other of syncretism (e.g. Stewart and Shaw 1994; Droogers 1995). It is of cause important to study what King (2001) has called the "politics of syncretism", but the strong discursive focus has meant that processes of religious blending on the level of practice remain understudied and undertheorised. To progress, we need to replace the old questions 'which religions are syncretic and which are not?' with the new question 'which processes and patterns of religious blending can be observed in actual religious practice?'

Processes of religious blending take place both on the level of traditions and on the level of individual elements. Tolkien religionists often speak of their Tolkien-based practices and beliefs as 'our tradition', and it is illuminating to analyse these local traditions as outcomes of blending processes that integrate elements from Tolkien's literary mythology with beliefs and practices from one or more established religious traditions. Most Tolkien-based religionists have a Neo-Pagan background and develop their own traditions and 'paths' by blending elements from Tolkien's literary mythology with elements from various Pagan traditions, such as Wicca, Heathenry, and Goddess spirituality. One Tolkien-integrating and Neo-Pagan group, for example, combines rituals directed to the Valar with rituals directed to the gods and goddesses of the Celtic and Norse pantheons.[33]

[33] This tradition will be discussed in chapter 10.

The elements that make up religious traditions, such as particular rituals and beliefs, can themselves be the outcomes of religious blending. Consider as example a visualisation ritual from a different, self-identified 'gnostic' group.[34] This group claims that the Blessed Realm, which according to Tolkien's literary mythology is the abode of the Valar, resides in the Imaginal Realm, a notion stemming from Neo-Sufism. Furthermore, the group's members argue that those ritual techniques which are usually employed to access the Imaginal Realm can also be used to contact the Valar. Consequently, they use a variety of visualisation techniques in the tradition of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn to communicate with the Valar. In this case, as in the case of many other rituals within the spiritual Tolkien milieu, the structure or form of the ritual derives from the tradition of Western ceremonial magic, but the content and function of the ritual has been changed and adapted to the Tolkien-based religious context. The very notion of the Valar comes from Tolkien's mythology, but even this concept has been changed. Our Tolkien religionists situate the Valar in the Imaginal Realm, a place which does not occur in Tolkien's writings, and they have transformed the Valar from a class of fictional beings into an allegedly real pantheon. In fiction-based religion in general, the procedure of ascribing the semantic quality of reality to fictional beings is a key process of religious blending.

0.3.2. Religious Affordances of Fictional Texts

A second aspect of my position is to seek a middle-way between the claim that (religious) narratives have one single, inherent meaning that can be reconstructed through careful interpretation, and the contrasting claim that texts themselves are devoid of meaning and that meaning-construction takes place only in the process of reading. I hold that both positions are right in part. Reading is indeed influenced by the knowledge and interpretive conventions that a reader brings to bear on the text, but it is nevertheless possible, through a semiotic analysis of the text itself, to approximate those elements in the text which promote specific interpretive outcomes. In other words, text use can only be understood if social-scientific and semiotic perspectives are combined. Since narratives always express the points of view of different characters and often include passages which have been deliberately kept ambiguous by the author, such texts possess not only one, but *several* inherent meanings, even when one meaning is dominant. When people read texts against the intentions of the author, they generally actualise one of the non-dominant potential meanings of the text. Stated differently, narratives (and indeed texts in general) can possess multiple sets of interpretation potentialities, or 'textual affordances' as I will call them.

'Religious affordances' are a sub-type of textual affordances. It is religious affordances that make possible a religious reading, i.e. a reading that considers the text to speak

[34] I discuss this tradition in chapter 16.

of real supernatural entities existing in the actual word. Religious narratives, i.e. narratives that are usable as authoritative texts for religion, tend to contain one or more of four types of religious affordances: (a) they include *fantastic elements* which are real within the narrative world, but supernatural from the perspective of the world of the reader; (b) they include *narrative religion*, especially in the form of ritual interaction with superhuman beings; (c) they thematise and assert their own *veracity*; and (d) they claim to stem from a *divine source*.

Speculative fiction can include some of these religious affordances, especially fantastic elements, such as supernatural agents and otherworlds, and narrative religion, especially rituals engaged in by the characters of the narrative. Per definition, fiction never claims to stem from a divine source, but it can thematise its veracity in various indirect ways. It is the presence of religious affordances in fiction which make it possible to use fictional texts as basis for religious practice. Tolkien's literary mythology includes many fantastic elements (e.g. Elves, otherworlds, visions), some narrative religion (e.g. the Valar and Eru; a few rituals), and a playful thematisation of the veracity of the textual universe (through a frame narrative that stages Tolkien as compiler and the main narrative as ancient history). These religious affordances make it possible to use Tolkien's narratives as authoritative, religious texts and help determine the form Tolkien-based religion can take.

0.3.3. Religion Defined Substantively

A substantial definition of religion constitutes a third dimension of my approach. Since I will be looking for religion outside established institutions and traditions, and since I aim to identify types and distinctions within the subject matter, I need a definition of religion which is above all a useful analytical instrument. It is therefore clear, that I cannot use a colloquial or "social constructionist" (Beckford 2003, ch. 1) 'definition' which takes religion to be simply those practices which participants themselves identify as "religious". Such an approach would fail to capture much, for most religionists prefer to identify sub-institutional religion as spirituality, magic, gnosis, or even science. It might also include too much if it misinterprets such metaphorical expressions as "football is my religion". For similar reasons, a broad, functionalist definition of religion such as Clifford Geertz' or Thomas Luckmann's will not do.[35] Such definitions can be useful for highlighting similarities between religion and *religion-like* phenomena such as film (Lyden 2003), fan culture (Jindra 1994), and commitments (Bailey 1997), but their potential weakness is to equate all that is meaningful, social, or important to people with religion.

[35] Luckmann's definition is the broadest as he counts all kinds of symbolic self-transcendence (not only "great" ones) to be religion. For Luckmann, self-realisation (transcending the here-and-now self), political ideologies (transcending the current social reality), and theology (transcending the natural world) all constitute examples of religion (1991, 172-174). Also Geertz' definition (1966, 4) is broad enough to encompass ideologies and worldviews of all sorts.

I strongly agree with Luckmann's insistence that sub-institutional religion belongs to the subject matter of the study of religion and that it is necessary to define religion in a way that includes religious conduct and ideas which are not institutionalised.[36] I am convinced, however, that a substantive definition rather than a functionalistic one will serve us best as a starting-point for analytical theorising about religion and its structures, patterns, and modes.[37] A definition that contains no reference to the functions (e.g. meaning-giving and securing social cohesion) and the forms (e.g. the presence of a canon) that are commonly associated with institutional religion, will furthermore be particularly suitable for identifying religion in unexpected places (outside of institutions), in unexpected guises (also when parading as non-religion), and in unexpected modes (such as the casual and playful). Taking these considerations into account, I shall therefore define religion as *beliefs, practices, experiences, and discourses which assume the existence of supernatural agents, worlds, and/or processes*.[38] I make no distinction between religion and magic (of either the Frazerian or Durkheimian sort), but consider magic to be a key component of religion, indeed the part that has to do with the attribution of supernatural efficacy to thought and action.[39] I should furthermore make clear that when I refer to the entities which religion revolves around as "supernatural" that is to say that

[36] I therefore oppose those scholars who argue that (detraditionalised) spirituality is something categorically different from (traditionalised) religion and who draw the conclusion that spirituality should henceforth be studied within the framework of a "sociology of spirituality" (e.g. McGuire 2000; Flanagan and Jupp 2007) or suggest that we re-name the sociology of religion 'the sociology of religion and spirituality' (Heelas 2008, 11). Such arguments only serve to further reify the problematic conception of religion as by definition *institutional* religion. Since 'spirituality' is a *form* of religion, what we need is instead more "sociology of non-institutional religion" *within* the framework of the sociology of religion in general (Davidsen 2012c).

[37] I agree with Jonathan Turner (1987) that if scientific theorising is to have any analytical value, a fundamental prerequisite is clear definitions of core concepts and categories. Since analytical theorising is what the study of religion needs (cf. Geertz 1999; 2000), our first task is to produce a clear definition of religion. I must disagree with those who argue that we should abandon the concept of religion because it has been defined in Christocentric terms in the past (e.g. Asad 1993; Fitzgerald 2000). And I vehemently oppose those who claim that religion cannot be defined because people (including scholars) use it in different ways and who suggest that we should therefore be content to catalogue the various meanings which people attribute to the term (e.g. Beckford 2003; von Stuckrad 2010). The problems with earlier definitions which these scholars rightly point out should not lead us to abandon defining religion and, by implication, to abandon theorising about religion. The current problems rather call for clearer definitions and stronger theories.

[38] Supernatural agents include both personalised agents, such as gods and spirits, and impersonal powers with will and power of action, such as 'the Universe' or the cosmic life force. Supernatural worlds include both dualistic concepts of a spiritual world, for example the Christian Heaven and the Celtic Otherworld, and notions of other planes or dimensions, such as the astral plane. Supernatural processes refer to supernatural 'laws', such as the karma law, that are believed to govern the workings of the universe, and to magical processes by which the universe can allegedly be influenced.

[39] The Catholic Eucharist, by this definition, is a splendid example of magic, combining (a) magic based on similarity and supernatural efficacy attributed to speech (turning wine into blood) and (b) magic based on contagion (transferring the power of the god to the devotees through consumption).

their postulated existence and causal power *cannot* be verified from the perspective of science and that the study of religion must therefore assume them to be purely the construction of the human imagination. In other words, my approach is not one of methodological agnosticism, but of methodological naturalism or non-supernaturalism.[40]

0.3.4. Elemental Religion and Rationalised Religion

A fourth aspect of my approach concerns the fundamental distinction that I draw between elemental religion and rationalised religion. I use the term *elemental religion* to refer to three related things which together constitute the core of religion. These are (1) practices that assume the existence of supernatural agents, worlds, or processes *in a straightforward literal sense*, (2) the assumptions (or first-order beliefs) which underpin these practices, and (3) the experiences which these practices induce. Particularly central are practices, beliefs, and experiences related to supernatural agents (rather than to supernatural worlds or processes). Practices, beliefs, and experiences related to supernatural agents thus constitute the 'core of the core', so to speak, of religion. As I see it, the

[40] The naturalist approach that I suggest is akin to what Peter Berger has referred to as "*methodological* atheism" (1967, 100, 180; original emphasis). For Berger, this approach is *atheist* because it analyses and theorises religion on the assumption that no supernatural agents with causal power actually exist and intervene in human affairs, and *methodological* because it does not rule out the existence of such agents for good, but only states that the fundamental epistemological principles of science precludes scholars from assuming their existence. I find Berger's term, methodological *atheism*, unlucky, however, and prefer to make reference to (methodological) "naturalism" (cf. Preus 1987; Segal 1983; 2000a). Methodological naturalism is a position which is not atheist in particular, but *non-supernaturalist* (cf. Taves 2010, 172) in general. Taking a naturalistic approach means going against the strong strand of methodological agnosticism, a position whose proponents claim that methodological atheism is "reductionist", "projectionist", or "secularist" and that we should "take religion more seriously". Methodological agnostics have problematically argued that it is impossible to explain religion (because we do not know whether religion is human-made or a reaction to a real divine reality), and that religion can therefore only be described, catalogued, and compared (e.g. Smart 1973, 23-24; Platvoet 1983; Kippenberg 1983; Hanegraaff 1995; Cox 2004). Some have gone one step further and suggested that we build the possibility that supernatural entities exist and causally influence the world into our explanatory models (e.g. Porpora 2006). In other words, methodological agnosticism has been used to shield religion from rational critique on ideological grounds, to argue that the study of religion must necessarily be anti-theoretical, and to legitimise a supernaturalistic approach to religion. For a recent critique of these problems of methodological agnosticism (which is unfortunately only available in Danish), see Hammer and Dyrendal (2011) and Sørensen (2011). See also my own critique of supernaturalism in the context of Pagan Studies (Davidsen 2012b). It should be noted that some scholars of religion (e.g. Geertz 2003) use the concept methodological agnosticism to refer to a naturalistic approach. That is a step in the right direction, but I think that it is less confusing to speak of naturalism than to attempt to shed the notion of methodological agnosticism from its supernaturalist connotations. That said, also naturalism is a term with many meanings. Let me therefore make it absolutely clear that (my version of) naturalism does not imply physicalism (but allows for the study of reality on various levels of analysis), does not imply secularism (but adopts a Durkheimian view on the worth of religion, assuming that it can be wrong, yet have beneficial functions), and does not rule out interpretive approaches (but urges the combination of interpretation and explanation).

most fundamental religious practices are rituals involving communication with postulated supernatural agents, and the most central religious beliefs are those which concern the existence and intentions of postulated supernatural agents. Religious experiences can be distinguished from other important experiences (e.g. experiences of awe and connectedness) in that they involve a sense of being addressed by a supernatural agent.

Elemental religion can become the object of processes of *religious rationalisation*. Religious rationalisation involves the explication and justification of elemental religion, and leads to the formulation of explanations and theories that constitute a reflective, second-order kind of religious beliefs. I refer to these second-order beliefs as rationalised religion.[41] My use of the term rationalisation is inspired by Max Weber who used it to refer to intellectual elaboration and systematisation of religious beliefs (cf. Goldstein 2009), and by Tanya Luhrmann (1989, ch. 20) who has analysed how contemporary magicians rationalise their belief in magic by weakening the ontological claims made in actual practice.[42] Religious rationalisations are not necessarily (indeed typically not) rational in a narrow sense of explaining away all that which is mystical or supernatural. Rather, rationalisation in the context of religion refers broadly to intellectual reflection aimed at evaluating and elaborating on first-order religious activity.[43]

The relation between elemental religion and rationalised religion is dialectic. On the one hand, elemental religion constitutes the basis and *sine qua non* for religious traditions, while rationalised religion forms an optional super-structure that reflects upon the meaning and purpose of elemental religion and thus 'lives off' it. On the other hand,

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[41] The terms elemental religion and rationalised religion are roughly synonymous with Harvey Whitehouse's (2004a; 2004b) "cognitively optimal religion" and "doctrinal religion". It falls outside the scope of this thesis, however, to bring my analytical apparatus and empirical findings into discussion with the work of Whitehouse and other cognitive scholars of religion. As I have already argued elsewhere (2012c, 561-564) and as Olav Hammer has demonstrated (2013), the study of non-institutional religion has much to gain from a theoretical engagement with the cognitive study of religion.

[42] As Luhrmann shows, many magicians rationalise their magical practice by invoking the notion of a magical plane (1989, 274). Their actual practice (i.e. their elemental religion) rests on the belief that magic can influence the material world in a straightforward way. In their *post hoc* rationalisation of this practice (i.e. their rationalised religion) they restrict themselves to the more cautious claim that magic is 'really' only effective on the 'magical plane'. According to Luhrmann, the function of this rationalisation is to reduce the cognitive dissonance that magicians experience between their belief in magical efficacy as it is asserted in actual practice and their experience that magic fails to produce the desired results (1989, 276).

[43] In Weber's writings on religion there seems to be a tension between two meanings of the term religious rationalisation. In the narrow sense, religious rationalisation is a synonym of disenchantment (cf. Weber 1968); in the broad sense, it refers to any systematisation of religious doctrine. As Warren Goldstein points out (2009), Weber in fact observed two different *kinds* of religious rationalisation taking place in the Occident and Orient respectively. In the Occident, religion was rationalised in the narrow and 'rational' sense, i.e. it became ever more disenchanted, ascetic, bureaucratic, and this-worldly. The religions of the Orient were subject to rationalisation only in the general sense of systematisation and intellectualisation, for their rationalisation was 'irrational' in so far as the Oriental religions retained their enchanted, mystic, traditional, and/or other-worldly orientation (Goldstein 2009).

rationalised religion, in the sense of a worldview and an ethos, has a feedback effect on elemental religion, providing it with plausibility and meaningfulness. Rationalised religion, once formulated, does not supplant elemental religion. The two religious dimensions are not even competitors, but mutually support each other. Religious traditions *need* both to thrive. It is therefore important that scholars of religion study both elemental religion, rationalised religion, and the interaction between the two. Moreover, we should study the religious rationalisations of both average and intellectual religionists. We must not let the rationalised religion of the intellectual elite (so-called 'official religion') pass for the core of the religious traditions to which it belongs, or worse, consider it the only dimension of religion worth studying.

Religious rationalisation can be studied as individuals' reflection on their elemental religion (Luhrmann), or as an historical process (Weber). In the second case, not only elemental religion but also rationalised beliefs become the object of successive rounds of rationalisation, thus forming a chain of rationalisations. For analytical purposes, it can furthermore be useful to differentiate between two dimensions of rationalisation, which I for the lack of better terms refer to as belief elaboration and ontology assessment. *Belief elaboration* refers to the development of second-order beliefs (in narrative or doctrinal form) that situate the elemental supernatural within a cosmological context and illuminates the meaning and purpose of elemental religious practice. In established religious traditions, belief elaboration involves the systematisation and further elaboration of an already existing worldview and ethos. *Ontology assessment* refers to reflections on the ontological status of those supernatural entities whose existence is assumed in elemental religion. In real life, belief elaboration and ontology assessment are intermingled with each other, as belief elaboration always includes a component of ontology assessment, while the narratives and doctrines produced through belief elaboration can themselves become object of ontology assessment.

In fiction-based religion, ontology assessment involves an evaluation of the ontological status of (a) the supernatural elements in those fictional narratives which are used as authoritative texts, and of (b) the supernatural elements whose existence is assumed in elemental religious practice based on these texts. In the case of Tolkien spirituality, ontology assessment revolves around the evaluation of the ontological status of the supernatural agents (Eru, Valar, Elves) from Tolkien's literary mythology. Ontology assessment can either lead to the *affirmation* or *disaffirmation* of the ontological status of the elemental supernatural, or to a middle-position in which the original ontological claim is disaffirmed, but supplanted by a different ontological claim. For lack of a better term, I refer to this middle-position as *transformation*. A typical form of transformation is the reduction of a personal deity to an impersonal power.

Let me give two examples of rationalisations in Tolkien spirituality that involve both ontology assessment and belief elaboration. Some Tolkien religionists assert that ritual interaction with the Valar, the divine beings of *S*, is possible because the Valar are not merely fictional entities, but real beings (ontology assessment), and that one can visit

them on the astral plane and gain access to their spiritual knowledge (elaboration). That is to say, these religionists explicitly affirm the ontological status of the Valar as discrete, spiritual beings which they have already implicitly been granted in ritual practice. The religionists further embed this ontological affirmation within a cosmological context foreign to Tolkien's literary mythology (i.e. the world has a physical and an astral plane) and formulate a purpose for ritual interaction with the Valar (i.e. the Valar possess spiritual knowledge which they are willing to share with those who visit them). Other Tolkien religionists interpret visions of the Valar as contacts with Jungian archetypes. In this case the immediate experience is disaffirmed and de-ontologised (i.e. the Vala is not taken to exist as a discrete entity), but transformed and reontologised in the light of another metaphysical model (i.e. the Vala is recast as the personified expression of a cosmic or psychological principle).

The plausibility of first- and second-order beliefs can furthermore be protected by justifying them in various ways. There exist two major strategies of justification which I refer to as legitimisation and relativisation. Strategies of legitimisation point to secondary sources of various sorts, e.g. science, venerable religious traditions, and subjective experiences, which are taken to prove the objective truth of one's religious beliefs. An example would be the claim that Tolkien's narratives are ultimately non-fictional because Tolkien channelled (rather than made up) his stories, a 'fact' which is 'proved' by Tolkien's letters in which he expresses a feeling of inspiration. Another example is the claim that the historicity of Tolkien's mythology can be proved because the coastline of pre-historical Europe corresponds to Tolkien's maps of Middle-earth.

Relativisation also attempts to justify religious beliefs, but it does so by de-objectivising them. Relativisation either takes the form of subjectivisation or compartmentalisation. Subjectivisation is the argument that religious belief X 'is true for me, but might not be true for you'; the strategy of compartmentalisation states that 'religious beliefs are true in their own way'. Subjectivisation is quite straightforward and very widespread among contemporary religionists. The more advanced strategy of compartmentalisation is rarer, but can for example be found among philosophers of religion who argue that religion/faith constitutes a special "language game" or "reality" which must be understood according to its own "logic". Scholars of religion will recognise the strategy of compartmentalisation in the work of religionist scholars, such as Mircea Eliade, who argue that religion is *sui generis*. The effect of both subjectivisation and compartmentalisation is to render religion immune to rational critique.

Rationalisation, legitimisation, and relativisation together constitute a repertoire of *semiotic* strategies aimed at protecting the plausibility of religious beliefs. These strategies are semiotic because they seek to constitute religious beliefs as signs which refer, either directly or indirectly, to real supernatural agents, worlds, and processes in the actual world. To maintain the plausibility of religious beliefs, or indeed of any kind of socially constructed beliefs, supportive *social* structures are necessary as well. I borrow Berger and Luckmann's term "plausibility structures" to refer to these structures (1966, esp. 174;

Berger 1967, 45). The plausibility structures which sustain fiction-based religion include the immediate social base (communities, networks) and sources of support of a more structural or facilitating kind (the broader cultic milieu, speculative fiction, the Internet).

0.3.5. Philosophical Assumptions

The study of fiction-based religion and of post-traditional individual religion in general is in a nascent state. Ground-breaking work is being done by anthropologists, sociologists, and scholars of religion, but no single, systematic theory has emerged from these efforts that I could simply adopt as the theoretical framework for this thesis. I have therefore found myself forced to scavenge theoretical bits and pieces from anthropology, sociology, the study of religion, and cognitive semiotics and try to synthesise them into a framework of my own making. Some readers might find my approach a cross-disciplinary mess, but I feel that there was no other way to go about this project than theoretical eclecticism. I also hope, of course, that some of the analytical tools that I develop will be considered useful enough to be employed to analyse other data and to be developed further by others.

Besides simple necessity, there is also a second and much more fundamental reason for my endorsement of theoretical eclecticism. It is my conviction that one should always seek to combine the best analytical tools, no matter from which discipline they originate, in the study of any given empirical phenomenon. One can do so and *should* do so because the borders between academic disciplines are arbitrary while the world is one. It is therefore the subject matter and one's research questions which should determine one's approach, not the discipline that one happens to belong to. The goal of theoretical eclecticism is not interdisciplinarity, an approach that reifies disciplines as much as discipline-confined studies do. The goal is also not a form of multiperspectivism which endorses unresolved tensions between mutually exclusive positions. The ultimate aim, simple yet difficult to achieve, is the theoretical integration and a dialectic relation between theory and data in which theory is not only used to analyse the data, but where data are also used to refine the theory.

A realist philosophy underpins my integrative vision of science, and this philosophy revolves around two fundamental notions. First, realists believe that the world exists independently of our phenomenological perception of it. As Alan Chalmers writes, realist science, therefore, "describes not just the observable world but also the world that lies behind the appearances" (1999, 226). Second, realists subscribe to a (weak) form of the correspondence theory of truth. It is a weak form only, for realists are well aware that their descriptions and theories are always only *models* of the world (cf. Jensen 2009). Chalmers, who formulates this point more strongly than most realists, argues that our models are "unrepresentative". By this he does not mean to say that our models do not represent anything at all (for they do), only that they do not correspond completely with the world itself and that they should therefore never be mistaken for reality itself. Even if

absolute correspondence between world and model cannot be achieved, realists hold that it is the *degree* of correspondence between model and world that makes some models truer than others. Realists therefore believe in the progress of science which they understand as the increasing accuracy of our "attempts to characterise the structure of reality" (Chalmers 1999, 245).

I find it necessary to state these points because the humanities during the last decades have come under the spell of an unnecessarily paralysing relativist philosophy of science. In the study of religion a radical turn away from the essentialism of the phenomenological approach has led scholars to adopt instead an overly strong social constructionism. For the social constructionists, who include such important scholars as Timothy Fitzgerald (2000; 2006; 2009; 2013), Russell McCutcheon (1997; 2003), and Kocku von Stuckrad (2003; 2010; 2013a), the aim is no longer to study religion, but to deconstruct the category. What matters for them is what people mean by 'religion', and how the term is strategically used to label certain practices in opposition to other value-laden categories such as superstition or the profane or secular. These scholars have themselves developed a profound mysophobia regarding the concept religion, either emphasising its constructed character by rendering it in scare quotes ("religion"; McCutcheon 1997) or with small capitals (RELIGION; von Stuckrad 2013a), or by advocating to abandon its use in scholarly discourse altogether (Fitzgerald 2000).

Kevin Schilbrack (2012; 2013) has attacked the deconstructionist approach and posed the question, "after we deconstruct 'religion,' then what?" For the deconstructionists, there is nothing left to do after deconstructing 'religion', but Schilbrack argues that there is. As he sees it, there is a third way between, on the one hand, old school essentialism, and, on the other hand, social constructionist, discursive, and deconstructionist approaches. That is the way of critical realism. As Schilbrack explains, a critical realist is interested in all the same issues as a deconstructionist, but in some additional ones as well. Indeed, like deconstructionism, critical realism

> seeks to critique the socially produced concepts with which one categorizes the world [such as 'religion'], but it does so in order better to describe realities that exist, according to critical realists, apart from one's language and thoughts. [...] To be a realist about religion is to talk about religions as forms of life that exist in the world. It is to hold that religions have achieved [a] kind of intersubjective reality (Schilbrack 2013, 108, 109).

I adopt Schilbrack's position. While that appears to be the minority position at the moment within the study of religion, there is nothing odious about it philosophically speaking. As John Searle remarks, "realism and a correspondence conception are essential presuppositions of any sane philosophy, not to mention of any science" (1996, xiii).

To sum up briefly, my approach can be seen as a form of (a) *constructionism* which is interested in how religion is semiotically constructed and socially maintained. This constructionism is (b) based on a *naturalist* (rather than on a methodologically agnostic)

and on a *realist* (rather than on a relativist) philosophy of science. My approach further synthesises a (c) focus on *individual religion* with a (d) *substantive* definition of religion.

0.4. The Road Ahead

The thesis is divided into two main parts devoted respectively to the development of a theoretical and analytical framework for the study of fiction-based religion in general and to a thick description of the spiritual Tolkien milieu in particular. The thesis is rounded off with a conclusion that systematically reflects on the empirical findings and on the perspectives for using the analytical toolkit in future studies.

0.4.1. Part I: A Theoretical Framework for the Study of Fiction-based Religion

In the first part of the thesis, "A Theoretical Framework for the Study of Fiction-based Religion", I introduce the socio-cultural context of my study, identify strengths and weaknesses in previous research on post-traditional, individual, and fiction-based religion, and develop my own theoretical framework. As a first step, I sketch in chapter 1 how processes of detraditionalisation, deinstitutionalisation, and dedogmatisation have led to the emergence of a post-traditional religious field in the West. Post-traditional religion is not embedded within one particular religious tradition, but characterised by the blending of elements from various religious traditions which each other and with material from other cultural sources, such as fiction and popular science. Socially, the post-traditional religious field takes the form of a 'cultic milieu' (Campbell 1972). As such, it comprises both formal post-traditional organisations (such as the Theosophical Society) and post-traditional individual religion (or "spirituality"). The individuals and small groups engaged in Tolkien religion, together with their beliefs and practices, constitute a sub-milieu within the cultic milieu. On the one hand, this 'spiritual Tolkien milieu' constitutes a milieu of its own because individuals and groups, especially in the age of the Internet, are connected through partly overlapping networks that allow individuals to exchange ideas and groups to share members. On the other hand, the spiritual Tolkien milieu constitutes a sub-milieu within the cultic milieu because Tolkien spirituality has emerged through the blending of elements from Tolkien's narratives with existing rituals and beliefs from the wider cultic milieu. Finishing chapter 1, I review previous research on post-traditional individual religion. I identify and evaluate three research traditions which can be characterised respectively as cataloguing, normative, and social-scientific in character.

Chapter 2 focuses on the category of fiction-based religion, a subtype of post-traditional religion. The chapter is framed as a critical discussion with Adam Possamai. He was the first to identify and describe religions based on popular fiction as a new religious form. With reference to Jean Baudrillard, he coined the term 'hyper-real religion' to

denote this type of religion. For Baudrillard, however, all living religions are social constructions and therefore hyper-real. The notion hyper-real religion is thus confusing and must be given up. Fiction-based religion is proposed as a more precise alternative and the concept of fiction is clarified. I then elaborate on Possamai's distinction between hyper-real religions that use popular culture as either a secondary or primary source of inspiration to develop a threefold typology of fiction-based religion. I distinguish between *fiction-inspired religion* (including Neo-Pagans who are influenced by Tolkien's writings in a general way), *fiction-integrating religion* (including the Tribunal of the Sidhe and other groups that integrate elements from Tolkien's literary mythology into an existing religious tradition), and *fiction-based religion sensu stricto* (including 'purist' Tolkien-based religion that takes Tolkien's works as its very foundation). I finally draw into question Possamai's claim that hyper-real religion originated in the 1950s, demonstrating that the history of fiction-inspired religion can be traced back at least to the Theosophical Society's use of Edward Bulwer-Lytton's novels late in the nineteenth century.

In chapter 3, I develop my notion of religious affordances. Inspired by reader-response criticism (Stanley Fish), I argue that it is possible for readers to read Tolkien's literary mythology in different ways, and that the differences in reading outcomes are influenced by the beliefs and concerns that readers bring into their engagement with the text. For instance, readers who are active in the cultic milieu and already believe in the existence of otherworlds, magic, and spirits will be likely to interpret the presence of otherworlds, magic, and spirits in the text as signs of its religious nature. By contrast, readers who do not believe will be likely to perceive the presence of otherworlds and so on as evidence of the text's fictional character. With Umberto Eco I further argue that it is possible to discern those traits in the texts that interact with reader expectations to promote specific interpretive outcomes. I borrow the term affordances from James Gibson to coin the term religious affordances which I use to refer to those textual features which promote a religious interpretation for readers. I distinguish between four types of religious affordances of which religious narratives tend to possess at least the first three. Such narratives include (1) *fantastic elements* which are real (though often non-ordinary) within the narrative world, but supernatural from the perspective of the world of the reader; they include (2) *narrative religion*, especially in the form of "interventionist practices"[44] with superhuman beings; and they (3) thematise and assert their own *veracity*. Sometimes they also (4) claim to stem from a *divine source*. Fictional texts are usable as authoritative texts for religion if they possess some of these religious affordances (Tolkien's literary mythology has much of the first and a bit of the second and the third). The religious potential of fictional narratives can furthermore be reinforced if

[44] I borrow this term from Martin Riesebrodt who distinguishes "interventionist" (2010) or "interventive" (2008, 30) practices (interaction with the postulated supernatural beings) from "discursive practices" (talking about the supernatural beings) and "regulatory practices" (acting according to the dictates of the supernatural beings).

veracity – and even divine authorship – are attributed to them by paratexts (*in casu* Tolkien's authorial preface), metatexts (Tolkien's letters and other texts commenting on the narratives), and intertexts (e.g. the religious nature of Tolkien's own sources).

Chapter 4 is devoted to the notion of religious blending, a process which remains curiously undertheorised despite scholarly agreement on its significance in contemporary religion. Lacking a standard theory of religious blending, I set out to assemble an analytical toolkit of my own. Despite my reservations about the notions bricolage and syncretism, I adopt these terms and draw a first distinction between bricolage, i.e. religious blending by individuals, and syncretism, i.e. the blending of religious traditions. In dialogue with earlier scholarship on syncretism, I thereafter develop a more fine-grained set of analytical tools. I make a distinction between religious bricolage in which individuals engage in practices from several religious traditions without attempting to integrate these practices into one coherent whole (supplementary bricolage) and bricolage in which such integration is attempted (integrative bricolage). I also distinguish between different types of syncretism that are either ambiguous and instable (mixture), result in a new stable tradition (synthesis), cause one tradition to be usurped by another (assimilation), or involve the adoption of elements by one small tradition from its cultural surroundings (inward acculturation). Since Tolkien spirituality involves the integration of fictional and religious concepts, such as Tolkien's Quendi with the *álfar* of folklore, I pay special attention to religious blending on the concept level. I distinguish between two forms of religious concept metamorphosis, resemantisation and concept construction, and demonstrate the usefulness of Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner's theory of conceptual blending to analyse such processes. The strength of conceptual blending theory is that it allows one to break up concepts into semiotic elements of a lower order, and to analyse the processes of projection, compression, and so on involving these elements on the sub-concept level.

In chapter 5, I sketch a semiotic and dynamic approach to the study of religious belief. I use the term 'religious belief' to refer to any explicit or implicit statement which assumes the existence of supernatural agents, worlds, or processes. Adopting a semiotic approach, I consider religious beliefs to be signs. Indeed, religious beliefs constitute a special type of signs which are not only defined by their content, but also by the fact that they, despite possessing no objective reference, nevertheless insist on referring to real events and states of being in the actual world. I am interested in how religious beliefs construct themselves as 'signs with an object' and use most of chapter 5 to develop a vocabulary for analysing semiotic processes of reference ascription and plausibility construction. In particular, I look at what I call 'ontology assessment', i.e. a reflective process through which a particular type and degree of reference is reflectively ascribed to beliefs. I draw up a typology of principal ontology assessments, including affirmation which takes beliefs to be referential in a literal sense, and transformation which counts on a metaphorical sign relation between beliefs and their alleged referents. I differentiate between various sub-types of transformation. Moving on to the ontology assessment of

texts, I identify four religious modes in which religious narratives and supernatural fiction can be read, namely the mytho-historical, mytho-cosmological, mythopoeic, and binocular modes. I count also on two non-religious modes, namely the euhemeristic and the fictionalising modes. In chapter 5, I also analyse the dynamics of belief within religious traditions. I identify four loci of belief within religious traditions, namely elemental religious practice, folk rationalisations, authoritative religious narratives, and official theology. The dynamic relations between the four loci of belief are explored. For example, I show how second-order beliefs (folk rationalisation and theology) emerge as rationalisations of first-order beliefs expressed in religious practice and religious narratives. I also analyse how some loci of belief provide plausibility support for others. Finally, I discuss the special place of the cultic milieu in the dynamics of belief in Tolkien religion as supplier of both building blocks for practice and models for rationalisation and justification.

0.4.2. Part II: The Spiritual Milieu Based on J.R.R. Tolkien's Literary Mythology

The second part of the dissertation, "The Spiritual Milieu Based on J.R.R. Tolkien's Literary Mythology", opens with chapter 6 on method. In this chapter, I account for the method of my data collection, present an overview of my empirical material, and revisit the research questions. Most of the individuals I have talked to live abroad, so our contact has taken place via Skype, email, and discussion forums. This is not different, however, from how the members of most of the groups and networks I have studied communicate with each other, for these groups are international and online-based. Accordingly, my method of data collection lies somewhere between interviewing and doing on-site fieldwork. I have done sixteen semi-structured interviews across eight groups, but with most people I have subsequently had much more extensive contact. The Word document in which I store all communication counts approximately 500,000 words. Furthermore, I have analysed forums and homepages of several other groups and individuals, so my approach can perhaps be categorised as 'online ethnography'. Towards the end of the chapter I return to my research questions and use the analytical toolkit developed throughout part I to further operationalise them. I formulate four hypotheses to be tested on the empirical material.

In chapters 7 through 16, I analyse the religious affordances of Tolkien's literary mythology and carry out a number of case studies of groups within the spiritual Tolkien milieu. Taken together, the ten chapters offer a thick description of the spiritual Tolkien milieu which I analyse using the analytical framework developed in chapters 2 through 5. Chapter 7 of the dissertation, treats the religious affordances of *LR*. I demonstrate that *LR* contains numerous fantastic elements (e.g. superhuman beings, otherworlds, magic, visions) and a limited elements of narrative religion (e.g. divine powers and rituals directed at them; morality, cosmology, and eschatology). It also includes a frame narrative that stages the main story as 'feigned history' and thus thematises its veracity. While all

this was *meant* by Tolkien to be taken with a grain of salt, *LR* certainly contains textual and paratextual elements that make a non-fictional reading of the text possible.

LR was published in 1954-55, but it did not become a bestseller until it appeared in paperback in 1965. Chapter 8 traces the unexpected success of *LR* among hippies and Neo-Pagans. It shows how hippies adopted the Shire life of the Hobbits as a social model, and demonstrates how Neo-Pagans were moved by Tolkien's enchanted world and considered *LR* to contain "metaphorical" references to metaphysical realities. For instance, while Neo-Pagans generally did not consider Lothlórien to be a real place, some of them saw (and see) the Elven forest kingdom as a metaphorical reference to real otherworldly places very much *like it*. Indeed, for some readers it was *LR* that first made them wonder about the possible reality of otherworlds and magic, this being their first step towards becoming Pagans. While Neo-Paganism was and is merely *Tolkien-inspired*, it is worth introducing the movement at some length since most Tolkien religionists and self-identified Elves are *also* Neo-Pagans and typically integrate Tolkien elements with Pagan traditions, especially Wicca.

Chapter 9 explores the religious affordances that were added to Tolkien's literary mythology with the publication of *S* in 1977. The new religious affordances of *S* include an elaboration of the narrative religion compared to *LR*. Much more information is given on the cosmogony, theology, cosmology, and eschatology of Arda according to the lore of the Quendi. This new material allows Tolkien's works to be cast as a mythology in its own right, and the Elven point of view in *S* invites readers and Tolkien religionists to identify with the Elves (rather than with Hobbits or humans).

Chapters 10 through 12 describe three cases of Tolkien spirituality centred on the self-identification as Elves. Chapter 10 introduces the Tribunal of the Sidhe, a Neo-Pagan group that was founded on the American West Coast in 1984 and is probably the largest Tolkien-integrating religious movement today. The members of the Tribunal of the Sidhe claim to be Changelings, i.e. Elves (or similar beings) from an astral world who have been incarnated in human bodies. They also claim that Tolkien was a Changeling himself and that *LR* and *S* tell the history of the Changelings in mythic form. I discuss the self-identification as Changeling as an example of religious blending, analysing how members combine elements from Tolkien's mythology with various forms of fairy spirituality and revelations of their own to construct and rationalise the notion that they are Changelings.

Chapter 11 covers the Elven movement, a loose network of self-identified Elves which emerged in the early 1970s and established itself on the Internet in the 1990s. The self-identified Elves engage in identity blending in much the same way as the Tribunal of the Sidhe, so to avoid redundancy, the Elven chapter focuses instead on the construction and maintenance of plausibility within the Elven movement. More concretely, I examine the range of semiotic strategies for plausibility construction, i.e. rationalisation, legitimisation, and relativisation, which the Elves use, often in combination, to elaborate upon and justify their core identity claim 'we are Elves'. Special attention is given to the Elves'

effort to negotiate a balance between fabulousness and plausibility. The awakened Elves identify with the Elves of legend and fantasy fiction because these beings are near-immortal magicians, but being humans after all, they cannot plausibly claim to possess the same powers as their narrative role models. A balance is found, for example, by self-identified Elves who claim to possess Elven souls and to have lived fabulous past lives (among the stars and on Atlantis), but who maintain that their Elven powers in this life are severely tempered because their souls are trapped in weak human bodies. I also analyse the process of 'conversion' (or interpretive drift) which new members of the movement go through to develop their fascination with Elves into the belief and public profession that they are really Elves. Finally, I consider to what extent fiction, Internet communities, and the cultic milieu function as plausibility structures for the Elven community, and I identify the 'plausibility threats' facing the community.

The construction of the Elves as a superior race is also the concern of Laurence Gardner and Nicholas de Vere, two alternative historians discussed in chapter 12. Strange as it may seem, these writers use Tolkien's literary mythology to legitimise their conspiracy theories about a royal, Elven bloodline which includes Christ and Charlemagne. While they do not directly integrate elements from Tolkien's narratives into their religious beliefs and practices, they seek out similarities between bloodline lore and Tolkien's texts and use these similarities to suggest that Tolkien possessed esoteric knowledge which he hinted at in his books. In this way, the alternative historians construct Tolkien as a fellow esotericist and attempt to rub his prestige as a mythologist and philologist off onto their own speculations. This strategy is viable because Tolkien enjoys a high measure of authority within the cultic milieu.

Chapter 13 is devoted to two cases of the integration of Tolkien's literary mythology into the Western magic tradition as this has been given form by the British *fin de siècle* order the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. I first analyse an interesting example of ritual blending, namely the High Elvish Working created in 1993 by the Fifth Way Mystery School. The structure of the ritual was taken from the Golden Dawn's Supreme Invoking Ritual of the Pentagram, but the content, including the evocation of the Valar and certain phrases in Elvish, were drawn from Tolkien's literary mythology. The High Elvish Working, which was circulated among Neo-Pagans and published on the group's homepage, has been a major source of inspiration for later groups in the spiritual Tolkien milieu. The second case is Terry Donaldson's *LR* Tarot deck, published in 1997. Especially the accompanying book is interesting, for here Donaldson connects Tolkien's mythology to the elaborate system of correspondences established by the Golden Dawn. He furthermore provides guidelines for visualisation rituals based on the card illustrations and introduces new Tolkien-inspired Tarot spreads. It goes for most of the *S*-based, Tolkien-integrating religionists treated in chapters 10 through 13 that they are at pains to decide for themselves whether Tolkien's literary mythology is merely fiction (albeit spiritually advanced and religiously enlightening fiction) or whether it constitutes a real mythology (albeit a relatively inferior or derived one).

Chapters 14, 15, and 16 are concerned with the second wave of Tolkien spirituality which emerged online in the 21st century. Chapter 14 analyses the religious affordances of Peter Jackson's movie adaptations of *LR* and examines a number of online groups which draw (or drew) most of their Tolkien inspiration from these movies. In contrast to the *LR* book, Jackson's movies have no frame story anchoring the narrative world in the world of the reader, and they include no narrative religion whatsoever. Even so, groups of self-identified Middle-earth Pagans have developed rituals directed at characters from the movies. Not only superhuman characters, such as Gandalf and Galadriel, are the object of these rituals, but also human and Hobbit characters, including Aragorn, Éowyn, and Frodo. These characters are either believed to inhabit some non-physical plane of existence or to be expressions of the Wiccan God and Goddess. Many Neo-Pagans have experimented with movie-based rituals, but Middle-earth Paganism has not been successful in terms of tradition-forming and institutionalisation. Most Middle-earth Pagans lost interest after a short while, some moving on to religious blending involving other movies and TV series.

Chapter 15 examines the religious affordances of *HoMe* and Tolkien's letters and short-stories and thus serves as a prelude for the discussion in chapter 16 of Legendarium Reconstructionist groups who draw on all these texts. In terms of religious affordances, *HoMe* is interesting for three reasons. First, it includes the earliest versions of the stories that would evolve into *S*, versions which Tolkien religionists argue are the closest we get to Tolkien's original revelation. Second, *HoMe* includes much detailed information about the Valar which can be used to construct Valar-directed rituals. Finally, *HoMe* includes two unfinished 'time travel' stories which are highly autobiographical in character and suggest that Tolkien believed in the possibility of ancestral memory regression. Tolkien's letters also add to the religious affordances of his mythology, as Tolkien often speculates about the relationship between his narratives and the historical record and expresses a feeling of inspiration. Indeed, Tolkien frequently states that he did not invent his stories, but that he rather "recorded" or "reported" what was already there.

Chapter 16 examines Tië eldaliéva (The Elven Path) and Ilsaluntë Valion (The Silver Ship of the Valar), two closely cooperating groups who emerged online after the movies, but who draw most extensively on *S* and *HoMe*. These groups are particularly interesting because they go the furthest in creating a Tolkien-based spiritual tradition. For example, drawing on Tolkien's narratives, supplemented with their own inventions and revelations, members of Tië eldaliéva have created a complete lunisolar calendar. Drawing on ritual formats from ceremonial magic and Wicca, they have developed elaborate rituals for each moon phase and solar festival. Since physical co-presence has been unobtainable, the group carried out its rituals over the phone or on Skype. Ilsaluntë Valion, which broke off from Tië eldaliéva in 2007, has further refined the ritual calendar and gradually purged the ceremonial magical elements from the group's rituals. Supplementing the collective rituals, Ilsaluntë Valion has furthermore developed a freer and more individu-

al ritual approach. In the group's own terms, members do gnostic research using Tolkien's narratives as a means of transportation to the Imaginal Realm or Faery. Based on extensive virtual ethnography of the two groups, the chapter sketches the history of Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion, analyses the modes of religious blending in the groups, and discusses how members embed their Tolkien-based ritual practices within a sophisticated world-view and religious philosophy.

The dissertation is rounded off with a conclusion that systematically revisits the research questions and explores the theoretical and methodological implications of the findings for the study of fiction-based religion and post-traditional individual religion in general. On the next page, I draw up a table which systematically shows which chapters of the thesis (theoretical and empirical) help answer which research questions.

Table 0.1. Overview of the Dissertation																			
Chapters / **Research Questions**		**Introduction**	**Part I Theoretical Framework**					**Part II The Spiritual Tolkien Milieu**											**Part III Conclusion**
		0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
1a	Religious affordances of Tolkien's literary mythology	X					X		X		X					X	X		X
1b	Tolkien's literary mythology as source for religious blending				X					X		X	X		X	X		X	X
1c	Other sources for religious blending; patterns of religious blending			X	X							X		X	X	X		X	X
1d	Rationalisation: belief elaboration and ontology assessment					X				X		X	X	X	X	X		X	X
1e	Justification: legitimisation and relativisation	X				X						X	X	X	X	X		X	X
2	Plausibility structures for Tolkien spirituality		X							X			X	X	X	X		X	X
	Socio-cultural background and contrasting cases	X	X	X						X									X

Part I

A Theoretical Framework for the Study of Fiction-based Religion

Chapter 1. Individual Religion and the Post-traditional Religious Field

Religious creativity can be found in all cultures and through all times, but the social conditions under which religious creativity unfolds differ considerably. The last half-century of so-called late modernity in the North Atlantic civilisation has arguably provided the most benign social context ever for religious innovation and experimentation. Not only can one reinterpret, recombine, and invent religious ideas and practices without fear of persecution, some commentators have even argued that the old social obligation to conform to religious tradition has been replaced with a new obligation to choose or even create a "spirituality" that suits one's personal taste. According to one observer, modern individuals have become subject to a "heretical imperative" (Berger 1979).

The individualisation of religious authority is an important prerequisite for fiction-based religion, and this chapter therefore deals with this process in some detail. The chapter is divided into four sections. In the first section, I sketch how modernisation has caused tradition to lose power *vis-à-vis* individual aspirations, and in the second I examine the consequences of this for the religious field in the West. Underway, I attempt to clarify the meaning of such terms as detraditionalisation and deinstitutionalisation and draw up a model of the current constitution of the religious field. The third section covers the social organisation of the post-traditional religious field or "cultic milieu" (cf. Campbell 1972) – into which the spiritual Tolkien milieu is embedded – and describes the character of post-traditional individual religion. A review of the most important literature on post-traditional individual religion concludes the chapter.

1.1. Subjectivisation

Sociologists and historians agree that an important component of modernisation, the complex process which has transformed Western society over the last half-millennium from agrarian feudalism to industrialised democracy, is an increase of the autonomy of the individual *vis-à-vis* tradition. Various near-synonymous terms are used to refer to this process (or parts of it), including "individualization" (Beck 1992, ch. 5; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2001), "subjectivation" (Taylor 1991) or "subjectivization" (Heelas and Woodhead 2005), and "detraditionalization" (Heelas, Lash, and Morris 1996). In what

follows, I use the term subjectivisation and attempt to distil a simple narrative from the vast body of sociological work on the issue.[45]

Sociologists argue that modernisation has caused traditionalism to give way to various forms of individualism. Two forms of individualism (both as ideologies and actual forms of practice) are particularly important, namely utilitarian individualism and expressive individualism. Utilitarian individualism is thought to be intimately linked with modernity, rising hand in glove with capitalism, liberalism, and the Enlightenment critique of tradition. The moral critic Steven Tipton describes utilitarian individualists as "seeking to satisfy [their] own wants or interests" (1982, 6), but one can also see utilitarian individualism as the ideology of working hard to achieve success with the means given. The American dream is utilitarian individualism in mythic form. Expressive individualism emerged in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century among the intellectual and artistic elites of the Romantic movement, and expressivists can be characterised as individuals "intent on discovering and cultivating their 'true' nature" (Heelas 1996a, 156).[46] According to Charles Taylor, these earlier aspects of individualisation have gained force in the present "Age of Authenticity" which begun in the 1960s or 1970s. This happened because an increase in affluence and education allowed expressive individualism to spread to the middle class and become a mass phenomenon (1991; 2007, ch. 13).

In the Age of Authenticity, individuals are free to choose from various lifestyles on offer. Indeed, some sociologists argue that they are forced to choose. Anthony Giddens, for example, argues that our present era is characterised by the "dis-embedding" of individuals and practices from tradition and institutions which forces individuals to engage in a reflective "project of the self" (1990; 1991). Similarly, Charles Taylor stresses that individuals must choose a lifestyle for themselves. This lifestyle choice does not need to be a choice for individualism, however, but can also be a choice for the moral constraints of tradition (as in the case of fundamentalism) or more generally for a higher political or religious purpose. In Taylor's terms the inescapable subjectivation of "manner" (we have to choose) does not entail subjectivation of "matter" or "content", i.e. the choice of a lifestyle (or a religion) aimed at expressing and fulfilling one's "desires or aspirations, *as against* something that stands beyond these" (1991, 81-82; original emphasis). It goes without saying that a conscious *choice* for tradition is an essentially modern condition and radically different from the obligatory and taken-for-granted traditionalism of old.[47]

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[45] Please note that I have not been able to avoid using 'subjectivisation' in two different meanings. The term refers both to a particular justification strategy (cf. section 0.3.4) and to a historical process (the meaning it carries here).

[46] The term expressive individualism was coined by Bellah et al. (2008, esp. 333-334).

[47] Many other sociologists share Giddens' and Taylor's notion that a new form of subjectivised and reflexive modernity of increased freedom of choice has emerged around the 1960s. Zygmunt Bauman (2000), for instance, speaks of a transition from "solid" to "liquid" modernity, and Mike Featherstone (1991) is among those who observe a transition from modernity to "postmodernity".

Some cautionary remarks are needed to make sure that we do not reify the observations presented above into a too simple narrative of one, unitary transformation from a completely traditional and unreflective past to an extensively post-traditional and subjectivised present. It can be useful for sociologists to be reminded that historians are busy deconstructing "the essentialist 'past *as* traditional' viewpoint" and that anthropologists demonstrate over and over that also so-called traditional societies are marked by tensions between tradition and individual aspirations (Heelas 1996b, 8). One thing that we can learn from our colleagues is that utilitarian individualism is not a modern particular, but something which can be found through all times and also outside the West. That is not to say that the subjectivisation thesis is wrong, however, for something certainly has changed. Utilitarian individualism has become a stronger social force, and expressive individualism is really new, at least as a mass phenomenon. Furthermore, individualism has been politically institutionalised in the twentieth century with democracy and human rights. We have to question, however, whether individuals living in an "Age of Authenticity" are really so completely free to choose as Taylor's subjectivised individuals appear to be. In particular, it is difficult to believe that socialisation and other social processes play no role for individuals who "choose" to stay within their tradition. As Colin Campbell (1987) and Olav Hammer (2010) have pointed out, also those who choose an expressivist lifestyle follow the super-individual fashions of the authentic. Furthermore it is crucial to point out that subjectivisation refers to societal changes that have primarily impacted the highly educated, urban middle-class (Strathern 1992; Skeggs 2004, 139). With these words of caution in place we can proceed to look at the effect of subjectivisation on the field of religion.

1.2. Transformations and Constitution of the Religious Field

The impact of subjectivisation is particularly visible in the religious field.[48] Some sociologists of religion argue that religion has become "privatized" (Luckmann 1967; 1991) or "personalized" (Greeley 1991). Others even speak in grand terms about a "spiritual revolution" (Heelas and Woodhead 2005) from "traditionalized religiosity […] well suited for the community" to "detraditionalized spirituality […] well-suited for the individual" (Heelas 1996a, 173). As Heelas argues,

[48] When I use the term field, I do not mean a *champ* in Pierre Bourdieu's sense (cf. Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 97). I simply refer to the *extension* (in Gottlob Frege's sense) of a category, i.e. its field of reference, as opposed to its *intension* or stipulative definition. In this sense, the religious field comprises all those beliefs, experiences, practices, and discourses in the actual world which correspond to my stipulative definition of religion. This field constitutes the subject matter for the study of religion, but it does not per definition constitute a single, social unit by virtue of this. Rather, the religious field (in my sense) includes both institutions, milieus, traditions, and fields (in Bourdieu's sense) which give it social structure, and instances of "non-institutional" (Ter Borg 2008) or "spontaneous" religion (Davidsen 2012c, 561-564) beyond these field structures.

> detraditionalized people want detraditionalized religion: a 'religion' which is (apparently) more constructed than given; with practices which emphasize the authority of participants; which enables participants to be personally responsible for their salvation; […] which provides guidance and personal experience rather than beliefs; [and] which does not demand that one should belong to a particular organization (1996a, 172-173).

In the line of Heelas, Wouter Hanegraaff has argued that an important aspect of secularisation has been the autonomisation of individual spiritualities from collective, tradition-bound, and institutional religion (1999b). Let me sketch Hanegraaff's proposal as an example of the dominant 'transformation from religion to spirituality' narrative, before I move beyond it to develop a more fine-grained model, both of the transformations within the religious field and of the field's current constitution.

1.2.1. Wouter Hanegraaff on the Autonomisation of Spiritualities

Hanegraaff takes his point of departure in an observation made by Émile Durkheim in his *Formes élémentaires*. Having argued that religion (as opposed to magic) must be defined as rites and beliefs which take place within a "moral community"[49] (1995, 39-42), Durkheim anticipates a possible objection: "But if one includes the notion of Church in the definition of religion, does one not by the same stroke exclude the individual religions that the individual institutes for himself and celebrates for himself alone?" (1995, 43). The individual religions which Durkheim has in mind here include such things as the beliefs and rites associated with the personal "*manitou*" of the Ojibway and with the Catholic's patron saint (1995, 43). As far as religions past and present go, however, Durkheim concludes that the existence of such individual cults poses no threat to his approach because they

> are not distinct and autonomous religious systems but simply aspects of the religion common to the whole Church of which the individuals are part. The patron saint of the Christian is chosen from the official list of saints recognised by the Catholic Church, and there are canonical laws that prescribe how each believer must conduct his private cult (1995, 43).

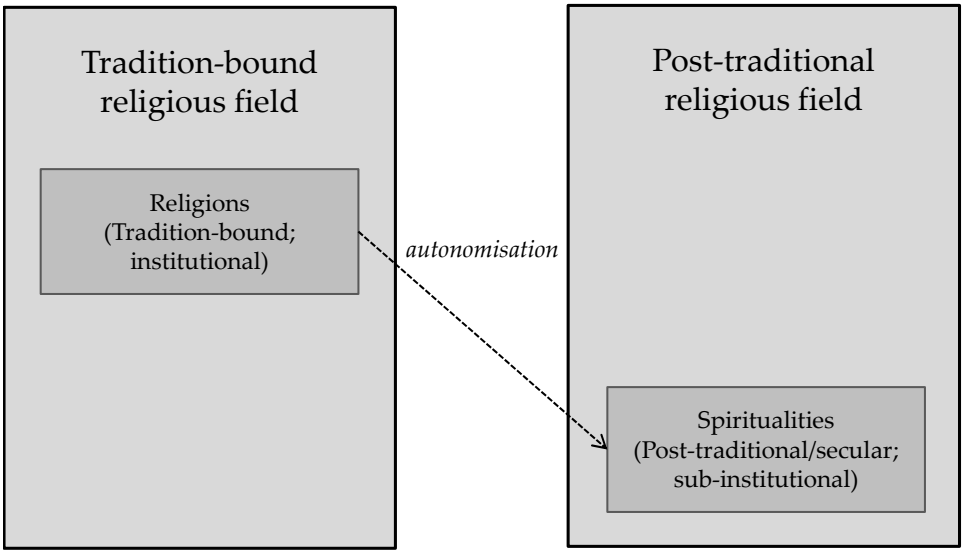
Durkheim was writing in 1912 and refers approvingly to several contemporaries, including Herbert Spencer, who expected that individual religions that were *not* embedded within religious traditions and institutions (within a "Church") were "destined to become the dominant form of religious life" in the future (Durkheim 1995, 43). Evaluating this prophecy 85 years later, Hanegraaff argues that "the type of religion referred to by Durkheim [individual religions outside a Church] has indeed become a fact, and that

[49] Especially in the American Durkheim reception this term has been taken to signify that moral values (rather than beliefs in general) form the core of religion and that religion is therefore a prerequisite for moral behaviour. As Karen Fields (1995, xxxii-xxxiv) remarks, however, Durkheim's moral community should be understood more neutrally as an imagined community (cf. Anderson 1983).

the contemporary New Age movement is its clearest manifestation" (1999b, 146). In Hanegraaff's terminology, an important outcome of secularisation has been the "autonomization of spiritualities" (i.e. Durkheim's individual religions) from "religions" (i.e. religious traditions) (1999b, 151). More elaborately, he states that

> [s]ecularization by no means implies that religion declines or that religions die out; but it does mean that religion is transformed in a crucial way. The essence of this transformation is that religions are faced with increasing competition by spiritualities which are themselves no longer based upon and embedded in an existing religion but become wholly autonomous. This process of autonomization may be described as the emergence of *secular spiritualities* based upon a *private symbolism* in a strict sense (Hanegraaff 1999b, 152; original emphasis).[50]

Figure 1.1. The Religious Field According to Wouter Hanegraaff



That the new spiritualities are "secular" means that they are not embedded within a religion[51] such as was the case with Durkheim's individual religions, but that they are embedded "directly in secular culture" (Hanegraaff 1999b, 145). As such, these spiritualities can draw on "a large number of symbolic systems of various provenance" (Hane-

[50] Hanegraaff provides precise definitions of the terms "religion", "a religion", and "a spirituality". *Religion* is "any symbolic system which influences human action by providing possibilities for ritually maintaining contact between the everyday world and a more general meta-empirical framework of meaning" (Hanegraaff 1999a, 371). *A religion* is "any symbolic system, *embodied in a social institution*, which influences human actions by providing possibilities for ritually maintaining contact between the everyday world and a more general meta-empirical framework of meaning" (Hanegraaff 1999a, 372, emphasis added). *A spirituality* is "any human practice which maintains contact between the everyday world and a more general meta-empirical framework of meaning *by way of individual manipulation of symbolic systems*" (Hanegraaff 1999a, 372, emphasis added).

[51] I would say within a "religious tradition"; Durkheim would say in a "Church".

graaff 1999b 153), namely all those which culture provides. Hanegraaff does not supply an exhaustive list, but suggests that, besides religious traditions, "mythologies of science" (including popular conceptions of psychology and physics) are among the most important symbolic systems that provide inspiration for autonomised spiritualities (1999b, 153). In other words, while religions are both institutional and tradition-bound, spiritualities are both sub-institutional and post-traditional (or trans-traditional).[52] Figure 1.1 depicts Hanegraaff's model of the constitution of the religious field today. Below, I will elaborate on the model, but first it is necessary to introduce some finer analytical categories.

1.2.2. Deinstitutionalisation, Detraditionalisation, and Dedogmatisation in the Religious Field

Both Heelas and Hanegraaff operate with just two basic types of religion, i.e. religions and spiritualities, and with just one process that explains the shift in predominance from the one to the other, i.e. "detraditionalization" (Heelas) or the "autonomization of spiritualities" (Hanegraaff). What makes these models so strong is their simplicity. Heelas and Hanegraaff are able to explain much of the transformation which is currently going on within the religious field in the West with reference to one single process. The simplicity of Heelas and Hanegraaff's models is also their weakness, however, for there is much that they do not cover.

It is, of course, unfair to criticise Heelas and Hanegraaff for not treating the transformation of the religious field *in toto* when their explicit aim was only to account for the rise of spirituality. Nevertheless, I think that we can understand post-traditional individual religion (spirituality) better if we do not only contrast it with an ideal type of tradition-bound, institutional religion which is allegedly unaffected by deinstitutionalisation and detraditionalisation, but develop the analysis in three ways. First, we should consider the processes deinstitutionalisation and detraditionalisation as *vectors* whose effect is felt all over the religious field, albeit to a different degree, and thus also within tradition-bound, institutional religion. Secondly, we must disentangle the processes of deinstitutionalisation and detraditionalisation from each other so that it becomes possible to account for phenomena such as self-identified Christians outside the churches (tradition without institution) and post-traditional institutions like the Theosophical Society. Third, we need to conceptualise changes in the *manner* of believing, e.g. from literalism to non-literalism, that may or may not accompany the processes of deinstitu-

[52] Arguably, the term 'trans-traditional religion' more clearly captures the tendency within the cultic milieu to draw on several traditions at once, than does the term 'post-traditional religion'. A further advantage of trans-traditional religion over post-traditional religion is that it more closely resembles the twin term 'sub-institutional religion', as neither of the two includes a temporal component like the 'post' in post-traditional religion. I nevertheless prefer the term post-traditional religion because I wish to stress, with Heelas and Hanegraaff, that the emergence of religion unbound by one specific tradition is a new phenomenon arising with (late) modernity.

tionalisation and detraditionalisation. The analytical model that I develop in the following attempts to do these things. The first step is to distinguish analytically between three processes of transformation, three processes that often go together and reinforce each other, but which can also be encountered in isolation and should not be conflated. The three processes are deinstitutionalisation, detraditionalisation (which I use here in a more narrow sense than Heelas), and dedogmatisation.

By *deinstitutionalisation* of religion I mean the process of individuals leaving organised religious institutions, either by withdrawing their active participation from for instance church services and voluntary work, by discontinuing their membership, or both. The result of deinstitutionalisation is not necessarily a turn to non-religion or religious indifference for the individuals involved, but can also mean the substitution of institutional religion for sub-institutional, individual religion.[53] Whether such sub-institutional religion is also post-traditional (as Heelas and Hanegraaff imply) or remains tradition-bound (as in the case of the "nominal Christians" studied by Abby Day (2011)) depends on whether deinstitutionalisation is accompanied by detraditionalisation.

By *detraditionalisation* of religion I understand the process of individuals giving up the identification with one religious tradition in particular and exchanging a tradition-bound religious practice for one that combines elements from various religious traditions.[54] I speak of *traditionalised* or *tradition-bound* religion when religious activity takes

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[53] I am aware, that in the social sciences the concept institution (and its derivatives, 'institutional' and '(de)institutionalisation', etc.) can refer to (at least) two different things. I use institution in the most straightforward sense to refer to a *formal organisation*. When I refer here to institutional religion, I thus mean religion that takes place within a formal organisation such as the Roman Catholic Church or the Protestant Church in the Netherlands (Protestantse Kerk in Nederland). Non-institutional religion, by contrast, is *religion found outside formal organisations*. In a second meaning of the term, which is associated especially with Arnold Gehlen (1940), institution refers to a taken-for-granted programme for action. Institutions in this sense are the cultural counter-parts of biological instincts so far as they work automatically and non-reflectively, though they can of course be changed or substituted in a way that instincts cannot. For Gehlen, institutionalisation hence does not mean the instantiation of culture (including religion) into formal organisations, but the routinisation or automation of certain action programmes. Deinstitutionalisation, by contrast, is the process by which formerly automised action programmes become de-automised and the object of conscious evaluation and reflection. Though terminologically confusing, it is highly relevant to identify the institutions (in Gehlen's sense) of non-institutional religion (in the organisational sense). Such institutions include the notions that one should seek a 'spirituality' that is authentic *for me*, and that all kinds of sources may be disembedded and recombined in the process. These notions are celebrated as liberating by radical detraditionalisation theorists, but can be considered institutions in Gehlen's sense because they are held without any reflection or questioning by most non-institutional religionists (cf. Hammer 2010; Houtman, Aupers, and de Koster 2011, ch. 3).

[54] My thinking about traditions is inspired by Fredrik Barth's notion of traditions of knowledge (1993; 2002). I understand religious traditions to be clusters of related beliefs, practices, and discourses about the supernatural. As Barth points out, all traditions are "held together by the effects of a functioning social organization [rather than] by logical coherence of its constituent ideas" (1993, 266). That is to say, it is through the processes of clustering ideas and concerns together, of reifying the cluster by attaching to it a name and an identity, and of holding it together across space-time by sharing it in communities and transmitting it to

place within the confines of one specific, well-defined religious tradition. Detraditionalised or post-traditional religion, by contrast, refers to religious activity that draws on many different religious traditions at once.

Besides deinstitutionalisation and detraditionalisation I use the term *dedogmatisation* to refer to individuals interpreting teachings and prescriptions in increasingly liberal and/or idiosyncratic ways. Dedogmatisation can entail changes in people's religious beliefs and practice, but primarily refers to changes in the manner of rationalisation and legitimisation. More concretely, dedogmatisation refers to the process (or complex of related processes) by which (a) the reflective beliefs which average religionists learn and hold become simpler, (b) ontology assessments increasingly downplay the ontological status of the supernatural,[55] (c) the claims to epistemological exclusivity give way to epistemological pluralism, and (d) attempts to objectivise religious claims (legitimisation) give way to the de-objectivisation of religious claims as subjective truths (relativisation).

We see the processes of deinstitutionalisation, detraditionalisation, and dedogmatisation at work especially in the weakening of institutional Christianity (which makes up the largest part of the tradition-bound religious field in the West) and in the rise of a new post-traditional religious field. Within Christianity, clergy and dogma have suffered a loss of authority. The most dramatic consequence of this is de-Christianisation, i.e. people de-converting from Christianity and leaving the Christian tradition for good. A less far-going outcome is de-ecclesialisation, i.e. people leaving the church, but staying Christians. Where de-Christianisation means deinstitutionalisation as well as detraditionalisation, de-ecclesialisation entails deinstitutionalisation without detraditionalisation. A third outcome is the growth of various dedogmatised forms of Christianity relying on individual experience and judgment rather than on dogmatic authority. Such dedogmatised or liberal Christianity can be found both inside and outside the churches and among both laity and clergy. It has its roots in the Enlightenment and encompasses expressions such as Peter Berger and Anton Zijderveld's doubt-praising and Kierkegaard-inspired Protestantism (2009) and the popular, individualist, and utilitarian faith mode identified by Christian Smith and Melissa Denton as "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism" (2005, 162-163). This mode is predominant among American Christian teenagers and possibly among adults as well (Smith and Denton 2005, 166).[56] Finally, an increasing

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future generations, that a tradition is formed and maintained. Broader traditions can contain smaller (or more local) traditions within them. For instance, the Christian tradition contains within it the Catholic tradition which again contains a tradition of Mary veneration.

[55] In the terminology of chapter 5, dedogmatisation leads to a situation where ontology assessments increasingly involve selective affirmation (e.g. belief in the Christian God, but not in his interventions in history as told in the Bible) and/or a transformation of the ontological status of the supernatural (e.g. God as an impersonal power; God as Love).

[56] Moralistic Therapeutic Deism is characterised by the following five propositions: "1. A god exists who created and ordered the world and watches over human life on earth. 2. God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions. 3. The central goal of life is to be

number of people who are church members and identify with the Christian tradition engage in religious bricolage. For instance, Bochinger, Engelbrecht, and Gebhardt (2009) have demonstrated the prevalence of New Age beliefs and practices among German church members.[57] It should be noted, however, that such instances of religious bricolage among church members are neither as radically new nor as unusual as some church spokespersons or late-modernity sociologists would have us think. It *looks* new because religious authorities in the Western world had more control over their herds between roughly 1850 and 1950 than ever before or since (McGuire 2008, 41). But in fact, the increased visibility today of bricolage also *within* traditionalised religion in the West is simply a function of the disappearance of this historical anomaly.

Christianity's loss of religious monopoly has been accompanied by the rise of new religious movements, the arrival of religious minorities through migration, and by the emergence of a post-traditional religious field. This field or substantial parts of it have been referred to variously as the "cultic milieu" (Campbell 1972), "new age" (Hanegraaff 1996; 1999b), "occulture" (Partridge 2004), "alternative spirituality" (Sutcliffe 2004), "perennism" (Possamai 1999; 2005b), and the "holistic milieu" (Heelas and Woodhead 2005). The religious activity of this field can be characterised as post-traditional because it is not confined to any single religious tradition (e.g. Christianity, Hinduism), but involves the free combination of elements from several traditions with each other and with alternative medicine and alternative science. Because this post-traditional religious field has emerged within a Christian, and especially within a Protestant, cultural context, it has been referred to as "post-Christian" (Houtman and Aupers 2007) and "post-Protestant" (Sutcliffe 2006). It has grown rapidly from almost nothing in the 1960s to a size where about 1-2% of the British population attended some activity of this sort during any given week in the early 2000s (Heelas and Woodhead 2005, 40).[58] Though the field includes institutions, most religious activity takes places outside these, in solitude or in small groups, or in the context of courses, fairs, and therapy. In other words, while the post-traditional religious field includes formally organised cultic institutions, most post-traditional religious activity takes the form of sub-institutional, individual religion.

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happy and to feel good about oneself. 4. God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when God is needed to resolve a problem. 5. Good people go to heaven when they die" (Smith and Denton 2005, 162-163).

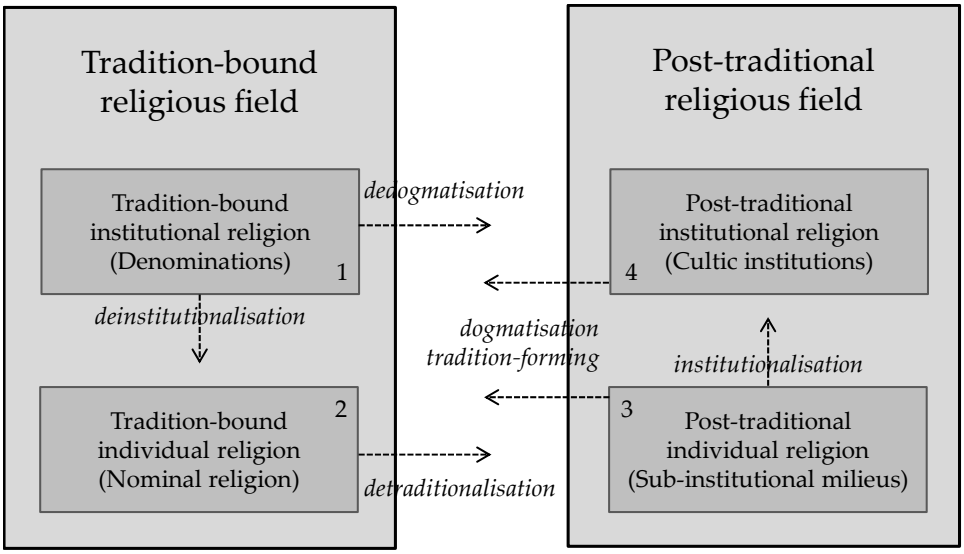
[57] Dobbelaere, Tomasi, and Voyé (2002) have shown the same for Europe in general, while McGuire (2008) and Parker (1996; 1998) stress the prevalence of religious bricolage among the church-going population in North America and Latin America respectively.

[58] Studies in the United States report similar or slightly higher activity figures (Heelas and Woodhead 2005, 59).

1.2.3. The Constitution of the Religious Field

In figure 1.2, I have modelled the constitution of the contemporary religious field in the West, including some main ideal-typical forms of religion and some of the vectors which currently influence these four religious forms.

Figure 1.2. The Religious Field



The religious field is divided into a tradition-bound and a post-traditional sub-field, both of which are in turn subdivided into an institutional and an individual component. Within the tradition-bound religious field we thus have both, on the one hand, tradition-bound, institutional religion which is organised into denominations,[59] and, on the other hand, the tradition-bound, sub-institutional religion of individuals who are not members of a religious organisation, but nevertheless identify with a particular tradition (i.e. the so-called nominally religious). Also the post-traditional religious field includes an institutional component, namely such cultic institutions as the Theosophical Society in which post-traditional religion is cast in a formal organisation, besides post-traditional individual religion (Hanegraaff's spiritualities) which is loosely organised in sub-institutional milieus.

None of the four religious ideal types are stable. Due to vectors within the religious field, they tend to develop in the directions indicated by the dotted arrows.[60] The arrow pointing downwards from box 1 towards box 2 indicates that even *within* denominations a trend of declining institutional authority, and hence deinstitutionalisation, can be observed. The nominally religious, in turn, are subject to another process, represented by

[59] Since my focus is on cultic religion, I consider all tradition-bound institutions to be denominations and draw no distinction between denominations, churches, and sects.

[60] Obviously other vectors and processes of change exist as well, but the ones shown are particularly pertinent.

the arrow pointing right from box 2. This is detraditionalisation in the form of increased involvement with religious practices and beliefs foreign to one's nominal tradition. As pointed out earlier, this process of detraditionalisation also effects tradition-bound institutional religion directly, namely when members of religious institutions engage in post-traditional religious bricolage. In those cases, the individual religious practice embedded in collective religion is no longer defined by tradition as it was in the cases analysed by Durkheim. For the sake of simplicity, however, this is not shown on the model. The rightwards arrow from box 1 indicates an effect of religious pluralisation, namely that tradition-bound religious organisations increasingly moderate their claim to possess the exclusive Truth and become more prone to interpret other religious traditions in a principally post-traditional way as compatible, combinable, or perhaps even as essentially the same as their own tradition.

The arrow pointing up from box 3 indicates that even post-traditional individual religion takes place within a social context and therefore includes an impulse towards institutionalisation. Post-traditional 'individual' religion that takes place outside cultic institutions is still embedded in milieus, networks, and circuits of friends, lectures, shops, and so on. I therefore qualify it as sub-institutional rather than non-institutional. Finally, the leftwards double-arrow from boxes 3 and 4 represents a tension within the entire post-traditional field. While post-traditional religion is post-traditional by virtue of being characterised by religious blending across traditions, authoritative blending patterns tend to be formed and codified. This means that institutionalisation within the post-traditional religious field inevitably entails the formation of 'trans-traditional traditions' (such as Theosophy and Wicca). These trans-traditional traditions have both an institutional component (the Theosophical Society; initiatory Wicca) and a sub-institutional component (the broader theosophical current; eclectic Witchcraft). The post-traditional religious field furthermore includes a potential for spawning new exclusive traditions, such as Scientology and the International Raëlian Movement. While these movements share many beliefs and practices with the cultic milieu out of which they arose, their degree of institutionalisation and traditionalisation, i.e. their "sectarian" rather than "cultic" character (cf. Wallis 1975), makes them part of the tradition-bound religious field. Such new religions have become denominations, in my expanded use of that term.

Most of the cases considered in part II fall under the rubric of post-traditional individual religion, but also my cases feel the vectors of tradition-forming and institutionalisation. The Tribunal of the Sidhe (cf. ch. 10), for instance, combines Tolkien material with Paganism and exo-theology, but the combination is patterned and the members consequently refer to the group's teachings as "our tradition". And though Tolkien religionists do not organise themselves in formal institutions, they do have looser social structures online and offline, structures that both hold Tolkien spirituality together as a milieu and serve as plausibility structures for belief and identity-maintenance.

In the following section, I take a closer look at the post-traditional religious field, treating especially the logic of religious combination and the sub-institutional organi-

sation which holds the field together. I take my point of departure in Colin Campbell's notion of the "cultic milieu" (1972) which I consider to be a synonym of my post-traditional religious field. I do so, because I consider Campbell's path-breaking article "The Cult, the Cultic Milieu and Secularization" (1972) to be the most insightful piece on the logic and the organisation of post-traditional religion even though it is nearly 40 years old.[61] Since I take the cultic milieu and the post-traditional religious field to be synonyms, I shall henceforth also use the terms *cultic religion* and *post-traditional religion* synonymously to refer to individual as well as institutional religion within the post-traditional religious field.

1.3. The Post-traditional Religious Field as a Cultic Milieu

Campbell was the first to suggest that because the organisational units within the post-traditional religious field (the "cults") tend to be "ephemeral and highly unstable", sociological research should focus less on individual cults and more on the cultic milieu which is "continually giving birth to new cults, absorbing the debris of the dead ones and creating new generations of cult-prone individuals" (1972, 122). According to Campbell, the cultic milieu

> includes all deviant belief-systems and their associated practices. […] In addition, it includes the collectivities, institutions, individuals and media of communication associated with these beliefs. Substantively it includes the worlds of the occult and the magical, of spiritualism and psychic phenomena, of mysticism and new thought, of alien intelligences and lost civilizations, of faith healing and nature cure. [… It] constitutes a unity by virtue of [1] a common consciousness of deviant status, [2] a receptive and syncretistic orientation and [3] an interpenetrative communication structure. In addition, the cultic milieu is united and identified by [4] the existence of an ideology of seekership and by seekership institutions (1972, 122, 135).

In what follows, I take a critical look at the four features which according to Campbell unite the post-traditional religious field into a cultic milieu. At least as far as the twenty-first century goes, I disagree with Campbell's first point (consciousness of deviancy), but I heartily agree with the second and the third (syncretistic orientation and interpenetrative communicative structure). I find Campbell's fourth characteristic of the cultic milieu (seekership) to hold much promise, but to be overstated.

I cannot adopt Campbell's notion that the religion of the cultic milieu is per definition characterised by "a common consciousness of deviant status" and his adjunct substantiation of cultic belief as "deviant science" and "deviant religion" (1972, 124-126).

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[61] With my appreciation of Campbell's work I am in good company. Also Hanegraaff (1996), Possamai (2007), and Partridge (2004) have developed their ideas about post-traditional religion in dialogue with Campbell's classic article.

Even if the cultic milieu was self-consciously deviant in the 1960s and 1970s, when traditionalised religion was stronger, post-traditional religion has now become too mainstream to be defined in terms of deviance, whether actual or perceived. Though some post-traditional religionists undoubtedly share or even nurture an identity as deviant – Satanists in Alabama could be one possible example – it seems to me that most of them either consider their practices to be quite normal or have never reflected on the issue. Furthermore, at least in Europe the cultural support for cultic religion seems to be at least as strong as that for tradition-bound religion. Here, it is not so much cultic religion in particular (compared to 'conventional religion'), but rather religion *as such* which is perceived as deviant *vis-à-vis* the secular mainstream.[62] Add to this that holistic therapies are finding their way into public health care and it becomes difficult to argue that the cultic milieu is defined by a consciousness of deviancy *vis-à-vis* science and biomedicine. To sum up, while cultic religion is obviously formally and substantially different from what most people consider conventional religion (by being sub-institutional and post-traditional), it goes too far to define it as essentially deviant.[63]

Campbell's three other unifying characteristics of the cultic milieu all have to do with form. The second and fourth characteristic can be treated together. Campbell is right to point out the "receptive and syncretistic orientation" of the cultic milieu. Elaborating on what this means, Roy Wallis has observed that in the cultic milieu there "prevails an ideology of "revelational indeterminacy", that is, a belief that the truth may be revealed in diverse ways and through diverse agents. No individual or collectivity possesses a monopoly of the truth" (1979, 45). This is not to say that there is no belief in religious truth. On the contrary, the cultic milieu is characterised by the widespread and

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[62] That Christians in post-Protestant Europe feel increasingly deviant has been indicated by David Thurfjell (2011). He has shown that young, liberal Swedish Christians are embarrassed about their religion because they experience a dissonance between their religious commitment and the surrounding secular culture with which they also identify. At the same time there are indications that the cultural support for cultic religion is growing. Already in the introduction I mentioned the massive supportive role that speculative fiction plays for cultic religion and I return to this issue later on. As Christopher Partridge has recently argued, "occulture is ordinary" (2013).

[63] Trying to avoid the connotations of deviancy associated with the terms cultic milieu and cultic religion, I opted for the alternative term "the esoteric milieu" in a previous publication (Davidsen 2012c, 187). I am no longer happy with that terminological choice, however, for two reasons. First, esotericism is itself a highly disputed concept with many diverging meanings (cf. Hanegraaff 2004; von Stuckrad 2005; Asprem 2009; Asprem and Granholm 2013a; Bergunder 2010). The term esoteric milieu is therefore just as much in need of a clarification as the cultic milieu. There is also a second and more important reason. It is misleading to equate the cultic milieu/post-traditional field and the esoteric milieu simply because not all the teachings of the cultic milieu can be classified as esoteric in the sense of belonging or relating to a particular cultural reservoir of western esotericism and/or by being about hidden or secret (but now revealed) knowledge. Much cultic religion, and much of what constitutes the spiritual Tolkien milieu, *is* esoteric (or occult), but not all – and esotericism can furthermore be found also outside the cultic milieu, within religious traditions. For the same reason, one cannot equate the contents of the post-traditional religious field with Partridge's occulture (2004, 68).

explicit belief that a single truth exists behind the plurality of indeterminate revelations. Campbell even suggests (and that is his fourth point) that "the cultic milieu is united and identified by the existence of an ideology of seekership" which translates into a "quest" for "enlightenment" and for (the underlying, universal) "truth" (1972, 124). Emphasising this trait, Adam Possamai has even suggested to refer to cultic religion as "perennism" (1999; 2005b, 48-50; 2007, 153).[64] Campbell argues that uncommitted seekers rather than the adherents of particular cults best express the fundamentally cultic religious orientation (1972, 127-128), i.e. what I refer to as individual post-traditional religion. This is so because the formation of a cult already tends towards re-institutionalisation, re-traditionalisation, and re-dogmatisation, i.e. initiates a move away from the post-traditional and sub-institutional character of the cultic milieu proper, towards the sect. Campbell has a point here, but I think that he over-emphasises the prevalence of seekership and religious questing.[65] I think that it is better so say that while *some* post-traditional religionists seek the one truth, the consequence of perennism *in general* is the promotion (always) and legitimisation (when made explicit) of a practice of *religious blending*. In other words, it is not so much the belief in a single truth, but the integration of all religions into one great reservoir of religious knowledge which characterises the post-traditional religious field.[66]

That the building blocks of post-traditional individual religion are not restricted to one specific religious tradition (or indeed to religious traditions in general) does not take away that individual religion (like all activity) happens within a social and cultural context. This context serves – *in lieu* of a Durkheimian Church – as plausibility structure for post-traditional individual religion and constrains and enables certain forms of individual religious practice. In other words, a number of basic assumptions within the cultic milieu cause post-traditional religion to play out according to certain patterns. Wallis has identified "epistemological individualism" as one such widely shared notion and defined it as the "belief that the individual is the ultimate locus for the determination of truth"

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[64] The term perennism draws on the esoteric notion that a *philosophia perennis*, an eternal philosophy of ancient wisdom, exists which has been transmitted through the ages and is now imperfectly reflected in the various religions. The belief in the existence of such a tradition is usually referred to as perennialism. Possamai's perennism refers to a mode of religiosity that counts on a common truth behind the various traditions, but which does not necessarily entail perennialism in the strict sense of the belief in a primordial revelation (2007, 153). For Possamai, perennism includes not only the New Age movement (in a narrow sense), but also Neo-Paganism, various hyper-real religions (like Jediism), and more. According to Possamai, these perennist movements share three characteristics: monism, a human potential ethic, and a quest for spiritual knowledge (2005b, 49; 2007, 153). I think that these three points are better thought of as characteristics of a major portion of the cultic milieu rather than as defining traits of post-traditional religion in general.

[65] This is because Campbell's notion of cultic religion is highly influenced by Ernst Troeltsch's (1931) concept of mysticism or mystical and spiritual religion (cf. also Campbell 1978).

[66] It seems to me that sociologists who refer to "DIY religion" (Gilmore 2012) or "integrative spirituality" (Bowman 2009) have in mind what I refer to as post-traditional individual religion.

(1979, 45).[67] On the one hand, epistemological individualism promotes a specifically *individualised* religious mode of plausibility construction and legitimisation in which subjective experience and intuition are considered strong and reliable sources of knowledge which can even trump those socially recognised 'objective' sources of religious authority (books, teachers, etc.) which we know from traditional forms of religion. This is not to say, however, that individuals are able to construct plausibility on their own. Subjective experiences can only be ascribed authority in practice because epistemological individualism is socially sanctioned within the cultic milieu. Even when individual religion is characterised by individuals combining freely and relying on their feelings to decide what is true 'for them', these freedoms are socially constructed and sanctioned. Also, while everybody pays lip service to epistemological individualism, not all subscribe to it in practice. Individual religionists do not always let their co-*bricoleurs* claim whatever they want, but find it worthwhile to try to persuade each other and to negotiate about the truth. That is to say, ideal and actual epistemological individualism is balanced with a need for social recognition that one's experiences and beliefs are true in general and not just 'true for me'. After all, even in individual religion some religious claims are more acceptable than others.[68] A further sign of the social dimension of individual religion is that religionists as a rule feel a need to balance their individual religious pursuits with a sense of belonging to at least what Michel Maffesoli has called "emotional communities" or "neo-tribes" (1996) within the broader confines of the post-traditional religious field. In the twenty-first century, the Internet plays a pivotal role for the maintenance of such sub-communities (Castells 2001).

Campbell emphasises the social dimension of the post-traditional religious field when he refers to it as a *milieu*. He thereby stresses that the field is more than a simple collection of atomised individuals, but also that the field is not coherent enough to constitute a movement.[69] Usually, the term movement refers to a group of people sharing an aim and working towards its realisation, whether this aim is political (as in the case of social or political movements) or salvific (in the case of religious movements). Clearly, the cultic milieu *in toto* is not a movement in this sense. Furthermore, scholars have objected to the designation of New Age and Neo-Paganism, two large constituents of the

[67] For Wallis, epistemological individualism is a characteristic of the cult which "has no clear locus of final authority beyond the individual member" and which therefore, and contrary to the sect, "lacks any source of legitimate attributions of heresy" (1984, 14). Partridge (2007) has pointed out that epistemological individualism is characteristic for "New Age thought" and is therefore found in the cultic milieu also outside the individual cults. I take it therefore to permeate the post-traditional religious field in general.

[68] Especially in chapters 11 and 16, I give some examples of how Tolkien religionists negotiate which beliefs can be deemed legitimate and which not.

[69] Also, since the cultural reservoir which individual religionists can draw on for their religious bricolage is without boundaries, it makes no sense to speak of it as a tradition.

cultic milieu, as movements.[70] Michael York (1995, 325-327) has suggested describing the cultic milieu in terms of what Luther Gerlach and Virginia Hine call a "segmented polycephalous integrated network" or "SPIN" (Hine 1977). Even better, the cultic milieu can be seen as a meta-SPIN that includes SPINs of a lower order within it. Gerlach and Hine developed the notion of the SPIN to describe the organisation of social *movements*, and York's proposal to use it to describe the cultic *milieu* has led to a heated debate over whether the SPIN model can be transferred to non-movements.[71] In recent years, studies of the social organisation of the cultic milieu have tended to bracket York's terminology and try instead to develop Campbell's concept of the cultic milieu (e.g. Possamai 2007), to draw on Manuel Castells' notion of "networks" and the "network society" (e.g. Corrywright 2003; 2007), or to combine the two (e.g. Sutcliffe 2004). Like Possamai, I consider Campbell's milieu concept to be the most adequate starting point. Furthermore, I suggest to elevate Campbell's third unifying trait of the cultic milieu to *the* defining characteristic of a milieu in general and hence propose to define a *milieu* as 'a cluster of organisations and individuals together with their beliefs and practices which constitutes a loose unity by virtue of real and perceived commonalities and *an interpenetrative communication structure*'.[72]

Like any milieu, the post-traditional religious field (or the cultic milieu) can include sub-milieus. I prefer this terminology to Sutcliffe's reference to "networks" within the alternative spirituality milieu because the sub-milieus have the same milieu characteristics as the cultic milieu *in toto* rather than particular network characteristics. The spiritual Tolkien milieu which makes up the subject matter of this thesis constitutes a sub-milieu within the cultic milieu. On the one hand, it constitutes a *milieu of its own* because its individuals and groups share certain assumptions and practices, especially the notion that Tolkien's works constitute legitimate authoritative texts which can be used as sources for religious blending, and because individuals and groups, especially in the age of the Internet, are held together by an interpenetrative communication structure that allows individuals to exchange ideas and groups to share members. On the other hand, the spiritual Tolkien milieu constitutes a *sub-milieu within the cultic milieu* because Tolkien spirituality is a form of post-traditional individual religion, because Tolkien religionists typically engage in other forms of cultic religion besides Tolkien religion, and,

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[70] See for instance Sutcliffe (2003, 3-5) who, against Heelas' notion of the "New Age movement" (1996a), prefers to speak of New Age as a "domain of popular religious discourse and practice" with various "currents" within a broader field of "alternative spirituality".

[71] Sutcliffe (2003, 199) is among those who hold that it cannot; Chryssides (2007, 18-19) is among those who find that it can.

[72] I prefer the notion of milieu to Castells' notion of network because the milieu concept is broader. A milieu includes not only abstract structures, but also the cultural content which is shared and the people who share it. Consider, by contrast, Castells' abstract definition of networks as "open structures, able to expand without limits, integrating new nodes as long as they are able to communicate within the network, namely as long as they share the same communication codes" (1996, 470).

most importantly, because the distinctive beliefs and practices of Tolkien spirituality have emerged through the blending of elements from Tolkien's narratives with existing rituals and beliefs from the wider cultic milieu.[73]

1.4. Research on Post-traditional Individual Religion

As the previous section made apparent, my study of Tolkien-based religion is indebted to previous research on post-traditional individual religion. To make explicit on whose shoulders I stand, let me therefore in this section sketch the *Stand der Forschung* on individual religion. It is useful to distinguish heuristically between three main approaches to the qualitative study of individual religion, which I refer to as the cataloguing, the normative, and the social-scientific approach respectively.[74]

1.4.1. The Cataloguing Approach

Belonging to the first category, historians of religion have catalogued the ideas (e.g. Hanegraaff 1996) and legitimisation strategies (e.g. Hammer 2004) of post-traditional religion. This has resulted in very strong overviews, but since these studies build exclusively on written sources rather than on fieldwork, their subject matter has strictly speaking been the individual religion of cultic virtuosi rather than post-traditional individual religion as such. This is not, however, to say that these overviews are unimportant for

[73] In chapters and 4 and 5, I discuss in greater detail how Tolkien religion is indebted to cultic religion.

[74] Readers interested in such *quantitative* questions as the numerical size of the cultic milieu, its demographic composition, the personality types attracted by it, and the relation between people's conceptions of 'religion' and 'spirituality' are referred to Heelas and Woodhead (2005), Frisk (2007), Farias and Granqvist (2007), Berghuijs, Pieper, and Bakker (2013), and Houtman and Mascini (2002). Also within the study of tradition-bound religion, scholars are increasingly focusing on 'unofficial' and 'everyday' religion, i.e. the individual religious aspect of institutional religion (cf. Durkheim), which turns out to be equally subject to the vectors of deinstitutionalisation, detraditionalisation, and dedogmatisation. Pioneering studies and programmatic texts on individual religion include Ammerman (1997a; 1997b; 2003; 2007; 2013), Primiano (1995), McGuire (2003; 2008), Orsi (2003; 2005), Rubow (2000), Day (2011), Bender et. al. (2013), Bochinger, Engelbrecht, and Gebhardt (2009), Woodhead (2013), and Smith and Denton (2005). Most of these focus on Christianity, but research is also emerging on everyday lived Islam, e.g. Jeldtoft (2011), Dessing, Jeldtoft, Nielsen, and Woodhead (2013). Linda Woodhead (2009) considers these studies on the lived religion of ordinary individuals to belong to an "emerging paradigm" in the sociology of religion. Defining for the emerging paradigm is the use of both qualitative and quantitative methods to study individuals in the social context of the "global civil society" and hence the search for a third way between the "old" paradigm (which studies religion on the national-societal level and focuses on socio-historical processes such as secularisation) and the "new" paradigm (which ultimately seeks to unveil the universal laws that supposedly govern individual religious behaviour). On the old and new paradigms, see Warner (1993). I think that it is not only changes within traditionalised religion (which has always included a component of individual religion), but the emergence and cultural visibility of post-traditional individual religion which has caused the practices and experiences of individuals *within* traditions to attract more attention from researchers.

the study of post-traditional individual religion proper. Indeed the opposite is true because many of the ideas of cultic intellectuals appear in the religious bricolage of average cultic religionists in simplified and recombined forms.[75]

Christopher Partridge is perhaps the only scholar who has been bold enough to attempt to chart the ideas, practices, and institutions of the cultic milieu (or the "occultic milieu" as he prefers to call it) *in toto*, including the ideas and practices of post-traditional individual religion. This is obviously a huge task, and Partridge needed two volumes to present all his findings (2004; 2005). His overview represents a very helpful addition to Hanegraaff's, especially because Partridge makes the important point that popular culture, including film, literature, and music, often draws on cultic religion and in turn helps disseminate occultural ideas to the populace (2004, chs. 6-7). Even though Partridge does not develop his rich empirical material into a substantial theory of individual religion, his work has deservedly become an important reference point in the emerging study of popular occulture.[76]

1.4.2. The Normative Approach

A second approach to post-traditional individual religion is normative and poses the question whether individualised religion promotes "human flourishing" or not (Heelas 2008, 2). The interlocutors of this debate tend to support one of two main positions. One group advances an ideological critique of so-called New Age religion which is held to lack moral quality, especially due to its perceived "narcissistic" (Lasch 1987), "capitalist" (Lau 2000), "consumerist" (Ramstedt 2007b) and/or "commoditised" (Carrette and King 2005) character. New Age is seen as the sacralisation of liberalist-capitalist values according to these critics, who draw their ideological ammunition from Christian communitarians (e.g. Taylor 1991; MacIntyre 1981) and neo-Marxists (e.g. Lasch 1980). Interestingly, another group comprised of a coalition of tradition-weary "post-Christian" theologians (Lynch 2007, 9) and self-identified "libertarian humanist[s]" (Heelas 2008, 2) are prepared to defend *a part* of the individual religious field as morally sound by making a distinction between two forms of individual religion, corresponding to the two kinds of individualism discussed in section 1.1 above. According to Heelas, we can distinguish between two types of individual religion which are either "utilitarian" or "expressive" in character (1996a, 156), which cater to either "individuated subjectivism" or "relational subjectivism" (Heelas and Woodhead 2005, 96), and which represent either a mere "capi-

[75] I return to this point in section 4.1.3 below.

[76] In truth, Hanegraaff and Partridge are more than synchronic cataloguers, for they also engage in the diachronic debate on religious change. We have already seen Hanegraaff make a strong case for the autonomisation of spiritualities from religions. In a discussion in chapter 5 of the 'metaphorical turn thesis', i.e. the notion that contemporary religion is turning less literal, I will introduce Hanegraaff's argument that magic (and with it much of cultic religion in general) has become "disenchanted" (2003) and pitch it against Partridge's observation that the rise of spirituality entails a "re-enchantment" of the world (2004).

talist-driven gratification of desire" or a "person-centred, expressivistic, humanistic, universalistic spirituality" (Heelas 2008, 7).[77] Heelas has referred to the expressivist form as "Self-spirituality" (1996a). Lynch and Heelas agree that the utilitarian (or "materialist") individualism is as bad and unfree as traditionalism, while expressive (or "post-materialist") individualism, including expressive spirituality, is liberating.[78]

While the distinction between instrumental and expressive religious pursuits is not in itself problematic, the moral condemnation of utilitarian popular religion (and of unreflective traditional religion) has had the unlucky consequence of bringing the empirical, neutral study of individual religion out of balance. Especially Heelas' influential treatment of New Age as expressive "Self-spirituality" (1996a) has effectively pushed this form of religion to the front of scholarly attention at the expense of other types of post-traditional religion (though Heelas says that this was never his intention; 2008, 41).[79] "Self-spirituality" refers to a particular kind of individual religion which is intent on "celebrating" (Heelas 1996a) or even "sacralizing" (Heelas 1992) the self. In other words, it is about the attainment of powerful experiences and increased knowledge (often referred to as "gnosis") and about acknowledging and nurturing one's divine self or inner God/Goddess (Heelas 1996a, 19-20), or at least about furthering one's individuation or self-actualisation.[80] Rather than arguing for the moral superiority of self-spirituality I

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[77] Also Neo-Pagans (e.g. York 2001; Harrington 2007) participate in the bashing of allegedly utilitarian 'New Age' religion and insist that Neo-Paganism is qualitatively different.

[78] Lynch and Heelas disagree somewhat, however, on the liberating potential of spirituality within religious traditions. Heelas' appreciation of the reflectivity and rationality of "spiritualities within religious traditions of transcendent theism" (2008, 54-55) is tempered by his insistence that they still sacralise "life-as" rather than "subjective-life" values and are therefore not as potent in furthering human flourishing as "inner-life spiritualities". Lynch, by contrast, finds the same "progressive spirituality", i.e. spirituality which is politically modern, liberal, and anti-patriarchal and whose theology is characterised by a "pan(en)theist view of the divine" (2007, 10-11), outside and *within* Christianity and other religious traditions.

[79] It is striking, for instance, that the majority of the contributions to Kemp and Lewis' *Handbook of New Age* (2007) adopt a basic understanding of New Age as self-spirituality from Heelas (1996a) and therefore ignore contemporary individual religion which is *not* self-sacralising. Notable exceptions include the Swedish sociologist of religion Lars Ahlin (2004, 145-146; 2005, ch. 6-8, esp. 224, 231) and the Dutch scholar of religion Frans Jespers (2010) who have both argued that 'New Age' actually consists of two quite different religious modes, one of which is self-sacralising and the other not. Jespers labels these two modes New Age proper and folk religion. New age proper refers to the expressively individualistic religion that is Heelas' focus. This form of religion aims at spiritual transformation and attracts middle class individuals who also in other spheres of life strive to develop themselves through training and education. Folk religion, by contrast, is a lower class phenomenon characterised by the belief that one's life is largely controlled by powers or processes *outside of the self*. Where New Agers believe that they can create their own future, a key aspect of folk religion it to use divination to obtain knowledge of an already predestined future.

[80] In his later work (esp. 2008), Heelas no longer speaks of "Self-spirituality", but of "new age spiritualities of life", "well-being spirituality", or "inner-life spiritualities". This shift in terminology does not reflect an expansion of the scope of his research, however. Heelas is still after the kind of spirituality which is about working hard to develop oneself as an authentic human being.

suggest a neutral distinction between (a) individual religion in general which is *self-governed* and (b) self religion in particular which is both self-governed and *self-sacralising* in the sense of making the self the prime religious object. Certainly, *some* individual religion is self-sacralising, also within the spiritual Tolkien milieu,[81] but the expressiveness and self-directedness of self religion should not be over-studied at the expense of those characteristics which are fundamental to individual religion in general.[82]

1.4.3. The Social-Scientific Approach

Besides the cataloguing and normative approaches there exists also a social-scientific one which studies, analyses, and theorises about actual religious practice and its social context. The focus here is on blending patterns, plausibility construction, and the internal variance of post-traditional individual religion. In other words, the sociologists, anthropologists, and folklorists who take this approach make it their task to investigate the patterns and processes within the post-traditional individual religious field. In doing so, anthropologists and folklorists tend to study post-traditional individual religion in particular settings or locales. This sometimes results in descriptive detail without much theory, but certainly not always. Many studies are not only perceptive and insightful, but also provide analyses that can inform a more general theory of post-traditional individual religion (e.g. Luhrmann 1989; Magliocco 2004; Bowman 2004; Prince and Riches 2000).

Also a number of sociologists are active in the study of post-traditional individual religion. Besides Campbell's ground-breaking work, which has already been mentioned, important sociological contributions to the study of post-traditional religion have recently been made by for example Matthew Wood (2007) and Adam Possamai (2005a; 2005b; 2007; 2012). For this thesis, Possamai's work is particularly relevant, so let me point out three aspects of his position that inform my own approach. First, Possamai strongly emphasises that there is more to individual religion than self religion. Indeed, Possamai has argued that we should distinguish between no less than three types of cults within the cultic milieu, adopting Bruce Campbell's (1978) distinction between "illumination cults" (corresponding to expressive self religion) and "instrumental cults" (with materia-

[81] As we shall see in part II, experience and gnosis play an important role for Tolkien religionists, and especially the self-identified Elves are clearly engaged in self-sacralising expressive religion.

[82] Ulrike Popp-Baier has argued that the individualisation of religion leads to "self-controlled religiosity" which she defines as "a combination of (or oscillation between) critique, consumption, accommodation and sometimes even commitment with regard to religion" (2010, 59). My notion of self-governed individual religion is narrower than Popp-Baier's concept of self-controlled religiosity, however, the latter being closer to Taylor's idea that all contemporary engagement in religion, both traditional and post-traditional, is the result of choices made by subjectivised individuals. See Matthew Wood (2007; 2009; 2010) for a spirited attack on Heelas and others for over-emphasising the authority of the self in contemporary spirituality.

list goals), and adding the "entertainment cult" (2007, 160-161).[83] Possamai's subsequently turns the typology of cults into a typology of religious "teleologies", arguing that different individuals can engage in the same cultic activity with the aim of obtaining instrumental benefits, illumination, or entertainment – or a combination of the three (2007, 160-161).[84] Second, Possamai suggests that we analyse individual religious activity in terms of "religious consumption" (2002; 2003a; 2005a). Contrary to the moral critics discussed above, Possamai does not (primarily) use the term consumption to refer to the economic dimension of individual religion (commodification), nor does he mean to say that individual religion is passively consumed rather than actively produced. Consumption is taken to be an active, conscious, and (at least potentially) expressive activity.[85] Possamai is here in line with Campbell who has argued that the "Romantic ethic" of seeking the authentic has given rise to the contemporary "spirit of consumerism" and to a restless "addiction to novelty" (1987). Campbell and Possamai effectively unmask those contemporary expressive religionists (and with them Heelas) who claim to find the authentic *inside* themselves, and demonstrate that they actually (like the old Romantics) find it *outside* themselves, especially in history, in indigenous cultures, and in popular culture.[86] This leads easily to the third strong point in Possamai's work, namely his insistence that the role of popular fiction in the construction and maintenance of post-traditional individual religion has been both underestimated and undertheorised. Possamai calls for more research on the role of popular fiction as a source of inspiration and plausibility within the cultic milieu and on the more radical phenomenon of "hyper-real religions" that base themselves largely on fiction (2005a; 2012).

The present thesis seeks to answer Possamai's call and is thoroughly indebted to the questions raised by him. Without Possamai's work (esp. 2003a; 2005a) to build on and wrestle with, my own work would have been much weaker. I want to emphasise this so that my attempt to push further still, to refine some of Possamai's ideas, and to rebaptise his core concept of hyper-real religion, should not be mistaken for a critique of his project. Both my debt to Possamai and my disagreements with him will be apparent throughout the thesis, but especially so in the following chapter in which I develop my own notion of fiction-based religion through a critical dialogue with Possamai's work.

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[83] Possamai borrows this term from Paul Gillen (1987) who coined it in a study of Spiritualism.

[84] There is a tension in Possamai's writing, though, between (a) his notion that perennism is always characterised by a "human potential ethic" (2007, 153; cf. footnote 64 above) and (b) the introduction of instrumentalist and entertainment-directed forms of religiosity which do not have self-development as a goal.

[85] Heelas' inclusion of Possamai among the bad guys (such as Carrette and King 2005) who reduce New Age to capitalistic and unreflective consumption (Heelas 2008, 83; 2009, 764) is therefore unjustified.

[86] See Possamai (2003a, 33-34; 2005a, 52-56) on the religious consumption of history and indigenous cultures. Possamai (2005a, esp. chs. 2-6) treats the religious consumption of popular culture in general. On the religious consumption of history, see also Bowman (1993; 1994). Globalisation and the rise of the Internet have increased the availability of many of the new sources for individual religious blending.

Chapter 2. Fiction-based Religion

Having introduced the concept of post-traditional religion in the previous chapter, this chapter zooms in on the category of fiction-based religion which I take to be a subtype of post-traditional religion. The discussion is framed largely as a dialogue with the work of Adam Possamai, and one of the aims of this chapter is to evaluate and develop his ideas. The chapter is divided into three sections.

In the first and main section, I evaluate the adequacy of Possamai's concept 'hyper-real religion'. With reference to the French philosopher Jean Baudrillard (1994), Possamai has defined hyper-real religion as a "simulacrum of a religion created out of popular culture that provides inspiration for believers/consumers at a metaphorical level" (2003a, 37; 2005a, 79; 2009, 85). I shall argue that following Baudrillard's logic *all* religions are fundamentally hyper-real. It is therefore confusing to refer to religions based on popular fiction as 'hyper-real religions'. Granting that Possamai has identified a particular type of post-traditional religiosity, I offer 'fiction-based religion' as a more precise concept. I explain how this concept is underpinned by a notion of fictionality taken from possible worlds theory. As the following step, I conceptualise the notion of fiction-based religion by contrasting it, on the one hand, to conventional religion whose authoritative texts claim to be history (i.e. 'history'-based religion), and, on the other hand, to fandom which engages with the fan text in a playful rather than a religious way.

The second section focuses on the various ways in which fiction and religion can interact. The point of departure is Possamai's distinction between two types and generations of hyper-real religions that use popular culture either as a *secondary* source of inspiration (e.g. Scientology) or as a *primary* source of inspiration (e.g. Jediism). I develop this distinction into a typology of three forms (or degrees) of fiction-based religion, dividing fiction-based religion in the broad sense into fiction-inspired religion, fiction-integrating religion, and fiction-based religion in a narrow sense. Examples of all three types are offered, both from the spiritual Tolkien milieu and from the broader field of fiction-based religions. I also contrast fiction-based religion *sensu lato*, which is the religious use of somebody else's fiction, with the phenomenon of authors writing fiction with a deliberate religious-didactic aim.

The third section evaluates Possamai's conclusion that the first generation of hyper-real religions originated in the 1950s and that a second generation emerged with the Internet in the 1990s. Possamai is right to point out that something new happened in or around these decades, namely the emergence of fiction-integrating and fiction-based religion respectively. Taking the Theosophical Society as an example, I demonstrate, however, that the first fiction-inspired religions are much older. Concretely, I show how Helena Blavatsky was inspired by Edward Bulwer-Lytton's fiction, quoted his charac-

ters, and related key concepts from his novels to her own ideas in *Isis Unveiled* (1877) and in *The Secret Doctrine* (1888). Besides showing that the phenomenon of fiction-inspired religions go at least 140 years back, the discussion of theosophy as a fiction-inspired religion has the additional aim of de-mystifying and de-vulgarising the religious use of fiction in general. If it can be demonstrated that not only marginal groups such as self-identified Elves draw on fiction, but that the extremely influential core treatises of the Theosophical Society did so as well, then scholars of religion will be impelled to consider inspiration from fiction to be a significant dimension of the dynamics of belief in emerging religions in general.

2.1. 'Hyper-real' or 'Fiction-based' as Qualifiers for Religion Based on Popular Culture

As stated above, Possamai has defined a hyper-real religion as a "simulacrum of a religion created out of popular culture that provides inspiration for believers/consumers at a metaphorical level" (2003a, 37). I criticised an aspect of this definition in an earlier publication (Davidsen 2012a, 201-202) by calling into question Possamai's insistence that the inspiration from popular culture is always metaphorical. It is easy to demonstrate that hyper-real religions often involve belief in entities that are lifted out of the fictional context and ascribed metaphysical reality. Many Tolkien religionists, for example, believe (seriously and ontologically) to possess Elven souls or are convinced that Middle-earth exists on another plane. Also in Jediism, Possamai's favourite case, people really believe that the Force exists, even if they do not consider *Star Wars* to be factual history.[87] Possamai has modified his definition to take the critique into account (2012, 19-20). He now defines a hyper-real religion as "a simulacrum of a religion created out of, or in symbiosis with, commodified popular culture which provides inspiration at a metaphorical level *and/or is a source of beliefs for everyday life*" (Possamai 2012, 20; emphasis added). I now want to take our exchange one step further by problematising the very term 'hyper-real religion'. To do so, we must revisit Baudrillard's concept of hyper-reality.

2.1.1. Jean Baudrillard on the Hyper-Reality of Religion in General

Baudrillard is famous for pointing out how, in postmodern society, media no longer simply transmit information but actively construct knowledge and establish social norms, and how this media-constructed 'reality' often comes to be perceived as reality itself. This observation, and the social critique that it implies, is only the second step of his analysis, however. Preceding and enabling this move, Baudrillard sketches a theory of signs which is social constructionist in nature. He never applied this sign theory to

[87] Different types of non-literal interpretations of texts (and belief statements) will be treated in chapter 5.

contemporary religion (as Possamai does), but in the opening passage of *Simulacra and Simulation* he develops the key semiotic concepts of simulacrum, simulation, and hyper-reality in the context of a discussion of Christian theology (1994, 1-7).

As a semiotician, Baudrillard is interested in the relationship between signs and their assumed and actual objects, and he makes a distinction between two types of signs based on differences in referentiality. Signs that refer to a real object in the actual world are called *representations*, and signs that have no object, or, more precisely, signs whose object is an evidently constructed or 'made-up' idea without real substance, are referred to as *simulacra*.[88] The word 'cow' and a picture of a four-legged milk-producing bovine, for instance, refer to real cows and are therefore representations. A plastic figurine of Mickey Mouse, on the other hand, does not refer to a real being, but to a fictional character, and is therefore a mere simulacrum. Whereas representations refer to real objects (either by similarity or by convention), simulacra have "no relation to any reality whatsoever" (Baudrillard 1994, 6). A semiotic quality of 'realness' can be *ascribed* to simulacra, however, and simulacra can therefore come to be *perceived* as real. Baudrillard calls this simulacric reality the "hyperreal" (1994, 1-2), and refers to the action through which it is constructed and maintained as "simulation" (1994, 1, 3).[89] Following Baudrillard's logic, the celebration of national holidays can be seen as a form of simulation that reinforces the ascribed hyper-reality of the nation, itself a rather intangible or simulacric entity. Nations are not the best example of simulacra, however, for the people who make up a nation do tend to share some very real things, including practices, memories, and perhaps genes. Baudrillard instead offers the Christian God as his prime example of a simulacrum which has been elevated to hyper-real status. At the same time, he discusses how the hyper-reality of God has been called into question in the modern era.

Until the Protestant Reformation, Baudrillard tells us, Christians unproblematically considered both the concept 'God' and physical images of God to be viable signs for a real God-object. With the Reformation something changed, however, for suddenly images of God were considered so problematic that they needed to be destroyed. Baudrillard wonders what animated the iconoclasm and suggests that it had less to do with the Biblical prohibition against idol worshipping and more with a dawning suspicion that God himself was a simulacrum (1994, 4). As he puts it, the iconoclasts destroyed the

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[88] In his essay "Über Sinn und Bedeutung", Gottlob Frege remarks that it would be desirable to have a term for signs which have only meaning (*Sinn*), but no reference (*Bedeutung*) (1892, 33n6). With the term simulacrum, Baudrillard offers us such a term, and a better one than Frege's suggestion 'image' (*Bild*).

[89] In Martin Geoffroy's reading, hyper-reality is for Baudrillard that which "appears to be more real than reality itself" (Geoffroy 2012, 24). As far as I can see, that pushes Baudrillard too far. Though the term hyper-real seems to carry a connotation of 'super-reality', Baudrillard's main point is that the hyper-real is perceived as *real* at all despite being only a simulacrum, not that the hyper-real is perceived as *more* real than reality itself. A simulacrum, such as God or Mickey Mouse, is not more real than something else. The phrase 'more real than reality itself' makes sense in the context of distorted and imperfect *representations* (e.g. media representations) which come to pass for the reality they represent.

icons because they feared "the destructive, annihilating truth that they allowed to appear – that deep down God never existed, that only the simulacrum ever existed, even that God himself was never anything but his own simulacrum" (1994, 4). But why was this suddenly necessary? Baudrillard assumes that a significant change had taken place in religious epistemology. As he says: "If [the iconoclasts] could have believed that these images only obfuscated or masked the Platonic Idea of God, there would have been no reason to destroy them" (Baudrillard 1994, 4-5). Baudrillard thus believes that religion before the Reformation counted on a Platonic higher reality behind empirical reality, but that the self-evidence of such a higher reality had now become challenged. He points out that this challenge was met by two different religious reactions. One was the iconoclastic destruction of the images as an attempt to reinvigorate the higher reality of God. The other reaction was continued iconolatry, but now combined with the realisation that there was no higher reality to which these images could refer. Baudrillard speculates that continued (but self-conscious and ironic) iconolatry was actually the most modern reaction since it was compatible with the loss of ontology of the God concept: if God does not exist, there is nothing gained from worshipping himself rather than his image. He is not sure whether the icon worshippers were conscious that the God images "no longer represented anything" and that religion was, in reality, "purely a game" or a social construction, but he thinks that the Jesuits were among those who were (1994, 5).[90]

We can distinguish between an epistemological and an ontological level of Baudrillard's argument. On the *epistemological* level, Baudrillard points to the modern period as one of increased doubt within Christianity itself concerning its ontological grounding. This epistemological change brought Christian theologians to realise an *ontological* constant, a "truth" (Baudrillard 1994, 4), namely the simulacric nature of the God concept as such. In other words, God is a simulacrum no matter whether the worshipper considers him to be a simulacrum or not, by the very virtue of being a concept claimed to refer to an objective reality, but being in fact void of reference to any reality whatsoever. This has important implications, for if God is a simulacrum, then all other notions referring to supernatural agents, worlds, or processes are also simulacra and all religions are by definition systems of simulacra. As Baudrillard writes,

> [W]hat if God himself can be simulated, that is to say can be reduced to the signs that constitute faith? Then the whole system [Christianity or "Western faith"] becomes weightless, it is no longer itself anything but a gigantic simulacrum – not unreal, but a simulacrum, that is to say never exchanged for the real, but exchanged for itself, in an uninterrupted circuit within reference or circumference (1994, 6).

[90] Baudrillard's account of these changes in Christian theology is quite speculative and is not backed up with any references to church history or dogmatics. For our purposes, however, it does not matter whether the historical sketch is accurate. What counts are the general semiotic points that Baudrillard distils from the discussion.

To sum up, Baudrillard makes a distinction between the objective reference of religious concepts (they have none) and the reference authority which religionists ascribe to them. In themselves, religious concepts are simulacra, devoid of any reference whatsoever. But when the God sign (as concept or as image) or indeed any other religious simulacrum is treated as a representation with a real object, and as long as this simulation (or reality-maintenance) goes on, then the religious simulacrum can be said to have achieved an ascribed status as real. Because this reality is only ascribed, and hence 'hyper' compared to its lack of objective reference, Baudrillard refers to it as *hyper-real*. It thus follows logically from this argument that all living religions are hyper-real. Religions that are no longer practised – or simulated in Baudrillard's terms – lose this ascribed status of hyper-reality.[91]

The question now is whether Possamai's reference to a particular *class* of religions as hyper-real religions can be reconciled with Baudrillard's position that *all* religions are hyper-real. I think that there are two reasons for not following Possamai. To begin with, it is simply too confusing to dub a category of religions 'hyper-real' when religion *per se*, according to Baudrillard's definition, must be hyper-real and thus has already defined this term. Secondly, the actual religions singled out by Possamai (e.g. Jediism, the Church of All Worlds) are not more hyper-real than other religions. In fact, the opposite is the case. Possamai himself brings the hyper-reality of his so-called hyper-real religions into doubt when he says that the popular cultural narratives on which they are based typically provide inspiration on a metaphorical level only. How can a religious notion (say, the Force) be deemed hyper-real when its reference is explicitly called into question by considering it only a metaphor? If the religions that Possamai refers to are really characterised by a metaphorical interpretation of their texts (and they often are, though not always), and if that would make them categorically different from other kinds of

[91] Tanya Luhrmann (2012) develops an argument similar to Baudrillard's. For Luhrmann, "hyperreality" is not a property of a certain type of signs, but refers to an "epistemic stance" in which religious claims are approached in societies which have experienced secularisation and can therefore no longer take them to be self-evidently real in the same way as material reality. That religious notions are approached as hyper-real means that they are considered 'realer than real', but that their very realness is at the same time doubted. In this way the religious notions in question are both taken to be more real and less real than ordinary reality. Luhrmann writes: "There is something different between the way that these [American evangelicals] experience the reality of their God and the way the never-secular societies experience theirs. God is certainly real to the American evangelicals, but his realness is explicitly and self-consciously paradoxical. A God like the God at the Vineyard is hyperreal, realer than real, so real that it is impossible not to understand that you may be fooling yourself, so real that you are left suspended between what is real and what is your imagination. A believer is able at once to affirm the reality of the supernatural and to acknowledge that this reality is open to doubt" (2012, 383). For Luhrmann, hyperreality is thus a function of modernisation and secularisation and affects all kinds of religion, not only those which draw on fiction. I agree with Luhrmann that hyper-reality is a useful concept to highlight characteristics in the epistemic dynamics of (contemporary) religion in general. But I am not convinced that a distinction between premodern societies, in which everyone simply takes the supernatural to be real, and modern societies, in which belief is necessarily hyperreal and self-consciously paradoxical, must be drawn as forcefully as Luhrmann does.

religion (although it would not), then it would be more intuitive to refer to them as 'hypo-real' religions.[92]

The situation is thus that Possamai has identified a real class of religions, but that the concept which he uses to refer to them needs to be replaced. One could consider taking advantage of Possamai's definition of hyper-real religions as religions that are "created out of […] commodified popular culture" and introduce the alternative term 'popular culture-based religion'. Not only would that be a mouth full, but the term popular culture is also not precise enough. What Possamai really has in mind is religion based on popular *fiction* (such as comics, novels, films, and games), so one can substitute his term hyper-real religion with my term *fiction-based religion* while remaining loyal to his ideas. Having identified the problems with the term hyper-real religion, let me now explain why I hold fiction-based religion to be analytically superior.

2.1.2. Conceptualising Fiction-based Religion against 'History'-based Religion

There are three elements in the concept of fiction-based religion that need some clarification: 'fiction', 'religion', and 'based'. In section 2.2 below, I consider in detail what it means for religion to be based on fiction, i.e. for religion to use fictional narratives as authoritative texts. I develop a distinction between fiction-based religion *sensu stricto* and religions that are merely inspired by fiction or that integrate a selection of elements from fiction into a non-fictional frame. In this sub-section and the next, I focus on the key concepts fiction and religion, conceptualising fiction-based religion against conventional (or 'history'-based) religion and against fandom/play.

As mentioned in the general introduction, I define fiction as *any literary narrative which is not intended by its author to refer to events which have taken place in the actual world prior to being entextualised*. In Paul Ricoeur's terminology, it is fiction's lack of reference ambition that makes it different from the other narrative meta-genre of *history* which *does* claim to refer to the actual world (1983, 176). More precisely, Ricoeur points out that fiction and history refer in different ways. Fiction refers to a world which it creates itself by means of "productive reference" (Ricoeur 1983, 181). History refers to the actual world, but in another way than references made to present states of affairs. In contrast to direct and descriptive references to the present, Ricoeur labels the narrativised references mode of history "indirect reference" (1983, 182).

Let me stress that Ricoeur's distinction between fiction and history hinges on the author's intention to refer or not to refer to the actual world, such as this intention can be deduced from the text. The difference does not hinge on any actual correspondence or

[92] Most of Possamai's references to Baudrillard can be found in Possamai (2005a). Readers are invited to compare my account of hyper-reality and religion in the work of Baudrillard and Possamai with Geoffroy (2012) and Cusack (2010, 125). Especially Geoffroy's emphasis and understanding of Baudrillard differs somewhat from mine.

lack thereof between text and world. History, in Ricoeur's broad sense, thus refers to narratives that *claim* to refer to the actual world, regardless of the author's honesty (he could mean to deceive) and regardless of the actual correspondence between text and world (the author could be sincere, but mistaken).

The meaning of fiction which I adopt here is not the only one in the literature. Indeed, Marie-Laure Ryan (2002) has distinguished three theories about the border between fiction and history.[93] The first theory is the "Doctrine of Panfictionality" which holds that all texts that do not give an "absolutely truthful, complete, and objective image of the real" are fictional (2002, 354). Since no narratives fit these criteria, the Doctrine of Panfictionality collapses the category of fiction into the broader category of narrative.

While the Doctrine of Panfictionality looks mostly like a straw-man, the second theory of the fiction-history border, the "continuum hypothesis", is real and influential.[94] Like the Doctrine of Panfictionality, the continuum hypothesis considers fictionality a synonym of *actual* non-correspondence. But unlike the Doctrine of Panfictionality, which considers all texts that fall short of absolute correspondence to be fictional, the continuum hypothesis considers fictionality to be a matter of degree. Proponents of the continuum hypothesis argue that since some texts correspond more to the actual world than others, some texts are less fictional than others (Ryan 2002, 355). According to this logic, all texts are 'half-breeds', for no historical texts correspond completely to the actual world, and no works of fiction are completely devoid of references to the actual world. Even a narrative that is set in another world inhabited only by non-human beings will be told in a language borrowed from the actual world lest it be unintelligible and no text at all. The view that fictionality is a matter of degree resembles most people's understanding of what fiction is, and this correspondence with everyday language is a chief virtue of the continuum hypothesis.

A severe weakness of the continuum approach, however, is that it is unable to distinguish between different *types* of non-referentiality. Since all propositions that do not correspond to states of affairs in the actual world are considered 'fictional', the continuum approach confusingly lumps together lies, mistakes, and make-believe. This problem makes a third position necessary, namely the "binary approach" which is Ricoeur's and Dorrit Cohn's (1999). The "binary approach" considers history and fiction to be "two poles of a binary opposition [with] the border between them […] clearly marked" (Ryan 2002, 356). The difference between the two is that history *claims* to refer to the actual world, while fiction makes no such claim, but refers instead to a fictional world of its own creation. Formulated in this simple fashion, the binary approach inverts the categorisation problem of the continuum approach. Now fiction is clearly demarcated, but

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[93] The typology of theories about the fiction-history border is developed in a review essay of Dorrit Cohn's *The Distinction of Fiction* (1999).

[94] A refined version of the continuum approach has been championed by Wolfgang Iser (1976; 1991).

the category of history has become overstretched, lumping accurate, inaccurate, and deceiving forms of non-fictional discourse together.

None of the visions of the fiction-history border reviewed so far are adequate on their own. What we need is an approach to fictionality that makes it possible both to distinguish sharply between fiction and non-fiction and to assess the degree of similarity between the fictional world and the actual world. In other words, we want an advanced variant of the binary approach that embeds the continuum approach within it. The ideal approach should also sort lies and errors from history and fiction, and facilitate an analysis of how readers assess the degree of similarity between, on the one hand, the actual world (or rather, their conception of it), and, on the other hand, the fictional world (or indeed any textual world, for instance one projected by a religious narrative). Ryan's application of possible worlds theory to the study of fictionality (1991) gives us all that.

Possible worlds theory was originally developed in the field of model logic (e.g. Lewis 1973; 1983), and Ryan's use of possible worlds terminology makes her approach rather technical.[95] It is worth the effort to digest and adopt the technicalities of her approach, however, because it is exactly its logical character that makes it such a great analytical tool. Ryan's approach builds on seven axioms. Let me first quote them all and then comment on them in turn.

> 1. There is only one AW [actual world].
> 2. The [actual] sender (author) [AS] of a text is always located in the AW.
> 3. Every text projects a universe. At the center of this universe is the TAW [textual actual world].
> 4. The TAW may or may not be similar to the AW.
> 5. The TAW is offered as the accurate image of a world, or TRW [textual reference world], which is assumed (really or in make-believe) to exist independently of the TAW.
> 6. Every text has an implied speaker [IS; narrator]. The implied speaker is the individual who fulfills the felicity conditions of the textual speech acts.
> 7. The implied speaker of the text is always located in the TRW (Ryan 1991, 555)

The AW is the real world in which author and reader are situated (§1-2).[96] Following possible worlds logic, the AW is a possible world, but at the same time the only *actual* possible world. The AW contains within it a number of alternative (or non-actual) possi-

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[95] Other fiction theorists besides Ryan who have adopted a possible worlds perspective include Umberto Eco (1979), Thomas Pavel (1986), and Lubomír Doležel (1998).

[96] Influenced by postmodernist theory, Ryan has later come to doubt whether we can really know objective reality and hence compare it with fictional worlds. This has led her to reinterpret the notion of the AW. Where the AW in her 1991-article is a synonym of objective reality, in a later article Ryan distinguishes between the two. Objective reality here refers to reality *an Sich* which we cannot know, while the AW refers to any individual's *interpretation* of objective reality (Ryan 1998). I prefer Ryan's original formulation which takes individuals' interpretations of reality to constitute non-actual *possible* worlds.

ble worlds (APWs), projected by imaginations and discourses. For instance, someone who thinks about how it would be to win the lottery, or someone who tells a friend about what he is going to do during the holidays, is constructing and reflecting upon an APW.

All texts project a possible world, indeed a textual world (TW). From an objective point of view, this TW is an APW embedded within the AW. At the same time, however, the TW constitutes a semantic universe of its own which duplicates the structure of the AW (§3). That is to say, every TW is a universe which is centred on a TAW and which can include any number of textual APWs within the TAW. Textual APWs include the points of view of characters in narratives, embedded discourses, and so on.

Ryan's approach makes it possible to assess what she calls the "accessibility relations" between the AW and the TW in a two-fold way. Like the continuum theorists, she is interested in the degree of similarity between the TAW and the AW, i.e. in the text's degree of objective reference (§4). This is not trivial, for the very fact that Ryan considers it *possible* to compare the TAW and the AW implies that she adopts a realist approach to science and a correspondence theory of truth (cf. section 0.3.5 above). Being a binary theorist, Ryan is at the same time interested in the issue of textual reference claims. Indeed, Ryan's crucial move is to distinguish between a TAW and a TRW (§5). The TAW is the world of the text itself, so to speak, while the TRW is the (real or imagined) world about which the text claims to tell. The question of reference world is in principle binary; either a text has the AW as its TRW or it does not. I return below to the so-called 'hybrid texts' which constitute an exception to this rule. Finally, every text has an IS, situated in the TRW, with whom the AS can associate or dissociate himself (§6-7).

Table 2.1. The Modes of Mimetic Discourse (Adapted from Ryan)

Modes of Mimetic Discourse			TAW = AW *real referentiality*	AW = TRW *reference claim*	TAW = TRW *reference accuracy*	AS = IS *authorial responsibility*
Nonfictional accurate discourse		Non-fiction ('history')	+	+	+	+
Counter-factuals	Errors		-	+	-	+
	Lies		-	+	-	-
	Fiction		-	-	+	-

These axioms make it possible to distinguish fiction from other forms of mimetic discourse, including other types of counterfactual discourse, as shown in table 2.1 above

(adapted from Ryan 1991, 556).[97] As shown, all counterfactual discourses share the property that their TAW ≠ AW, but they differ in claims to referentiality. Fiction makes no claim to be referential, whereas both errors and lies do. The rightmost column indicates whether the AS (author) accepts responsibility for the claims put forward by the IS (narrator) or whether the beliefs of the AS and the IS differ. The AS can dissociate himself from the IS either openly (fiction) or in secret (lies) (Ryan 1991, 555-556).

In the table, fiction is presented as a form of counterfactual discourse that neither claims to refer to the AW (TRW ≠ AW), nor actually does so (TAW ≠ AW). In fact, the matter is more complex. Fiction *can* refer to the AW – namely in so far as elements in the TAW correspond with elements in AW, but because fiction does not claim to tell the truth of the AW (TRW ≠ AW), such 'references' are not bound to accuracy (Cohn 1999, 5). Furthermore, the overlap between the TAW and the AW is a matter of degree. Fictional worlds include some elements but not all from the AW, and add some imaginary elements as well. In many cases, an analysis of the 'overlap' between a fictional narrative's TAW and the AW will show that the *story*, i.e. the string of narrated events, is made up, but that many elements from the *inventory* of the AW (such as places, objects, and persons) have been projected into the fictional world and hence provide more or less reliable information about their counterparts in the AW. For instance, Sherlock Holmes lives in a fictional London which, like the actual London, is the capital of England and whose street names are identical to those of the actual London.

It is possible to sort various genres of fiction, from documentary and historical novels to science fiction and fairy tales, according to the overlap between the TAW and the AW (Ryan 1991, 557-566). On one end of the spectrum, Ryan locates 'true fiction', an oxymoronic category that covers documentary novels and dramatised history. True fiction builds on facts and includes nothing which is known to be false within the AW; therefore Ryan qualifies it as TAW = AW (1991, 556). True fiction still adds imaginary details, but only such as are credible and do not conflict with established facts. Like true fiction, also historiography can include qualified guessing, but the historian will point out what is fact and what is conjecture (hence IS = AS; AW = TRW). In true fiction, that is not the case. Moreover, in true fiction the author hides behind a narrator (IS ≠ AS) who does not speak directly about the AW, but refers instead to a fictional world. Within this fictional world, both that which is true from the point of view of the AW and that which is merely conjecture, is simply true – hence AW ≠ TRW (Ryan 1991, 561).

To develop a theoretical basis for a distinction of other fiction genres with greater distance to the AW than true fiction, Ryan provides a very extensive analysis of the accessibility relations between the AW and possible, fictional TAWs. Most importantly, she analyses to what degree the inventory (e.g. places, persons, and objects) and the history

[97] Ryan defines mimetic discourse as "utterances that describe particular facts, make singular existential claims, and are intended to be judged true or false in a world external to themselves" (1991, 556). This world can be either the AW or a fictional world.

(i.e. the string of past events) of the TAW correspond to the inventory and history of the AW.[98] She also looks at chronological compatibility (broken if the TAW's present is posterior to the AW's present), physical compatibility (broken if other natural laws apply in the TAW than in the AW), taxonomical compatibility (broken if the TAW includes other species than the AW), and so on (Ryan 1991, 559). These additional dimensions are useful to distinguish realistic fiction from supernatural fiction, the latter being characterised by taxonomical incompatibility (e.g. the existence of gods, angels, and so in the TAW) and physical incompatibility (e.g. the existence in the TAW of magic and supernatural agents who are unconstrained by natural laws). They are less relevant, however, for studies of the religious *reception* of supernatural fiction (and of religious narratives), because religious readings of such narratives are based on the belief that the AW includes, as part of its inventory, those supernatural entities and powers of which the text speaks. From the point of view of the believer, the category of supernatural fiction collapses into the category of realistic fiction, and the category of religious narratives collapses into the category of history.

This brings us to the issues of the reader's actual reception of fiction and to the degree to which the author is able to control the mode in which the reader approaches his text. As Dorrit Cohn points out, authors usually provide cues for their readers. Even though the fictional world can be very similar to the AW, "signposts of fictionality" (Cohn 1999, viii, 131), such as the description of the inner mental states of the characters, typically make clear to the reader that the work is to be read as fiction. By way of signposts of fictionality (or non-fictionality), the author attempts to form a "contract" or "pact" (Lejeune 1996; Behrendt 2006; cf. also Currie 1990, 30-35) with the reader about the "key" in which the work should be read. Cohn speaks of "referential" or "fictional" readings (1999, 34) and Ryan refers to "historicising" and "fictionalising" modes (2008). By paying attention to the signposts in the text, readers are generally able to deduce whether the author intends a text to be read as fiction (TRW ≠ AW) or as non-fiction/history (TRW = AW).

While most narratives guide their readers to read them *in toto* in either the fictional or the referential mode, two types of texts are more complex. Cohn (1999, 35) and Poul Behrendt (2006) point out the existence of *ambiguous texts*, especially autobiographies and fictional autobiographies (Behrendt refers to the latter as 'auto fiction'), in which the author deliberately makes it difficult to discern whether he intends the text to be fiction or history.[99] Ryan emphasises that another category of texts gives clear signals about the

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[98] Ryan does not have a specific category of 'events' or 'history', but counts the events that have taken place within a possible world to fall under the broader category of 'properties of the inventory'.

[99] This type of text requires the reader to keep open both possibilities while reading, i.e. that the text might be fiction and that it might be history. When author and reader mutually acknowledge (and enjoy) this ambiguity, they have made a 'double contract' in Behrendt's terms (2004; 2006) – rather than a simple fiction contract or reference contract.

intended reading mode, but demands that readers switch between the two modes. She refers to such texts as *hybrid texts* (Ryan 2002, 356). A good example of a hybrid text would be James Redfield's *The Celestine Prophecy* (1993) where an unambiguously fictional storyline alternates with long lectures by authoritative characters which are intended to be read as referential. In this case, breaks in the text between the level of the story (or narrate) and the level of embedded discourses show the reader when to switch between reading modes. The information given in the didactic passages is clearly supposed to be read as being valid both in the textual and in the AW (TAW = AW). This is to say that the communicative mode changes in these passages from being the narration of a narrator situated in a TRW ≠ AW to be an almost direct communication between an author in the AW (James Redfield) and a reader likewise situated in the AW (TRW = AW) whom the author attempts to educate.[100] I follow Cohn and Ryan in letting the intention of the author (as it can be reconstructed on the basis of signposts in text and paratext) determine whether a text is in itself fictional or not, while at the same time emphasising that both fictional and non-fictional texts can be read against the intention of their author. Needless to say, reading against the author's instructions is a major feature of the religious use of fiction in fiction-based religion.

It makes sense to single out fiction-based religion as a special type of religion because religions in general base themselves on narratives that fall under the rubric of history. That is so, because the narratives which form the textual basis of most religious traditions (think, for instance, of the Christian gospels, the Buddha legend, and the Babylonian creation story) *claim* to refer to events that have taken place in the actual world.[101] Two points should be made immediately to avoid any misunderstanding. First, what matters here are the claims made in the text itself, not the plausibility of those claims to a modern reader, nor their objective reference. Indeed, we bracket the question where religious narratives, from an objective point of view, are located on a continuum between

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[100] The example of *The Celestine Prophecy* is my own. Ryan gives another example of a hybrid text, namely an historical novel which is fictional on the whole, but which includes a number of quite accurate descriptive passages fit for the referential reading mode (2002, 356). I think that is an unlucky example. Hybrid texts certainly import elements from the AW into the fictional world, but *all* fictional texts do so even if historical novels do so to a high degree. Truly hybrid texts are amalgams of textual parts which are, considered independently, either completely fictional or completely non-fictional.

[101] Please note that also religious narratives that are staged in the mythical past must be considered historical according to my definition of history as narratives with reference ambition. This does not rule out, however, that one can and must distinguish between religious narratives set in the far past (myths) and religious narratives set in the recent past (religious legends). Still, myths and legends can together be contrasted to fiction because they are both presented as historically true. On the difference between myths and legends that I here imply, see Bascom (1965). In chapter 3, I treat the category religious narratives (i.e. narratives that claim to tell about the supernatural in the AW) in detail in order to establish a baseline from which to compare the religious affordances of supernatural fiction.

Ryan's categories of nonfictional accurate discourse and error.[102] Second, the classification of religious narratives as a form of non-fiction does not imply or require that religionists believe literally in the claims they make. Indeed, processes of rationalisation in 'history'-based religion often involve a weakening of the claims put forward in the authoritative texts, but such an interpretation does not reduce the texts themselves to fiction.

In contrast to history-based religion, fiction-based religion is based on texts that are intended by their authors to be non-referential and whose fictionality is acknowledged by most recipients. We have fiction-based religion when parts of the fictional supernatural are taken to exist within the AW and when practices and identities form around this belief. Since fictionality is a matter of the author's intention and the text's message, such ascription of reality to the text's fictional supernatural does not change the nature of the text (which remains fictional), though it does determine the interpretive activity as religious (rather than playful).[103]

Fiction-based religion can entail a reading of the authoritative, fictional text as history, i.e. as a text which refers directly to the AW. That is not the usual case, however, neither in Tolkien-based religion nor in fiction-based religion in general. More often, fiction-based religionists continue to consider their authoritative texts to be fictional, though they perceive the distance between the TAW and AW to be smaller than intended by the author. For instance, all Jediists will assert that *Star Wars* is fiction, but will nevertheless insist that the Force exists (Davidsen 2014). Because they have come to believe that the Force is real and exists in the AW, they do no longer perceive the Force within the *Star Wars* universe to be fictional. In other words, they will consider the history and most of the inventory of the *Star Wars* world to be imaginary, but consider the '*Star Wars* Force' to be an import from the AW. Indeed, Jediists consider the TAW and the AW to overlap because both include the Force as part of their inventory. We can say, that the Jediists categorise George Lucas' saga as an 'imaginary story about a real supernatural entity', cf. Ryan's category "imaginary stories about real people" (1991, 562). Many Tolkien religionists read *LR* and *S* in the same way – as fiction about real supernatural entities – and this is arguably how many liberal Christians approach the Gospel narratives as well. In chapter 5, I return in detail to the various types of reference assessments which individuals make of religious narratives and works of supernatural fiction.

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[102] To be more precise, as methodological naturalists (cf. section 0.3.3 above), we assume religious narratives to be sincere but inaccurate accounts of the states of affairs in the AW. In other word they are errors. The question of objective reference is not what interests us, however; we focus instead on the reference claims made by religious narratives (cf. ch. 3) and the reference authority ascribed to them (cf. ch. 5).

[103] Implicit in the distinction between religions based on fictional or historical *narratives* is my conviction that narratives are more fundamental to religion than discursive theology. This point will be taken up in the discussion of the dynamics of belief in religious traditions in chapter 5.

Let me conclude this section with an emphasis. It cannot be stressed too strongly that the technical definition of fiction which I have adopted in this chapter differs from the denotation of 'all that is untrue, false, or mistaken' which the term fiction often carries in everyday speech. The advantage of the technical definition is its clarity, but unfortunately scholars of religion tend to use 'fiction' in the imprecise and colloquial way. Therefore much of what is written about fiction in relation to religion is rather confusing. Michael York's otherwise splendid article on the "fictional origins of contemporary Paganism" (1999) can serve an as example of the conceptual imprecision which one often encounters.

York argues that modern Paganism is based on "fictional" sources, and names three of these sources in particular: Charles Leland's forgery *Aradia, or the Gospel of the Witches* (1899), Margaret Murray's speculative work of history *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe* (1921), and Robert Graves' purportedly inspired work *The White Goddess* (1948). All three works are replete with misinterpretations, idiosyncrasies, and even forgeries. From the point of view of contemporary history, none of them gives a truthful picture of the old forms of paganism of which modern Paganism is allegedly a continuation. Despite being inaccurate history, however, *none of the three works are fiction*. They all fall under the category of history, broadly conceived, because they *claim* to refer to events and states of affairs in the actual world. The three works do not fall into the narrower category of 'accurate history', however. Indeed, large passages within these works fall under Ryan's categories of errors and lies rather than under the categories of fiction or of nonfictional accurate discourse. The fact that contemporary Paganism is based on tenets in the works of Leland, Murray, and Gardner does therefore not warrant the classification of the movement as fiction-based religion. It is another matter that contemporary Paganism is *also* inspired by Tolkien's narratives and other works of fiction and can *for that reason* be qualified as fiction-inspired religion.

2.1.3. Conceptualising Fiction-based Religion against Fandom

Fiction-based religion has two 'others'. Above I have discussed how fiction-based religion differs from religions based on narratives with reference ambition (history). Let me now address the distinction between fiction-based religion and fandom. It is worth doing so for two reasons. First, several scholars have argued that fandom itself can be considered a religious phenomenon, thus muddling the distinction between the categories of religion and fandom.[104] Second, colleagues and laypersons with whom I have discussed my research have often been reluctant to include fiction-based religion within the category of proper religion and insisted, instead, that phenomena such as Jediism and Tolkien-based religion must fall under the categories of fandom, play, or practical jokes.

[104] See for example Jindra (1994; 1999; 2000), Hills (2002), Istoft (2008; 2010), Porter and McLaren (1999), Porter (2004; 2009), and Wagner and Lundeen (1998).

In part II of the dissertation, I shall demonstrate that Tolkien-based spirituality is a form of religion and qualitatively different from Tolkien fandom. In what follows here, I show that a substantive definition of religion like the one I introduced in the general introduction makes it easy to distinguish analytically between religion (including fiction-based religion) and fandom (as a form of play). For lack of space, I can here neither present an extensive overview of the 'fandom-as-religion' discourse, nor go into a detailed analysis of its assumptions and arguments.[105] *In lieu* of this, let me illustrate my position with a brief discussion of Michael Jindra's influential article "*Star Trek* Fandom as a Religious Phenomenon". This article was originally published in *Sociology of Religion* in 1994 and appeared in a revised and abridged version in 2000.

Jindra identifies seven dimensions of religion in *Star Trek* fandom. First, *Star Trek* fandom has *belief* or *faith*, namely in such values as humanism, scientism, and cultural relativism (Jindra 1994, 34). Second, it has a *myth*, namely the *Star Trek* narrative which Jindra sees as an American "frontier" myth pushed into space (1994, 32-33). Third, *Star Trek* fandom is characterised by *community* and even by a sense of superiority vis-à-vis non-fan 'mundanes' (Jindra 1994, 38-39). Fourth, *Star Trek* fandom has its own *ritual gatherings*, especially conventions (Jindra 1994, 38-39), and involves, fifth, *pilgrimage* to exhibitions and tourist sites (Jindra 1994, 39-40). Sixth, *Star Trek* points to another world which is made real through participation, for instance in role-playing (called "simming") (Jindra 2000, 172-173). Seventh, *Star Trek* has such an *effect* on the lives of its fans that many of them become inspired by the show to take up a specific profession as engineer, doctor, or scientist (Jindra 2000, 173). Jindra clearly favours a broadly functionalist definition of religion in which any communal activity which expresses values or commitment can count as religion. While such an approach can certainly serve to highlight some interesting similarities between fandom and (certain forms of) religion, it is blind to the differences between the two. To highlight what differentiates religion from fandom, it is useful to look closer at Jindra's sixth dimension and his suggestion that fandom is religious or religion-like because fandom, like religion, involves the creation and inhabitation of an imaginary world.

Jindra states that *Star Trek* points to another world which fans make real through participation, especially through role-playing. This is true in the trivial sense that fans enact the fan text when taking on roles within the fictional universe. It is misleading, however, to suggest that the enactment or 'making real' in role-playing is identical to the way in which religious activity assumes and affirms the reality of supernatural agents. While religion and role-playing have in common that they create an imaginary world, they also differ from each other in that religion ascribes ontological reality to the imagined while role-playing does not. Religious activity refers to and involves the communica-

[105] The fandom-as-religion discourse is not restricted to text-centred fandom such as *Star Trek* fandom. It has also been argued that celebrity fandom and sports fandom constitute religious phenomena (e.g. Chidester 1996).

tion with supernatural entities *that are postulated to exist in the actual world*. Role-playing fans create and enter a *fictional world*. Let me unpack what I mean.

Role-playing can be understood as a semiotic activity that projects a play world which exists parallel to the actual world and whose status as 'set apart' is consciously recognised by the players. Scandinavian drama theorists capture this when they say that role-playing (like theatre and fiction) is governed by a "fiction contract" (e.g. Riis 2006). Gregory Bateson formulates the same point differently when he argues that play is framed by the "metacommunicative" message "this is play" (1955; 1956). This means that assertions made within the play world, such as the assertion that a clump of sand is a cake, have reference authority only within the play world and that they are judged as such. It would be to misunderstand the play situation to judge assertions made within the play world against the reality of the actual world and argue that the 'cake' is really only a clump of sand. But it would also be to misunderstand the play situation to conflate the actual world and the play world and eat the sand cake. In other words, fictionality is *inherent* in play as a type of social activity, just as it is inherent to fiction as a type of narrative. Of course, this does not rule out that there can be significant similarities between the play world and the actual world – for instance in the values that are deemed important – and that the play world can therefore serve as a mirror for the actual world.

Religious activity, especially fiction-based religious activity, might look like play from the perspective of the non-believing outsider, but it is in fact radically different. Indeed, where play is governed by a fiction contract, religious activity is governed by what we can term a 'reality contract'. Religious claims about gods and supernatural agency are made about the actual world, also when those making the claims doubt their truth. As a consequence, in religious ritual, the cake is actually eaten. In the Eucharist, one does not eat bread (≈sand), but the body of Christ (≈cake). In rituals of faith healing, people urge a god in the actual world to intervene. Religious claims can subsequently be weakened through (more or less) disaffirmative ontology assessment, relativisation, and so on. But these interpretive moves presuppose that immediate, *literal and affirmative* religious claims have been made in the first instance, and do not in themselves reduce religion to play.

The engagement with the fan text which characterises *Star Trek* fans – and Tolkien fans for that matter – is playful rather than religious, because fans acknowledge that the fan text projects its own fictional world. One can temporarily enter this fictional world in role-playing, and also other fan activities are confined to the fictional world. Think for instance of the production of fan fiction or of "scientific" studies of the languages of Middle-earth or of the technology of the *Star Wars* universe. Also in these cases, fans enter the fictional universe to expand and explore it, while making no assertions about the actual world. That a clear distinction between fandom and fiction-based religion can be drawn analytically does not rule out, however, that the one can evolve into the other in real life. While Jediists and Tolkien religionists are correct to consider their practices to be different from fandom, many of them have a background as fans. Indeed, fiction-

based religion seems often to arise as the convergence of fandom and alternative religion. We have such a convergence, for example, when Tolkien fans who are also Wiccans move on to use the Wizard Gandalf and the Elven Queen Galadriel as images for the God and the Goddess in ritual (cf. ch. 14). We see it also when *Star Wars* fans who also practice meditation and believe in a higher power come to identify this higher power as the Force and come to believe that they can connect with it in meditation (Davidsen 2011a).

Before moving on to a discussion of the various ways in which fiction can inspire religion, let me briefly sum up the discussion so far. Fiction-based religion refers to religious activity and religious traditions in which fictional texts are used as authoritative texts. Fiction-based religion differs from conventional ('history'-based) religion because it bases itself on fictional narratives, i.e. on narratives that do not claim to refer to events that took place in the actual, historical-empirical world prior to their entextualisation. Conventional religion, by contrast, is based on narratives that claim to tell of the actions of supernatural agents in the actual world. Along another axis, fiction-based religion differs from fandom in that fiction-based religious activity assumes the existence of supernatural agents in the actual world, while fans engage with the authoritative text solely in the mode of play. In short, we can speak of fiction-based religion when fictional narratives are used as authoritative texts for actual religious practice. It is more precise to refer to religions with these characteristics as 'fiction-based religions' rather than as 'hyper-real religions'. For while hyper-real religion is the fancier term, the qualifier hyper-real has no analytical power because all religions are hyper-real in Baudrillard's sense of the term.

2.2. Varieties of Interaction between Fiction and Religion

Possamai has not only identified hyper-real religions as a distinct category of religious phenomena, but further sub-divided the category into two types. He makes a distinction between hyper-real religions that use popular culture as a source of "secondary inspiration" (Possamai 2009a, 89) and hyper-real religions that use popular culture as a "first hand source of inspiration" (Possamai 2009a, 89) so that popular culture is "appropriated as the spiritual work in itself" (Possamai 2009a, 90). In the group of hyper-real religions that use popular culture as a *primary* source of inspiration fall Jediism and Matrixism (Possamai 2009a, 31-32, 89).[106] Possamai also refers to this type as "hyper-real reli-

[106] Matrixism is supposedly a new religion based on Andy and Larry Wachowski's *Matrix* trilogy (1999-2003) and inspired by the Bahá'í religion. It has been treated briefly by Possamai (2009a, 32), Cusack (2010, 128-132), and Morehead (2012). So far, however, scholars writing on Matrixism have failed to substantiate their claims that it is a serious and active movement. I will therefore bracket Matrixism in the following

gions.com" because they are primarily active on the Internet, and he asserts that it was indeed the Internet and the "participatory culture" (cf. Jenkins 1992; 2006) evolving on the Internet that made it possible for hyper-real religions of this type to emerge (Possamai 2009a, 90-91). Hyper-real religions that use popular culture only as a *secondary* source of inspiration emerged already in the 1950s and 1960s according to Possamai who considers Scientology, the Church of All Worlds, Neo-Paganism in general, the Church of Satan, and Heaven's Gate to fall into this category (2009a, 29-31, 32-33, 89, 92).[107]

2.2.1. Degrees of Fiction-basedness: Fiction-inspired, Fiction-integrating, and Fiction-based Religion

Possamai's distinction between hyper-real religions (or fiction-based religions) that use popular culture (or better: fiction) as either a secondary source of inspiration or as its very spiritual basis is useful and is not challenged by the criticism levelled above at the concept of hyper-real religion in general. It is necessary, however, to split up Possamai's category of 'secondary source religions' into (a) *fiction-inspired religions* that are merely inspired and supported by fiction with which it shares concerns and ideas, and (b) *fiction-integrating religions* that integrate belief elements from fiction, re-enact fictional rituals, and/or adapt identities from fiction. This sharpening of Possamai's distinction gives us a better analytical instrument with which to tackle Tolkien spirituality later on, and it makes it possible (in section 2.3) to develop Possamai's observation that the various types of hyper-real religions have appeared at different times in history.

Of the religions discussed by Possamai, Heaven's Gate, Scientology, and the Neo-Pagan movement fit well into the category of fiction-inspired religion. Heaven's Gate

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discussion. For references to the use of fiction in the other 'hyper-real religions' discussed by Possamai, see the first pages of the general introduction of this dissertation.

[107] It is noteworthy that most of the religions discussed by Possamai – Scientology, Heaven's Gate, Jediism, and Matrixism – are based on a particular kind of fiction, namely science fiction. Also other scholars have emphasised the influence of science fiction on new religions in the 21st century. Cusack has briefly discussed how the Aetherius Society and other early UFO-cults were inspired by science fiction in the 1940s and 1950s (2010, 14-15, 116-117). Zeller (2012) and Machado (2010; 2012) have treated the science fiction influence on Heaven's Gate and the Raëlian Movement respectively, two religious movements that emerged in the 1970s. All these new religions drew on the fantastic elements of science fiction, incorporating ideas about psychic powers and about aliens who were reinterpreted as religious masters from space. However, the science fiction genre was quite hostile to explicit and organised religion, depicting it as backwards and negative until, as Possamai and Lee (2010) have demonstrated, a change took place in the 1980s towards a portrayal of religion as positive and compatible with science. Examples of pro-religious science fiction since 1980 include *Star Wars Episode V: The Empire Strikes Back* (1980), *Star Trek: Deep Space 9* (1993-1999), and *Battlestar Galactica* (2004-2009). I would argue that the emergence of Jediism was made possible not only by online participatory culture, but also by the fact that *Star Wars* provided something that no science fiction had possessed before 1980s, namely a positively depicted narrative religion (the religion of the Jedi Knights) on which people could model a fiction-based religion. Cowan (2010) explores the religious themes in science fiction in detail.

was a UFO-cult whose members watched *Star Trek* and other shows that helped sustain their belief in intelligent life in space. Scientology's emphasis on the powers of the mind and its galactic protology was likewise inspired by the pulp science fiction of the 1940s. As we shall see in chapter 8, Neo-Pagans, in turn, were and are avid readers of fantasy which serves as a plausibility structure for beliefs in spirits, magic, and otherworlds. The Church of All Worlds and the Church of Satan, by contrast, can be considered fiction-integrating religions. Both have integrated fictional elements into their rituals – from Robert Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land* and H.P. Lovecraft's novellas respectively.[108]

Besides fiction-inspired and fiction-integrating religions, that together cover Possamai's category of 'secondary source religions', I refer to Possamai's 'primary source religions' as *fiction-based religions*.[109] Fiction-based religions (in this narrow sense) have in common with fiction-integrating religions that elements from the fictional text are integrated into the religious practice and beliefs of real people in the actual world, for instance by ascribing ontological status to fictional beings or concepts (such as the Force) or enacting rituals (such as the water-sharing ritual in the Church of All Worlds). This sets these two types apart from fiction-inspired religion which shares general concerns and ideas with a fictional genre, but does not directly religionise the fiction. Fiction-integrating religion and fiction-based religion differ from each other, however, on the

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[108] Possamai does not mention all the fiction-inspired and fiction-integrating religions that exist or have existed. One interesting fiction-inspired religious organisation that he does not include is the now defunct Fairy Investigation Society (FIS), a British organisation that collected accounts of human-fairy relations in order to prove the existence of fairies (Young 2013). The Fairy Investigation Society was founded in 1927 and borrowed its name from a fictional organisation, the Faery Investigation Society, which had appeared in a novel by Bernard Sleigh, published the year before (Young 2013, 140). As such it constitutes an interesting parallel case to the Church of All Worlds which also adapted its name from a novel. Contrary to Robert Heinlein, however, who did not intend to provide the impetus for a new religious organisation, Sleigh was himself a fairy believer (Young 2013, 141). Sleigh's novel, entitled *The Gates of Horn, Being Sundry Records from the Proceedings of the Society for the Investigation of Faery Fact & Fallacy* (1926), also expressed his profound knowledge of history of fairy belief and investigation up to a level where some believed that his novel was based on an existing society (Young 2013, 141). Sleigh's novel bolstered the plausibility of fairy beliefs, as was indeed his intention, and according to the founder of the real Fairy Investigation Society, Quentin Craufurd, Sleigh even helped co-found the organisation (Young 2013, 141, 142). Even if Sleigh did play no role in the Fairy Investigation Society, he certainly wrote the novel with religious intentions whereas *Stranger in a Strange Land*, by contrast, was a fictional novel which was only religionised subsequently and to the surprise of its author. *The Gates of Horn* thus approaches the ideal type of religious-didactic fiction (section 2.2.2 below). For these reasons Craufurd's Fairy Investigation Society is not a prototypical example of a fiction-inspired religious organisation, though it ultimately belongs within this category. That is so because Sleigh's book did not introduce any new ideas about fairies, but merely envisioned a society of fairy believers believing such things as many real world fairy believers also believed. Craufurd's Fairy Investigation Society was a *fiction-inspired* organisation (for it was inspired and supported by Sleigh's book), but no *fiction-integrating* organisation (for it turned no originally fictional elements into religious beliefs and practices).

[109] Until this point, I have sometimes used the term fiction-based religion in a broader sense that encompasses also fiction-inspired and fiction-integrating religion.

issue of the centrality of the fictional text. In fiction-integrating religion, fictional elements are selectively disembedded from their fictional sources and integrated into a non-fictional religious frame. In fiction-based religion *sensu stricto*, by contrast, a specific fictional text or text corpus sets the frame into which other religious elements can be integrated. Within the spiritual Tolkien milieu, both fiction-inspired, fiction-integrating, and fiction-based religion can be found. In the table below, I present a schematic overview of how Possamai's categories and mine relate to each other, and offer some examples of each type of fiction-based religion.

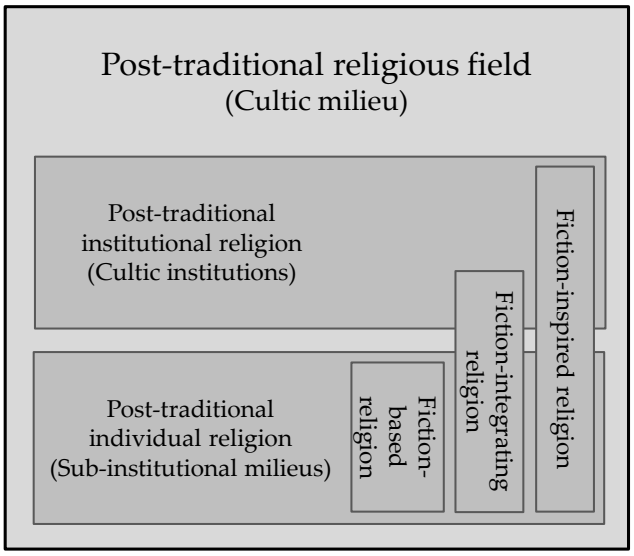
Table 2.2. Three Ideal Types of Fiction-based Religion *Sensu Lato*

POSSAMAI	**DAVIDSEN**		
Ideal type	**Ideal type**	**General Examples**	**Example within Tolkien Spirituality**
Hyper-real religion using popular culture as a secondary source of inspiration	Fiction-inspired religion = religion inspired and supported by fiction with which it shares concerns and ideas	Scientology, Heaven's Gate, Neo-Paganism	Contemporary Pagans (ch. 8)
	Fiction-integrating religion = religion integrating belief elements from fiction, re-enacting fictional rituals, and/or adapting identities from fiction	Church of Satan, Church of All Worlds	Tribunal of the Sidhe (ch. 10)
Hyper-real religion using popular culture as a primary source of inspiration	Fiction-based religion *sensu stricto* = religion that takes fictional texts as its very foundation	Jediism	Ilsaluntë Valion (ch. 16)

It is interesting to note that, of the cases discussed by Possamai, the more formally institutionalised movements, Scientology and Heaven's Gate, belong to the category of fiction-inspired religion, while the only movement to qualify as fiction-based *sensu stricto* is the very loosely organised Jediism. The two fiction-integrating cases, the Church of All Worlds and the Church of Satan, fall between Jediism and Scientology in degree of formal organisation. In other words, formal organisation seems to be negatively correlated with the degree of centrality that can be attributed to a fictional text. Put in the terminology of the previous chapter, we see that *individual* post-traditional religion can be both fiction-inspired (Neo-Paganism in general), fiction-integrating (branches of Satanism),

and fiction-based (Jediism), while *institutional* post-traditional religion is usually only fiction-inspired (if it draws on fiction at all). In figure 2.1 below, I have depicted these correlations.

Figure 2.1. Fiction-based Religious Types in the Post-traditional Religious Field



The reason for this pattern might be that post-traditional institutions are more concerned with legitimacy than post-traditional individual religionists, and that cults – in Campbell's sense of informal groups of individuals sharing post-traditional religious interests – have a tendency to downplay fictional sources of inspiration as they institutionalise.

2.2.2. Religious-didactic Fiction

I understand fiction-based religion *sensu lato* to be the religious use of somebody else's fiction. That is to say, fiction-based religion is a form of textual poaching or appropriation by a reader or interpreter. This is only one of many ways, however, in which fiction can be employed for religious purposes. Another is the publication of what I call *religious-didactic fiction*. Here it is the author himself who uses the fictional meta-genre as a tool to convey certain religious themes, ideas, and values.

Some examples of occult, Pagan, and New Age fiction of the religious-didactic sort include Dion Fortune's *The Sea Priestess* (1938), Aleister Crowley's *Moonchild* (1929b), Brian Bates' *The Way of Wyrd* (1983), James Redfield's *The Celestine Prophecy* (1993), Diana L. Paxson's *The Wolf and the Raven* (1993), and Deepak Chopra's *The Return of Merlin* (1995).[110] These are works of fiction in so far as the narrative events and characters are

[110] See also Gilhus and Mikaelsson (2013) for an overview of early theosophical fiction written with a religious-didactic aim. Cusack (2012, 166) mentions that George Ivanovich Gurdjieff aimed to convey the message of his 'Work' with his fictional trilogy *Beelzebub's Tales to his Grandson* (1950), *Meetings with Remarkable Men* (1963), and *Life is Real Only When 'I Am'* (1975). As Mikael Rothstein has pointed out, ele-

fictional, but the books aim nonetheless to convey religious ideas, identities, values, and practices, sometimes implicitly as part of the plot, sometimes explicitly (and often clumsily) by way of long discursive passages in which characters with religious authority act as mouthpieces for the author.

In many cases the same authors publish both religious-didactic fiction and discursive religious treatises. Indeed, that is true of all the authors listed above. Sometimes writers even seem to try out their ideas in fictionalised format first, this being for instance the case with Gerald Gardner, the founder of Wicca, who published the novels *A Goddess Arrives* (1939) and *High Magic's Aid* (1949) before presenting his ideas of witchcraft in discursive from in *Witchcraft Today* (1954).[111] Of course, fiction with a religious-didactic aim can also be written by fiction writers who do not also write religious non-fiction. This is for instance the case with Marion Zimmer Bradley's feminist Pagan *The Mists of Avalon* (1983) (cf. Pike 2004a, 125-127; Harvey 2007, 72-73) and George Lucas' light synthesis of Buddhism and Christianity in *Star Wars* (esp. 1980) (cf. Davidsen 2014). Within the category of religious-didactic fiction, the quality and style varies from first-person, discursive, and overly didactic works (e.g. Redfield, Bates) to third-person, narrative, and only implicitly didactic works (e.g. Paxson, Lucas). Religious-didactic fiction is a relevant category in the study of fiction-based religion, because such fiction – and George Lucas' *Star Wars* movies are good examples – naturally include more religious affordances than other types of fiction and hence can serve more easily as foundational texts for fiction-based religion. It must be stated, though, that fiction-based religions based on religious-didactic fiction (such as Jediism) use fiction in ways unforeseen and unintended by the author. Also, many fiction-based religions are based on speculative fiction without a religious-didactic aim.

2.3. Theosophy as a Case Study of Fiction-inspired Religion

Possamai argues that his two *types* of hyper-real religions correspond to two *generations* of hyper-real religions emerging respectively in the 1950s and the 1990s (2009a, 89-91). Possamai is right that something new happened in the 1990s, namely the emergence of *fiction-based* religions *sensu stricto*. He is not right, however, to state that the first religions using fiction emerged only in the 1950s. Those *fiction-inspired* religions that emerged in the 1950s and which Possamai sees as the very first hyper-real religions, namely Scientology and Neo-Paganism, share their fiction-inspired character with much older move-

ments of Scientology's official mythology, especially the controversial Xenu story, can be seen as the religious culmination of L. Ron Hubbard's science fiction writings (2009, esp. 371-377).

[111] Gardner himself said that he had been forced to mask his teachings as fiction because the British Witchcraft Act was still in force in 1949, prohibiting the practice of witchcraft (e.g. 1959, 3). Some Pagan scholars believe this (e.g. Pearson 2006, 830), but since the act was no actual threat in the 1940s, James Lewis has argued that Gardner used it merely as an excuse for not revealing his sources (2007a, 482).

ments. Indeed, the origin of fiction-inspired religion can be traced back at least to the Theosophical Society, whose 'founding mother' Helena Blavatsky borrowed ideas from Edward Bulwer-Lytton's fiction and built them into official theosophical doctrine.[112] The following brief discussion of theosophy as a fiction-inspired religion is intended both to demonstrate that fiction-inspired religion is older than Possamai claims and, more importantly, to suggest that it is quite normal for new religions to draw on fiction. Not only marginal online groups do that. Also a 'respectable' book such as Blavatsky's *The Secret Doctrine* drew inspiration from the fiction of the day.

In 1871, Bulwer-Lytton published the novel *The Coming Race* in which a first-person narrator descends into a mine to investigate a mysterious light. Soon, our hero becomes trapped in a subterranean world inhabited by the Vril-ya, an advanced race of Atlantean survivors who still possess the antediluvian knowledge of a magico-scientific energy source called vril.[113] He befriends the Vril-ya and learns their language, and most of the book is a discursive account of the vril-powered science of the Vril-ya and of their customs which include vegetarianism and equality between the sexes. The society of the Vril-ya is in many ways utopian, though contemporary readers will frown upon the Vril-ya's sense of racial superiority over those barbarian subterraneans who do not use vril. Of vril, the narrator states the following:

> These subterranean philosophers assert that, by one operation of vril, which Faraday would perhaps call 'atmospheric magnetism,' they can influence the variations of temperature – in plain words, the weather; that by other operations, akin to those ascribed to mesmerism, electro-biology, odic force, &c., but applied scientifically through vril conductors, they can exercise influence over minds, and bodies animal and vegetable, to an extent not surpassed in the romances of our mystics (Bulwer-Lytton 1871, ch. 7).

Bulwer-Lytton's readers responded differently to the fantastic elements in his novel. One group of readers considered the fantastic content as signposts of fictionality and categorised it with Jules Verne's *Voyage au centre de la Terre* (1864). The seemingly autobiographical narrator and the very discursive style (including references to natural and occult science and scientists), however, led others to read the book as more than just fiction. I do not know whether there were hollow earth believers who mistook the book *in toto* for a non-fictional traveller's tale, but it is well-documented that leading theosophists, including Madame Blavatsky and William Scott-Elliot, adopted concepts and ideas from *The Coming Race* and from other of Bulwer-Lytton's novels (Liljegren 1957; Crow 2012a; 2012b; Strube 2013, 65-71). From *The Coming Race*, Blavatsky lifted notions of race and especially related the concept of vril (which had already been taken up by Louis

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[112] If another decade besides the 1990s deserves to be pointed out, it is the 1960s rather than the 1950s. In the 1960s, we see the first *fiction-integrating* religions, namely the Church of the All Worlds and the Church of Satan.

[113] In later editions the title of the novel was changed to *Vril: The Power of the Coming Race*.

Jacolliot) to other ideas about a universal force (Crow 2012b). In one place in *The Secret Doctrine*, Blavatsky writes,

> [What Mr. Keely] has unconsciously discovered is the terrible sidereal Force, known to, and named by the Atlanteans MASH-MAK, and by the Āryan Ṛishis in their *Astra-Vidyā* by a name that we do not like to give. It is the *vril* of Bulwer-Lytton's *Coming Race*, and of the coming races of our mankind. The name *vril* may be a fiction; the Force itself is a fact doubted as little in India as the existence itself of their Ṛishis, since it is mentioned in all the secret works (1888, 563).[114]

As John Crow has documented, the notion of a separable mental body, the *scin lecca*,[115] which Bulwer-Lytton explores in *A Strange Story* (1862), furthermore served as the base for the theosophical concept of the astral body, while Bulwer-Lytton's *Zanoni* (1842) provided Blavatsky with a model for the occult master (Crow 2012a, 694, 709-710).[116]

An additional indication of Blavatsky's inspiration from Bulwer-Lytton is her frequent use of his works for chapter epigraphs, including the three very first chapters in *Isis Unveiled* (1877, 1, 39, 73). Significantly, in two of these three cases Blavatsky does not quote Bulwer-Lytton himself, but his fictional master Zanoni. It seems that just as contemporary Jediists quote Master Yoda and bracket George Lucas (Davidsen 2011b), Blavatsky considered Zanoni rather than Bulwer-Lytton to be her spiritual teacher. Matters are more complex than that, however, for while Blavatsky was certainly fascinated by the fictional character Zanoni, she just as surely admired his creator. Blavatsky even claimed in *Isis Unveiled* that Bulwer-Lytton's fiction "sounds more like the faithful echo of memory than the exuberant outflow of mere imagination" (1871, 285). She thus implied that Bulwer-Lytton might have been divinely inspired, and in an article from 1884 she made the allusion that the Mahatmas considered him one of their own (Strube 2013, 65). These claims are intriguing, for the real Bulwer-Lytton was no spiritual master, nor did he claim to receive revelations. When Blavatsky speaks of Bulwer-Lytton as a Mahatma, she is thus not speaking of Bulwer-Lytton himself, but is rather projecting her own ideal of the occult master upon him. This ideal does not arise out of thin air, however, but is itself dependent on Zanoni, Bulwer-Lytton's character who certainly *is* a spiritual master with unusual powers. It seems to me that by projecting Zanoni's character and powers onto Bulwer-Lytton, Blavatsky implicitly confesses what was already appa-

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[114] A similar passage is found already in *Isis Unveiled* (Blavatsky 1877, 125-126). In *The Story of Atlantis*, Scott-Elliot identified the Atlanteans' magico-scientific force, "the operation of which [Bulwer-Lytton] has fairly accurately described in his Coming Race", as vril (1896, 46; also 53, 56).

[115] *Scin lecca* is Anglo-Saxon for shining body.

[116] For a detailed treatment of the occult ideas in *Zanoni*, see Godwin (1994, 124-128).

rent from her epigraph quotations, namely that ultimately Zanoni (rather than Bulwer-Lytton) was her actual role model.[117]

Later theosophists further developed Blavatsky's suggestions that real occult knowledge and experience was the basis of Bulwer-Lytton's fiction. For instance, the theosophist C. Nelson Stewart claimed that Bulwer-Lytton was not only an adept occultist, but that two of his novels, *Zicci* and *A Strange Story*, were based on dreams of a sort which "we should now call "astral experiences"" (Stewart 1927, 17). In other words, these books were based on a kind of revelation. Today, occultists such as Alec Maclellan continue to insist that vril is real and that it is only understandable that Bulwer-Lytton used a fictional frame to introduce vril to the public without revealing all its secrets (1982, 172, 183; cf. Barkun 2003, 32). Though occultism and mesmerism clearly inspired Bulwer-Lytton's novels, academics are cautious about declaring him a convinced occultist. They rather tend to treat such claims as legitimisation strategies that justify the incorporation of fictional elements from his novels into serious occult doctrine (e.g. Godwin 1994, 123, 129-130, 193-196; Crow 2012c; Strube 2013, 55-64).

Through Blavatsky, vril achieved long-lasting occult legitimacy as a viable term for the one energy that unites all forces of nature and spirit, and the term continues to be part of the occultural lexicon. The notion of vril also became incorporated into a conspiracy theory about the Nazis (e.g. Maclellan 1982, chs. 7 and 11), and in a colourful variant of this theory – which involves an SS-led space ship programme in Tibet and an underground base in Antarctica – the Nazis succeeded in fleeing to the backside of the Moon. This conspiracy theory is the base of Timo Vuorensola's recent movie *Iron Sky* (2012) in which the Nazis invade earth from their hidden moon base. Vril is still a powerful symbol in esoteric neo-Nazism, especially in Germany (Strube 2012; 2013).

Blavatsky's use of Bulwer-Lytton's fiction constitutes a clear example of fiction-inspired religion, dating as early as the 1870s and 1880s. But what are the implications of this fact? In any case, it forces us to push the beginnings of fiction-inspired religion back some 80 years compared to Possamai's earliest cases.[118] It might also be that our observa-

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[117] This gives us a hint about one of the ways in which fiction can be religiously persuading. Embedded discourse, especially the discourse of authoritative characters, is easily ascribed reference authority, while the narrative frame, including the very existence of the authoritative characters themselves, is taken to be fictional. This is because breaks in a fictional text between a narrative level and a level of embedded discourse can prompt a switch from a fictional to a referential mode of reading.

[118] Arguably, we should seek the starting point of fiction-inspired religion even earlier. As Thomas M. Disch has convincingly shown, Edgar Allan Poe's short story "Mesmeric Revelation" from 1844 provided the rationale for spiritualism, which took off with the Fox Sisters hoax in 1849, one year after Poe's death (Poe 1846; Disch 1998, ch. 2, esp. 54). Disch does not demonstrate that the Fox sisters had actually read Poe's story, but it is very possible that they had, for Poe was hugely popular in America at the time. According to Disch, the Fox sisters "turned Poe's theory into practice" (1998, 54), and even if this is an overstatement, it is clear that Poe's fiction (and that of other writers) included and dispersed spiritualist ideas. For that reason, the spiritualist movement was clearly fiction-inspired in the sense of being 'inspired and supported by fiction'.

tion of an early case of fiction-inspired religion has more wide-ranging implications. We can hypothesise, at least, that it is the rule rather than the exception that new, post-traditional religions are inspired by contemporary fiction, especially in their formative phase. In other words, it might be that post-traditional religion *as such* is fiction-inspired, though it is not necessarily fiction-integrating or fiction-based.

It is still a good question whether the religious adoption of fictional ideas is a phenomenon restricted to the last 150 years of post-traditional religious history or whether it is a phenomenon of all times and places. We know that all cultures distinguish between narratives that are taken to be referential and narratives that are taken to be fictional (Bascom 1965; Whitehouse 2004a, 50-51). It might therefore be that the transfer of ideas across this border, including transfers from fiction (or, in earlier times, from folktales) to religion and back again, are as common and natural as the border itself. Even if this is the case, however, I do not think that it is a coincidence that fiction-inspired religions *that explicitly compare their own teachings to fictional concepts* arose only in the second half of the nineteenth century. There are two reasons for this timing.

One reason is that the post-traditional religions that emerged from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards have encouraged religious blending, especially by claiming that similar notions from different religious traditions in reality referred to the same phenomenon. This process of synonymisation, which will be discussed in chapter 4, is exemplified by the Blavatsky quote above in which she identifies various forces as mere names for the one universal force. When such a distinction is made between the one real entity and the many names under which this entity is known, it becomes possible to use also fictional concepts (such as vril) to refer to allegedly real thing.

Equally important for the emergence of explicitly fiction-inspired religion was the appearance in the mid-nineteenth century of the New Romance, a fictional genre that lent itself particularly well to a referential reading and included many religious affordances. Michael Saler describes the New Romance, to which *The Coming Race* belongs, as a fictional genre of "fantastic tales in the guise of scientific naturalism" (2004, 142). According to Saler, the New Romance expressed a new "ironic imagination" which shared with the romantic imagination a fascination with the occult and the supernatural, but which in contrast to the romantic imagination maintained the rational conviction that occultism was humbug. Even though New Romance authors were only playing, the sheer realism of the supernatural in their novels and their extensive use of paratextual appurtenances such as fold-out maps and notes made their works useful as religious resources.[119] For readers with a romantic imagination, the New Romance could work as a source of inspiration (as in the case of Blavatsky) and as a plausibility structure that confirmed already held beliefs. According to Saler, some readers even overlooked the fictional

[119] Tolkien's appendices and his tongue-in-cheek claim to have published a *manuscrit trouvé* (cf. ch. 7) are indebted to the paratextual tradition of the New Romance.

premise of the New Romance, mistaking the books *in toto* as non-fiction and becoming "naïve believers".

It seems possible to conclude, then, that transfers of ideas between fiction and religion are possible and have probably taken place in all cultures, but that the explicit inspiration from fiction and the integration of fictional elements into new religions is primarily a feature of post-traditional religion and hence largely a post-1850 phenomenon. Also, three phases in the development of fiction-based religion can be distinguished, with explicitly fiction-inspired religion emerging in the second half of the 19th century, fiction-integrating religion in the 1960s, and fiction-based religion in the 1990s. Furthermore, it is clear that narratives that thematise supernatural issues are usable as sources for religion, *regardless* of whether these texts consciously aim to convey a religious message (religious-didactic fiction) or approach the supernatural with an ironical imagination (the New Romance and its contemporary fantasy and science fiction heirs). In the next chapter, I look in detail at the traits in these kinds of fiction which make them usable as religious resources.

So far, I have laid out my overall approach to the study of religion, identified the post-traditional religious field as the immediate cultural context for Tolkien spirituality, and discussed fiction-based religion as a form of post-traditional religion. With the general theoretical and socio-cultural frame in place, it is now time to develop my analytical method in more detail, focusing on the issues of religious affordances, religious blending, and rationalisation. In the three following chapters I shall be concerned with these issues in turn. In chapter 3, I develop a typology of religious affordances which texts (including fictional narratives) can possess. In chapter 4, I identify a number of types and processes of religious blending. In chapter 5, I discuss the dynamics of belief in religious traditions, focusing especially on processes of rationalisation through which religious beliefs are evaluated and elucidated, and on processes of justification through which the plausibility of religious beliefs is protected.

Chapter 3. The Religious Affordances of Fictional Narratives

Tolkien's literary mythology constitutes a corpus of fictional narratives. His stories fall under the category of fiction, rather than history, because they are literary narratives which are not intended by their author to refer to events which have taken place in the actual world prior to being entextualised. Instead they project a fictional world of their own (cf. section 2.1.2 above). But if Tolkien's narratives are fictional, why then do some readers treat them as religious narratives? There must be certain semiotic elements in Tolkien's narratives, elements which not all fictional texts share, that make a religionising reading possible. I refer to these elements as the *religious affordances* of Tolkien's literary mythology. I explore the religious affordances of *H* and *LR* in chapter 7 and those of *S* in chapter 9. In section 14.1, I analyse the religious affordances of Peter Jackson's movies, and those of *HoMe* are treated in chapter 15.

In this chapter, I introduce the very notion of religious affordances in some detail, proceeding in two steps. First, I draw on text-centred *semiotic* and reader-centred *reader-response* approaches to offer some general comments on the process of semiosis by which text and reader co-constitute the interpretation of a given text. I also suggest that the dynamic relation between text and reader can better be conceptualised by applying James Gibson's concept of "affordances" (1979) to the study of texts. As a second step, I coin the notion of "religious affordances" to refer to those traits in a narrative which promote a reading of it as a religious text. I identify four types of religious affordances, namely fantastic elements, narrative religion, thematisation of the text's veracity, divine source claims. I further demonstrate that some of these religious affordances can be found also in fictional narratives, and that others can be attributed to fictional narratives by paratexts or be promoted by intertexts. In other words, some fictional narratives include a sub-dominant potential for religious interpretation which is not salient enough to force itself on a reader, but which can be activated by readers who are both emotionally attached to the narratives and believe in the reality of such supernatural features (gods, magic, etc.) which are presented as real within the fictional world. The concept of religious affordances makes it possible to theorise (and predict) why some fictional texts are more likely than others to be used as authoritative texts for religious activity without having to abandon the distinction between fictional and religious narratives.

3.1. Textual Affordances and the Semiosic Process of Reading

Literary scholars agree that reading takes the form of a meaning-constituting process which requires the co-presence of a text and a reader.[120] Umberto Eco refers to this process as "semiosic" or "semantic" interpretation (1990, 54). It is *interpretation* because it results from the reader's processing of the text, and *semantic* because the reader engages with the semantics or inherent meaning of the text (Eco 1990, 54). However, if literary scholars agree that both text and reader play a role in the interpretation process, they disagree fervently about the conclusions to be drawn from this fundamental fact.

For some reader-response theorists it implies that texts do not contain meaning in themselves prior to a reader's interpretive engagement with them. Stanley Fish, who is probably the most well-known reader-response critic, has even argued that we should no longer speak of texts if by a text we mean "an entity which always remains the same from one moment to the next" (1980, vii). The 'texts' which are the object of literary studies from a reader-response respective are not the lines of letters on paper which we usually refer to as texts (and which Eco calls "Linear Text Manifestations"; 1990, 54), but those 'texts' which Wolfgang Iser refers to as 'virtual texts' (1976), namely the products of the semiosic and interpretive process. This does not mean that the interpretation of texts is completely random according to Fish. The "structure of meaning" which is produced through reading is namely always created "from the perspective of [a particular set of] interpretive assumptions" (Fish 1980, vii). Readers have acquired these assumptions by being socialised into an "interpretive community" (Fish 1980, ch. 6). Fish acknowledges that the text itself contributes to the construction of meaning, but maintains that we can never determine the inherent meaning of the text itself, hindered as we are by our own interpretive conventions and assumptions.

Eco grants that the situation sketched by Fish applies in most cases, namely when literature is read by casual readers whose engagement with the text takes the form of pre-theoretical and unreflective, semantic interpretation.[121] He insists, however, that it is possible for critical readers who are informed by semiotic theory, and who systematically test their interpretations against the text, to reconstruct or at least approximate the meaning(s) of the text itself. This reflective and theoretical exercise, which Eco calls "critical interpretation" (or "semiotic interpretation") is an entirely different way of approaching the text, a "metalinguistic activity – a semiotic approach –

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[120] "Context" is sometimes added as a third factor, but that would make the discussion at hand unnecessarily complicated. When I say that the reader co-determines the reading, I refer not only to the very presence of a person who can actualise (one of) the meaning(s) of the text, but also to one who brings his or her knowledge, experience, and expectations, a *semiotic context* in other words, to bear on the text.

[121] Eco defines the "semantic interpretation" (or "semiosic interpretation") of casual readers as "the result of the process by which an addressee, facing a Linear Text Manifestation, fills it up with a given meaning" (1990, 54).

which aims at describing and explaining for which formal reasons a given text produces a given response" (Eco 1990, 54).[122]

My analysis of Tolkien's literary mythology seeks to combine insights from Eco and Fish. On the one hand and inspired by Eco, my own approach is a form of critical interpretation of Tolkien's texts aimed at describing and explaining the formal reasons why they are able to produce certain responses, *in casu* a fictionalising and a religionising reading.[123] On the other hand, I am particularly interested in the formal reasons why Tolkien's narratives produce a variant response (the religionising reading) *in a certain group of readers* who are typically already active in the cultic milieu and hence might be said to constitute an interpretive community in Fish' sense. Not all religionists in the cultic milieu are inclined to read Tolkien religiously, however, so it seems that belonging to the cultic milieu is only a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition for adopting the religionising mode. The best way of explaining this is to say that Tolkien's literary mythology offers two principal reading modes or sets of 'textual affordances', namely *fictional affordances* which are dominant and promote a reading of the text as fictional, and *religious affordances* which are sub-dominant and promote a religious reading of the text. That the text possesses religious affordances at all explains why it *can* be read religiously. The fact that the religious affordances are dominated, so to speak, by the fictional affordances, explains why only a few follow this interpretive option. In other words, Tolkien's literary mythology not only affords an interpretation as fiction for readers in general. For religionists within the cultic milieu it affords *both* an interpretation as fiction *and* one as a religious narrative.

I borrow the concept of affordances from the ecological psychologist James Gibson. Gibson argued that objects in the environment possess particular "affordances" that present themselves as "action possibilities" for animals and humans (1979, ch. 8). Hollow trees, for instance, afford 'living-in' for certain animals. Going beyond Gibson, we can add that also human-made artefacts have affordances.[124] Some of these artefact affordances are a function of the designer's intention, but not all. Chairs, for instance, afford

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[122] Borrowing from Richard Rorty, Eco further distinguishes the two forms of interpretation from what he calls the "use" of a text. While interpretation, whether semantic or critical, engages with the semantics of the text, use, in Eco's technical sense, has a purpose that lies outside the text itself. Lighting one's pipe with a page from the Bible is an example of use. Readings that use the text to infer something about text-external states of affairs are also uses for Eco, for instance the attempt to reconstruct the personality of the author from a reading of his or her text (1990, 57).

[123] I will adopt Eco's general approach, but not use his particular theoretical apparatus in my analysis of Tolkien's narratives. Where relevant, I will draw on other semioticians, including Gérard Genette (1980; 1997a; 1997b), Algirdas Julien Greimas (cf. Courtés and Greimas 1988), and Ole Davidsen (1993), as well as on the fiction theorists Dorrit Cohn and Marie-Laure Ryan who were introduced in chapter 2.

[124] The concept of affordances has recently been applied to the study of material culture (e.g. Dant 2005, ch. 4; Woodward 2007; Knappett 2005) and it has inspired the analysis of human-artefact interaction in actor-network-theory (Latour 2005; Law 2009).

'sitting-on', but also 'standing-on', 'throwing-with' and so on. I argue that the same is true of texts. Analogous to the chair example, texts tend to afford both an 'intended interpretation' (analogous to 'sitting-on' the chair) and a range of unintended, but possible interpretations (analogous to 'standing-on' and 'throwing-with' the chair). One strength of Gibson's notion of affordances is that it emphasises that the same natural object or human-made artefact can simultaneously offer more than one action possibility to actors, even when one is most likely to occur and/or when one action possibility is intended.[125] While Gibson is interested in *action possibilities* offered by objects, his insight is easily transferred to texts and other signs which afford various *interpretation possibilities* or 'semiotic affordances'. What I refer to as textual affordances are simply the semiotic affordances of texts. As already mentioned, I further speak of those semiotic elements in a text which make a fictional respectively a religious reading possible as fictionalising and religious affordances.

It is important to emphasise that fictionalising affordances and what Dorrit Cohn calls "signposts of fictionality" (1999, viii, ch. 7) *are not the same*. Cohn's signposts of fictionality point *back* towards the author. They are elements in the text which a careful reader can use to determine whether the text *in itself* is fiction or not, based on a reconstruction of the author's intention. By contrast, textual affordances, including fictionalising and religious affordances, point *forward* towards the reader. They are elements in the text which make a particular reading possible, regardless of the author's intention. The same textual elements can serve both as signposts of fictionality (or non-fictionality) *and* afford various interpretations for readers. Consider for instance the occurrence in Tolkien's literary mythology of Elves and Wizards and playful statements about the historicity of the text. These semiotic elements are signposts of fictionality and at the same time afford both an intended reading as through-and-through fiction and an unintended reading as a fictional story about real supernatural entities.

3.2. Four Types of Religious Affordances

We can hypothesise that fictional narratives are usable as religious texts in so far as they possess some of the religious affordances which characterise religious narratives proper. In order to be able to discern the religious affordances of fictional texts, it is therefore necessary to first look at those textual traits that scholars of religion consider constitutive

[125] There is another aspect of the affordance concept which is equally important in Gibson's work, but unimportant for us. That is Gibson's insistence that affordances are relative not only to the physical qualities of an object in the environment, but also to the physical-functional qualities of a perceiving animal (or human actor). Affordances are thus not features of the environment itself, but of the environment-animal relation. Water, for instance, affords 'walking on' for certain insects, but not for elephants. Tolkien's literary mythology does not afford 'reading' for insects and elephants, but only for humans who can process the language in which it is written, but that is irrelevant for the purpose of this thesis.

of religious narratives. I draw here on the work of the Scandinavian scholars of religion Ole Davidsen (2005a; 2005b), Torsten Pettersson (2005), and Anders Klostergaard Petersen (2005) who have identified three textual features that promote a religious reading and who argue that texts with a high concentration of such traits can be referred to as religious texts.[126] One of these traits has to do with the *narrate*, i.e. the meaning content of the narrative, and two have to do with the mode of *narration*.

The criterion of what constitutes a religious narrative in terms of content is intimately linked to the definition of religion. Given my substantive definition of religion (cf. section 0.3.3 above), religious narratives should thus include references to supernatural agents and possibly to supernatural worlds and processes as well. In religious narratives we encounter agents and worlds (think of Zeus and Hera, and of Muhammad's journey to Heaven) which are supernatural from the point of view of the actual world, but real within the narrative world.[127] Also fiction can include references to supernatural agents, worlds, and processes on the narrate level, however, so clearly this substantive criterion is not enough to demarcate religious narratives from other narratives. It is necessary, therefore, to look also at the mode of narration.

One fundamental feature of the narration in religious narratives is the text's claim to speak about the actual world rather than about a fictional world.[128] In Torsten Pettersson's words, the religious narrative has 'reference ambition', i.e. it 'claims to communicate the truth about the actual world, 'truth' here referring to a postulated correspondence between the textual discourse and the subject matter it refers to' (2005, 219).[129] Ole Davidsen formulates the difference between fiction and religious texts in a similar way when he writes that

> *[w]here fiction stays within its own world which the reader has to transport himself to, [religious literature] intrudes into the life-world of the reader*. Fiction *speaks about* the world of the reader, but only indirectly. It tells of a fictional world which the reader can use as a mirror for his own world. The religious text does not only speak about, but *blends into*, its reader's world (2005b, 397-398; emphasis in original).[130]

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[126] When quoting these authors, I have translated the original Danish and Swedish into English.

[127] I do not mention impersonal powers here, since these rarely feature in narratives (unless in personified form), but rather belong to the province of discursive theology.

[128] It follows from this that the responsibility for the speech act of 'claiming truth' resides with the text's author rather than with a narrator. This is even the case with ancient religious texts whose author is unknown.

[129] Fictional texts lack reference ambition, though they can have the ambition to convey representative truths about what is true in general, for instance of certain types of people or situations (Pettersson 2005, 221). Pettersson contrasts the reference ambition (or representativity ambition) of the text with the reference authority (or representativity authority) which is ascribed to the text by its reader (2005, 221).

[130] See also Davidsen (1993, 7-8).

Taken together with the substantive criterion above, a definition of religious narratives now emerges according to which religious narratives are *narratives which claim to tell of the actions of supernatural agents in the actual world*.

A second trait on the level of narration is furthermore used by Anders Klostergaard Petersen to differentiate a *specific type* of religious texts, namely the so-called 'holy texts', from religious texts in general (2005, 429). For Petersen, holy texts constitute a type of particularly central religious texts which not only claim to tell the truth *about* the supernatural, but also claim to *stem from* a supernatural source. This is most pronounced in texts which claim to be directly revealed or indirectly inspired by a divine source. In Ole Davidsen's terms, such texts claim that a 'discursive determinator' stands behind the human author as the text's ultimate addressor (2005b, 390, 397-398).

We can distinguish so far between three types of religious affordances that characterise religious narratives in general – or holy texts in particular – and which all promote a religious interpretation. On the narrate level, religious narratives include (1) *fantastic elements*[131] (especially agents; also worlds and processes) which are real within the narrative, but supernatural from the perspective of the actual world. On the level of narration, religious narratives (2) thematise and assert their own *veracity*, and (3) sometimes claim to stem from a *divine source*. Since it is important to be able to distinguish between religious narratives and holy narratives, I consider the claim to stem from a divine source to be an independent type of religious affordances, though it strictly speaking only constitutes a sub-set of the religious affordances 'thematisation and assertion of veracity'.

If we think of religious narratives not only as expressions of a religious worldview, but also as texts which can (and are often made to) inspire religious practice to be modelled upon them, it becomes necessary to add a fourth type of religious affordances to the three we already have. On the narrate level, religious narratives often include what I will term *narrative religion*, i.e. more or less organised systems of practices directed at supernatural agents who are considered divine within the narrative world, together with information given in the narrative about these agents, their actions, and their projects. The core of narrative religion is constituted by religious practice engaged in by the characters of the narrative and instructions by authoritative characters on how to do so. Prometheus' institution of sacrifice to the gods in Hesiod's *Theogony* (actual practice) and Jesus' lesson to the disciples on how to pray in Luke 11:1-4 (instruction) are examples of this. The function of narrative religious practices is to provide the text's readers with a model for their own religious practice in the actual world. Also other information about the

[131] I use the term 'fantastic' in this thesis to denote something which is (a) impossible in the actual world, but (b) evidently real within the narrated world. This is one of two uses of the term, the other being associated with Tzvetan Todorov (1975), for whom 'the fantastic' refers to those *seemingly* supernatural events whose status as natural or supernatural remains uncertain within the narrative world. Todorov refers to that which is supernatural from the perspective of the actual world, yet unequivocally real within the narrative world, as either the "marvellous" (if it is benign) or the "uncanny" (if it is malign).

divine beings (theology), about the actions of the divine beings (such as the creation of the world), and about their projects (soteriology; eschatology), fall under narrative religion. The function of these parts of the narrative religion is to demonstrate why it is worthwhile to engage in a relationship with the divine agent(s).[132] Analogous to the divine source claim being really a sub-type of 'thematisation and assertion of veracity', narrative religion is strictly speaking a sub-type of fantastic elements. Given that communication with and about supernatural agents constitutes the core of living religions, it is nevertheless warranted to single out communication with and about supernatural agents within narrative worlds (narrative religion) as a distinct type of religious affordances.

Now the questions are: to what extent can fictional narratives in general possess these four types of religious affordances? And does Tolkien's literary mythology actually do so? Let us first consider the two religious affordances on the narrate level, fantastic elements and narrative religion. Speculative fiction, especially fantasy and science fiction, per definition includes fantastic elements. That is true also for Tolkien's literary mythology: both *LR* and *S* swell with non-human beings, magic, otherworlds, visions, and so on. In many cases, speculative fiction also includes narrative religion. That is the case when it includes beings who are regarded as divine within the narrative world and to whom ritual practices are directed by the characters of the narrative. Tolkien's literary mythology includes some narrative religion in this sense, for it includes several deities (Eru and the Valar) and beliefs associated with them, though it has few rituals and no religious institutions. The main narrative of *LR* includes a few descriptions of rituals directed at the Valar, and the appendices provide some information about the Elven ritual calendar. *S* contains no narrative religious practices, but includes extensive information on the topics of theology, cosmology, and eschatology. To take another example, we also have bits of narrative religion in *Star Wars*. For example, Obi-Wan Kenobi tells Luke Skywalker about the Force, Master Yoda instructs Luke how to 'use the Force', Darth Vader meditates in his Meditation Egg, and the rebels greet each other 'May the Force be With You'.[133]

Speculative fiction does not assert its own veracity regarding the supernatural beings it tells about, nor does it claim to be divinely inspired. Indeed, if a narrative did one of those two things, it would not be fiction at all, but would instead be a religious (and possibly even a holy) narrative. Nevertheless, some works of fiction indirectly or ambi-

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[132] Petersen similarly points out that religious texts share the substantial feature of 'representing or manifesting systems of meaning which include transempirical powers situated in a world different from the immediately accessible' (2005, 417). He does not, however, emphasise the importance of narrated religious practices in the way that I do.

[133] Within the textual worlds projected by most cases of speculative fiction (and certainly within Tolkien's Arda), it makes no sense to consider those beings who are most powerful and non-ordinary (such as the Valar or the Force) to be 'supernatural', for within such fictional worlds (just as in the textual worlds projected by religious texts) the gods *really exist* and are not merely *believed to exist*.

guously thematise their own veracity, and *LR* is one them. In the prologue to *LR*, a frame narrative connects the narrative events to the reader's world, and a voice, either a fictional narrator or Tolkien the author, claims that the text which follows is ancient history. The referential reading of the text which is hereby made possible is further supported by the frequent assertion by authoritative characters that there is a true historical core in all myths and folktales.[134]

Paratextual and intertextual sources can promote the ascription of veracity to fictional texts and even ascribe divine authorship to them. In the case of Tolkien's literary mythology, Tolkien's prefaces to *H* and *LR* constitute *paratexts* which support the ploy of feigned history established in the narrative itself.[135] Also Tolkien's letters (*Letters*) provide information about the author's intentions on how to read the narratives.[136] The letters are interesting, because Tolkien in some of them professes to have felt inspired during the writing process, statements which afford the reading of his text as ultimately stemming from a divine determinator. Tolkien's narratives can furthermore be ascribed (indirect) religious veracity because of their *intertextual* relation to those German, Celtic, Biblical, and other mythologies from which Tolkien drew inspiration.[137] Readers who consider (some of) Tolkien's sources to have religious reference authority are more likely to attribute such authority also to Tolkien's literary mythology. This goes for both readers with a Neo-Pagan and a Christian background.

In my analysis of the religious affordances of Tolkien's literary mythology I will look for the four types of religious affordances outlined above in the narratives themselves and in the prefaces and letters. My approach is to list those traits in Tolkien's narratives which characterise religious texts in general, but it is ultimately an empirical

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[134] I analyse this playful imitation of history in greater detail in section 7.3 below.

[135] In Gérard Genette's terminology, the 'paratext' refers to all the auxiliary texts around the main text. The category includes not only the authorial preface, but also the book cover and notes from the publisher (Genette 1997a, 3). The function of the paratext is to make it clear to the reader how to read the main text (Genette 1997b). On the back cover of the 50-years anniversary edition of *LR*, for instance, a review from the *Sunday Telegraph* is quoted, referring to the book as one "among the greatest works of *imaginative fiction* of the twentieth century" (emphasis added). That is a patent paratextual deixis of the text's fictional character, i.e. a paratextual fictional affordance. As I point out in section 7.3 below, however, Tolkien's authorial prefaces, especially the one to the first edition of *LR*, can be read as prescribing a referential reading of the narrative.

[136] Though the letters can be read as authorial prefaces and hence serve the same function as the paratext, they are strictly speaking (in Genette's terminology) *metatexts*, i.e. texts which comment or reflect on other texts that they have not been published together with (Genette 1997a, 4).

[137] I use Mikael Bakhtin's term intertextuality here since it is the better known term. For Genette, whose terminology I otherwise follow, intertextuality refers narrowly to the citation of (or allusion to) particular hypotexts. Genette would characterise the transtextual (his general term) relation between Tolkien's literary mythology (especially *S*) and the mythologies which inspired Tolkien as one of *architextuality* (i.e. dependence on mythology as genre) and *hypertextuality* (i.e. obvious, but implicit dependence on particular other texts) (Genette 1997a, 4-6).

question which of these religious affordances are actualised in the religious activity of Tolkien religionists. It might be that some of the traits which I here hypothesise to promote a religious interpretation of fictional narratives are absolutely necessary, while others are optional. This question, which requires a comparison of the hypothesised religious affordances of Tolkien's literary mythology with the actual use of this text corpus in the spiritual Tolkien milieu, will be considered along the way and treated systematically in the conclusion.

Chapter 4. Religious Blending in Fiction-based Religion

Religious blending, i.e. *the recombination of elements of religious belief and practice from different traditions*, is a crucial issue for any study of fiction-based religion. That is so because fiction lacks some of those religious affordances which religious narratives naturally possess, or possesses them only in small measure. In contrast to religious narratives, fiction never claims to stem from a divine source nor to be historically accurate, though fictional narratives can thematise their veracity in more indirect ways. In addition, while fictional narratives can include narrative religion, they rarely include it in the same measure and in the same explicit way as religious narratives do. That is to say that for a fictional text to serve as basis for actual religious activity, it is *necessary* for it to include religious affordances. But usually the religious affordances of the fictional text are not *sufficient* for a viable fiction-based religion to emerge. For this to happen, elements from the authoritative fictional text must necessarily be blended with and reinforced by building-blocks from established forms of religion. We see this dynamic in the case of religion based on Tolkien's literary mythology. Tolkien's narratives do not refer to the actual world and the implicit thematisation of the text's veracity must therefore be reinforced by linking Tolkien's narratives to religious traditions that unequivocally claim to speak about the actual world. Furthermore, the relative lack of rituals in Tolkien's literary mythology must be remedied by borrowing ritual formats from established religions that can then be filled with Tolkien content.

It would have been easy to study blending processes such as those sketched above if a general theory of religious blending had been available. Since no such theory exists, I will do the second-best thing and use this chapter to assemble a preliminary toolkit for the analysis of religious blending in fiction-based religion and in religion in general. To do so, I draw on earlier work on bricolage and syncretism by anthropologists and historians of religion, and on work on conceptual integration by cognitive linguists. I adopt the notions syncretism and bricolage as analytical terms, but as pointed out in section 0.3.1 above, I hereby do not imply that syncretic religion can be opposed to religion that is pure and unblended.

This chapter comprises two sections. In the first section, I discuss a number of useful distinctions between types of religious blending. I begin by making a basic distinction between *bricolage*, which I take to denote religious blending by individuals, and *syncretism*, which I use to refer to religious blending on the level of traditions. After that I move on to distinguish between various types of bricolage according to the degree of integration, and between various types of syncretism according to scope and permanency.

Syncretism, as a process involving entire religious traditions, can be broken down into semiotic processes on a lower, conceptual level, i.e. into processes through which religious concepts are fused, transferred, or altered. In the second section, I look at religious blending on this conceptual level. Drawing on earlier scholarship on syncretism, I distinguish between *transfers* of a concept from one tradition to another and the identification of two concepts from different traditions with each other by means of *synonymisation*. In both cases a process of *domestication* takes place through which the involved concepts are changed. I argue that in order to understand the semiotic dimension of religious blending, we must analyse processes of domestication, or, broader, processes of religious *concept metamorphosis*. Moving beyond existing scholarship, I suggest distinguishing between two main forms of concept metamorphosis: *resemantisation* and *concept construction*. In the last half of section two I seek to demonstrate the advantages of employing Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner's theory of conceptual blending (2002) to analyse processes of religious concept metamorphosis.

4.1. Types of Religious Blending

The terms bricolage and syncretism are sometimes used as synonyms, but when a distinction is made between them, it is usually based on scale. *Bricolage* then refers to the micro-process by which individuals or small groups recombine and re-interpret religious elements, while *syncretism* refers to the macro-process by which traditions exchange elements and potentially fuse. Understood in this way, bricolage and syncretism are intimately connected, for syncretism can emerge, bottom-up, as a result of bricolage.

Besides denoting blending on the individual level, religious bricolage carries another connotation, related to power. The notion of religious bricolage refers specifically to those recombinations and reinterpretations of religious ideas and practices *that take place outside the control of religious authorities and elites*. As such, religious bricolage does not only stand in contrast to syncretism as micro-process to macro-process, but also represents the religious creativity of ordinary individuals in contrast to more systematic 'tradition management' orchestrated by religious authorities.

To get a better grip on the phenomenon of religious blending and to facilitate the analysis of Tolkien spirituality, it is useful to develop the distinction between bricolage and syncretism further. In the rest of this section on types of religious blending, I do so by drawing up a distinction between integrative and supplementary bricolage, and by developing a distinction between mixture, synthesis, assimilation, and inward acculturation as forms of syncretism.

4.1.1. Two Forms of Bricolage: Integrative and Supplementary

Scholars of contemporary religion are unanimous in pointing out that contemporary religionists increasingly put together their own individual religion from diverse bits and pieces, i.e. that they engage in *religious bricolage*. For instance, Thomas Luckmann has observed (1991) that religion increasingly takes the form of "private syncretism", Robert Wuthnow has argued that "growing numbers of Americans piece together their faith like a patchwork quilt" (1988, 2), and Ingvild Gilhus and Lisbeth Mikaelsson (2000) make reference to 'multi-religious actors' as opposed to religious actors who stick to one tradition and institution. Some scholars of religion have used culinary metaphors to describe individual choice and combination within and without religious institutions, making reference to "cafeteria religion" (Cowan 2005, 31) and "religion *à la carte*" as opposed to religion as a "set menu" (Bibby 1990, 62-85; Dobbelaere and Voyé 1990, 4).

In contrast to scholars of syncretism (whom I will discuss shortly), scholars of contemporary religious bricolage have not been interested in bricolage *patterns*. For instance, though we can observe that certain combinations (say, belief in Christ and reincarnation) are more common than others (say, belief in Vishnu and the resurrection of the flesh), we do not fully understand the social mechanisms and cognitive predispositions that produce these patterns. We also lack a systematic comparison of religious bricolage in blending-hostile tradition-bound contexts and blending-endorsing post-traditional contexts. Leaving these issues for a future theory of religious bricolage, let me here just make one crucial distinction between two types of bricolage, supplementary bricolage and integrative bricolage.

Supplementary bricolage is the parallel engagement by the same individual in religious activities that belong to different traditions *without* any attempt to synthesise the multiple engagements with each other. It makes no difference whether individuals are aware that they combine across tradition-borders or are ignorant about it; as long as they combine, but do not attempt to integrate their multiple engagements, we can speak of supplementary bricolage. Consider as example of supplementary bricolage the 20% of the regularly church-attending Belgian Catholics who believe in reincarnation (Dobbelaere and Voyé 1990, 4).

As soon as individuals seek to synthesise their various religious commitments with each other, they begin engaging in *integrative bricolage*. For instance, the supplementation of Christianity with reincarnation changes from supplementary to integrative bricolage when people seek to integrate reincarnation into Christian doctrine. One common way to do so is to claim that Jesus studied in India and Tibet during the 18 years between instructing the scribes (cf. Luke 2:41-52) and stepping forth as a messianic prophet, and that reincarnation was therefore part of Jesus' original teachings.[138]

[138] See Lewis (2003, ch. 3) and Hammer (2009) on the 'Jesus in India' tradition.

Most of the practices and beliefs that make up Tolkien-based religion are instances of integrative bricolage. In other words, they result from the merging of elements from Tolkien's literary mythology with practice or belief elements from existing religious traditions. For example, Middle-earth Pagans (ch. 14) use Wiccan rituals to contact the characters from the *LR* movies whom they believe to be images of the God and the Goddess. These rituals merge elements from Tolkien's literary mythology (characters such as Gandalf and Galadriel) and elements from Wicca (circle-casting, duotheism). To take another example, many Tolkien religionists believe that the destruction of Númenor is a reference to the sinking of Atlantis and use this 'obvious' connection between the history of Middle-earth and the alleged history of our world to argue that also other motifs in Tolkien's literary mythology have an historical core.[139] Also in this case, elements from Tolkien's literary mythology (the destruction of Númenor and by implication other narrative events as well, such as the existence of an Elven civilization) are merged with elements from alternative history (besides the sinking of Atlantis, ideas of root races or aliens/elves arriving in pre-history from the stars).

It should be noted that fiction-based practices and beliefs do not always arise as the result of integrative bricolage; it is just very often the case. Sometimes fiction-based practices and beliefs emerge simply as the actualisation of narrative religion within a fictional text. Consider as example the water-sharing ritual in the Church of All Worlds and the ritual greeting 'Thou art God/dess' which are both taken directly from the pages of Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land*. In the spiritual Tolkien milieu there are many examples of fiction-based *beliefs* that simply emerge through the ascription of reality to parts of Tolkien's literary mythology. Many Tolkien religionists believe, for instance, in the existence of the Valar without considering them to be expressions of archetypes or equating them with other deities. Due to the absence of rituals in the narrative religion of Tolkien's world, by contrast, as good as all *practices* within the spiritual Tolkien milieu, including rituals aimed at communicating with the Valar, are results of integrative bricolage.

Most Tolkien religionists combine their Tolkien spirituality with engagement in other religious activities, and hence engage in supplementary bricolage. That is important for three reasons. First, the patterns of supplementary bricolage of Tolkien religionists reveal something about their religious interests and backgrounds. Second and related, since many Tolkien religionists engage in other forms of cultic religion besides Tolkien spirituality, their supplementary bricolage helps identify the spiritual Tolkien milieu as a sub-milieu within the cultic milieu. Third and most importantly, monitoring the supplementary bricolage of Tolkien religionists is crucial for determining which forms of Tolkien spirituality are experienced as most 'complete' and legitimate, and which forms need to be supplemented by other engagements.

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[139] The island continent of Númenor was destroyed before the events of *LR* when its inhabitants revolted against the gods (cf. section 7.2.3 below).

4.1.2. Syncretic Processes in Fiction-based Religion: Mixture, Assimilation, Synthesis, and Acculturation

While the concept of bricolage invites us to look at religious blending from the point of view of the individual, the concept of syncretism provides a lens with which to analyse religious blending on the level of traditions. Rather than rehearsing the debates on the adequacy of the very notion of syncretism, let me move straight to a discussion of some categories that are useful for the analysis of syncretic processes in fiction-based religious traditions.[140] Since the literature on syncretism is usually geared to the analysis of interactions between great traditions over long time-spans, I will use it very selectively to draw forth such terms and distinctions as can also be useful for the study of syncretic processes in small religious traditions over short periods of time. I present my analytical framework with fiction-based religion in mind, but parts of it are likely to be useful to analyse syncretic processes throughout the cultic milieu.

Drawing on Michael Pye (1971; 1994) and Ivan Marcus (1996), I suggest distinguishing between four syncretic processes, namely mixture, assimilation, synthesis, and inward acculturation.[141] *Mixture* refers to the ambiguous situation where foreign religious elements have been added to an existing tradition, but where is it still unclear whether these elements can be counted as genuine parts of that tradition.[142] In a fiction-based religious context one has mixture, for instance, when magicians create a Valar-directed

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[140] I touched upon this debate in section 0.3.1 above and further refer to Thomassen (2004, 139) for a strong defence of the continued use of the term syncretism against the common misunderstanding that speaking of syncretism automatically invokes an essentialistic view of the 'pure' traditions that have been blended. A selection of key articles on syncretism is collected in Leopold and Jensen (2004); a number of newer approaches are discussed in Martin and Leopold (2004). Attempts to develop typologies of syncretism that go beyond the basic distinctions discussed in this chapter include Rudolph (1979) and Berner (2004). Most studies on syncretism are not concerned with the nature of the semiotic blending processes themselves, however, but with the power struggles in which these are intermingled and with so-called anti-syncretic discourses accusing opponents of syncretism (e.g. Stewart and Shaw 1994; Stewart 1995; Geertz 1995; Droogers 1995; Kraft 2002). André Droogers (1989, 13-14) has made a very useful list of the dimensions of syncretism, covering both the various *uses* of the term and the different *types* of syncretism. Droogers' dimensions are: (a) syncretism as an objective (descriptive) or subjective (pejorative) term; (b) syncretism as merely the mix of two religions or as possibly involving also other non-religious building-blocks; (c) syncretism as product or process; (d) syncretism as taking place at the origin of a tradition or as a later development or threat; (e) syncretism as symmetric or asymmetric; (f) syncretism as a conscious or unconscious process.

[141] In the introduction I said that fiction-based religion often arises as the 'convergence' of fandom and alternative religion. The term convergence does not appear in this context, but all four processes of assimilation, mixture, synthesis, and inward acculturation can be considered different forms of convergence.

[142] My notion of mixture is inspired by Michael Pye's notion of "syncretism" which he contrasts with synthesis and assimilation. For Pye, syncretism refers narrowly to the interlacing of different traditions without synthesisation. As a chief example of syncretism, Pye points out that Shinto and Buddhism existed side by side in Japan for centuries, being practised by the same people, but never fusing into one single tradition (1994, 222).

ritual and perform it, but are unsure whether it can be considered part of their serious magical practice or not. Mixture is an unstable situation which tends to develop into either assimilation or synthesis.

Assimilation refers to the absorption of elements from one religious tradition into another. A classic example of assimilation was the incorporation of pagan holy sites and holidays into the cult of saints of the advancing Catholic Church during the early Middle Ages. In the field of fiction-based religion we can speak of assimilation when originally fiction-based beliefs and practices are absorbed into religious traditions *that consequently deny their fictional origins*. We see this in the Elven movement and the Vampire community, for example, but assimilation of fictional material is not restricted to these movements.

In general, *synthesis* denotes the rise of a new, permanent, and stable tradition based on elements from two or more source traditions. In the context of fiction-based religion, I use the term to refer to a situation in which practices and beliefs based on fiction are integrated into a stable tradition *which is predominantly constituted by non-fictionbased religious practices*. This is the case with the Tribunal of the Sidhe (ch. 10) whose members readily acknowledge that they draw on Tolkien's literary mythology (i.e. no disguising assimilation) and proudly refer to their beliefs and practice as 'our Tradition' (indicating that it is no mere mixture). In this case, and in fiction-integrating syntheses in general, fiction-based beliefs and practices (*in casu* Valar-directed rituals) are combined with beliefs and practices that have nothing to do with fiction (*in casu* rituals directed at deities from the Celtic and Norse pantheons).

In chapter 2, I defined fiction-integrating religion as 'religion integrating belief elements from fiction, re-enacting fictional rituals, and/or adapting identities from fiction'. That was no more than a rough and substantive definition that said nothing about *how* the integration of fictional elements work, and especially how explicit and how successful such integration is. The concepts of mixture, assimilation, and synthesis now allow a more detailed analysis of the different modes of fiction-integrating religion.

As the reader will remember, I further contrasted fiction-integrating religion to fiction-based religion *sensu stricto*, i.e. 'religion that takes fictional texts as its very foundation'. In most cases also fiction-based religion *sensu stricto* is subject to syncretic processes, for fiction-based religions usually borrow rituals and other things from established religious traditions. This looks much like synthesis as I just described it, but the fiction-based religious situation is different from fiction-integrating religion in that a fictional text corpus, rather than an established religious tradition frames the religious blend, so to speak. I therefore prefer to borrow Ivan Marcus' term *inward acculturation* to characterise the syncretic process taking place in fiction-based religion *sensu stricto*. Marcus coined this term to describe how Jewish minorities used to adopt practices from their host cultures and stage them as genuinely Jewish (1996, 11-12). He also makes clear that inward acculturation is a twin to assimilation, for both processes involve an exchange of religious elements between two traditions that are unequal in power and prestige. What

makes the two processes different is the agent. We can speak of assimilation when the larger or stronger tradition swallows the small one. Seen from the perspective of the small tradition, assimilation is thus equal to what Marcus calls 'outward acculturation', i.e. the acculturation into a broader whole outside one's own tradition. In inward acculturation, by contrast, the small tradition consciously and selectively borrows form the host culture. This is also how fiction-based religion *sensu stricto* works. Analogous to Marcus' Jewish case, the cultic milieu forms a host culture for fiction-based religions. Fiction-based religions maintain themselves as distinct traditions by focusing exclusively on a particular body of narratives (*in casu* Tolkien's literary mythology), but they also borrow ritual practices and strategies of rationalisation and justification from its host milieu and 'acculturate' them into their own fiction-based tradition.

4.2. Religious Blending on the Concept Level

Syncretism, as the macro-level blending of religious traditions, involves the exchange and blending, on a meso-level, of (elements of) myths, rituals, ethics, and theology. Pulled even further apart, syncretism can be analysed, on the micro-level, as the exchange and blending of religious concepts. In this section, I focus on processes of syncretism on the concept level. I review what the literature on syncretism has to say on the issue, before moving on to discuss how conceptual blending theory can be employed to analyse syncretism on this level.

4.2.1. Transfer, Synonymisation, and Domestication of Religious Concepts

Several processes of syncretism on the concept level have been identified in the literature, but let me comment here on just two main types. The first type is the so-called "transfer" or "addition" which refers to a religious element being disembedded from its original context and re-embedded within a new tradition.[143] We see this for instance among Tolkien Reconstructionists who attempt to build a pure Tolkien-tradition, but nevertheless transfer such concepts as archetypes and 'the Imaginal World' from other cultic traditions into their local Tolkien tradition.

[143] Especially in newer German scholarship on European religious history much attention is paid to "diskursive Transfers" between traditions (e.g. Gladigow 1995; Kippenberg, Rüpke, and von Stuckrad 2009, Teil III), in particular to the transfers of esoteric ideas across tradition boundaries (e.g. von Stuckrad 2009; 2013b). Catherine Albanese has similarly pointed out that religious elements have routinely been exchanged between religious traditions in American religious history, and consequently refers to American religion as "combinative" or "additive" (1997, 224). Drawing on Anthony Giddens (1990, 21-29), other scholars of religion refer to transfers in terms of the dis- and re-embedding of elements (e.g. Petersen 2009; Asprem and Granholm 2013b).

As Ruth Prince and David Riches (2000, 294) convincingly argue in their study of New Age in Glastonbury, transferred religious concepts are always "domesticated" by the new tradition into which they become embedded.[144] The theosophical reinterpretation of the Eastern concept of reincarnation is a textbook example. The theosophists shed reincarnation of its negative connotation of eternal imprisonment in the material world and of the discomforting possibility of spiritual degeneration. Maintaining the basic idea of spiritual rebirth, this core was adapted to a late nineteenth-century Western world characterised by faith in progress, individualism, and evolutionism to produce a new, domesticated, and melioristic conception of reincarnation as progressive, spiritual evolution.

A second main type of syncretism on the concept level is variously referred to as "identification" (Berner 2004, 306) or "synonymization" (Hammer 2001, 55-56; 2004, 164-165). This process involves the reinterpretation of similar notions from two or more religious traditions as being 'essentially the same'. As an example of synonymisation, Olav Hammer offers the practice of equating with each other notions of life force from different traditions, including chi (China), prana (India), and animal magnetism (mesmerism) (2004, 164).[145] Tolkien religionists with a Christian background similarly engage in synonymisation when they address the Christian God as Eru, thus using for Yahweh the name of the over-god in Tolkien's literary mythology.

Though it has not been pointed out in the literature so far, synonymisation also involves domestication. It does so to different degrees, as can be illustrated with Hammer's example of life forces introduced above. In its most 'pure' form, synonymisation simply identifies various labels (here chi, prana, and animal magnetism) as synonymous designations for the same object. Already in this case, the traditional notions are weakly domesticated, for new meaning is added to them, namely the quality of being identical to other concepts. Domestication in pure synonymisation is weak, but often synonymisation goes one or two domesticating steps further. This is so, because people usually pick one tradition (their own) as the yardstick against which the others are measured, arguing, for instance, that prana is just another label for the real thing, say, animal magnetism. Labels from other traditions are thus used, but the meaning ascribed to them comes from one's own tradition and can thus be radically different from the meaning which the concepts carry in their own traditional contexts. Sometimes synonymisers take a trans-traditional perspective and assert that, for example, chi, prana, and animal magnetism are names which different traditions have attached to the same real thing. We see this in Jediism in which it is frequently argued that energy concepts such as chi, prana, vril, and the odic force – and sometimes more or less personified agents as well, including the

[144] Hammer (2008, 62) uses the term domestication in the same meaning.

[145] Ulrich Berner defines identification as a form of syncretism on the element level in which "different elements are explicitly explained as being identical or appear to be interchangeable under all circumstances" (2004, 306).

holy spirit and God – are all mere labels which various religious traditions have attached to the same, unique cosmic power, namely the Force (Davidsen 2010; 2014). Hereby, an allegedly original and neutral, but in reality new and situated, concept is introduced, and the synonymised notions are radically domesticated, being stripped of their traditional distinctiveness and reduced to mere labels for this new notion.[146]

The notion of domestication helps us see that syncretism on the concept level always entails a change in the involved concepts. While it is useful to use the term domestication to refer to all such processes of conceptual change, we need also to distinguish between different types of concept metamorphosis to which domestication can lead. There are two basic types of concept metamorphosis, resemantisation and concept construction. *Resemantisation* refers to a change in the semantic content of a concept, while *concept construction* refers to the creation of a new concept out of existing concepts. In religious transfers, domestication takes the form of resemantisation (as we saw in the case of reincarnation). In the case of synonymisation, domestication typically leads to the construction of a new category through a process of concept construction (as we saw in the case of the Force). I have introduced the broader notion of concept metamorphosis here, because processes of resemantisation and concept construction do not only occur as a result of syncretism and domestication, but equally often as a result of tradition-internal processes of rationalisation.

4.2.2. Conceptual Blending Theory Applied to Religious Concept Metamorphosis

As we have seen, existing theories of syncretism have pointed out that syncretism on the concept level involves domestication, and they have singled out this process as crucial. These earlier theories do not, however, provide the tools to understand processes of resemantisation and concept construction in detail. To get a better grip on these processes, we must therefore turn to the field of cognitive semiotics. There are various theories within this field which it could be fruitful to discuss, but I will concentrate here on just one of them, namely Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner's conceptual blending theory (hereafter CBT; 2002, esp. chs. 3, 6-7, 13; Turner 1996).

CBT develops earlier work in cognitive linguistics, especially Fauconnier's own work on mental spaces (1985) and Mark Johnson and George Lakoff's influential work on metaphors (Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Johnson 1987; Lakoff 1987). The concerns of these theoretical forerunners are clearly visible in CBT. From Fauconnier's earlier work comes the idea that thinking can be described as the combination and processing of semantic material from various mental spaces, i.e. "small conceptual packets constructed as we think and talk, for purposes of local understanding and action" (Fauconnier and

[146] Berner is aware of this and therefore categorises identification together with three related types of syncretism on the element level as "agglomerating syncretism", i.e. syncretism "where an element is suppressed by other meanings" (2004, 306).

Turner 2002, 40). This goes together with a focus on real-time cognition, and with the insight that language does not carry meaning in itself, but guides meaning-construction in the mind (Fauconnier 1985, xxii). With Lakoff and Johnson, Fauconnier and Turner share a particular interest in explaining the cognitive mechanisms that underlie the processing of linguistic expressions. CBT is therefore particularly well-equipped to analyse linguistic compounds, metaphors, proverbs, and jokes.

Despite the cognitive and linguistic emphases, I think that Fauconnier and Turner succeed in formulating a general, *semiotic* theory of meaning-construction. I think so for two reasons. First, CBT is not cognitive in the narrow sense of the word. There are no references to brain processes in the theory, apart from Fauconnier and Turner's frequently repeated reassurance that 'all this is instantiated in the brain'. Also, though CBT focuses on mental processes, it does not 'stay inside the mind'. Rather, like theories of extended cognition (e.g. Clark 1997; 2008; Clark and Chalmers 1998), CBT aims to study cognition in interaction with the environment. In particular, CBT is interested in the dynamic relation between mind-external signs and the cognitive meaning-processing that these signs initiate and guide within the mind. Like any theory of extended cognition, CBT is therefore necessarily semiotic as well as cognitive. What is more, though most of the signs that interest Fauconnier and Turner are linguistic, they also study the cognitive processing of other signs, especially pictures and diagrams.

Second and related, while most of Fauconnier and Turner's empirical examples concern the deciphering of already-present signs in real-time cognition, they acknowledge that thinking can also lead to the construction of new signs, especially new linguistic concepts. Fauconnier and Turner refer to this process as "category metamorphosis" (2002, ch. 13). They offer same-sex marriage as an example, analysing it as a convergence of the established categories traditional marriage and same-sex partnership (Fauconnier and Turner 2002, 269-271). Let me now move on to a proper introduction of the theory and to an illustration of how it can be used to analyse concept metamorphosis within the religious domain.[147] I draw selectively on CBT, emphasising only those elements of it which are of immediate relevance to a discussion of religious blending and to the analyses in part II (esp. in chs. 10 and 16).[148]

CBT provides a model for analysing how elements from two or more mental input spaces are combined and modified within a blended space. Two basic processes are relevant here: (a) *compression*, within the blended space, of so-called *Vital Relations*

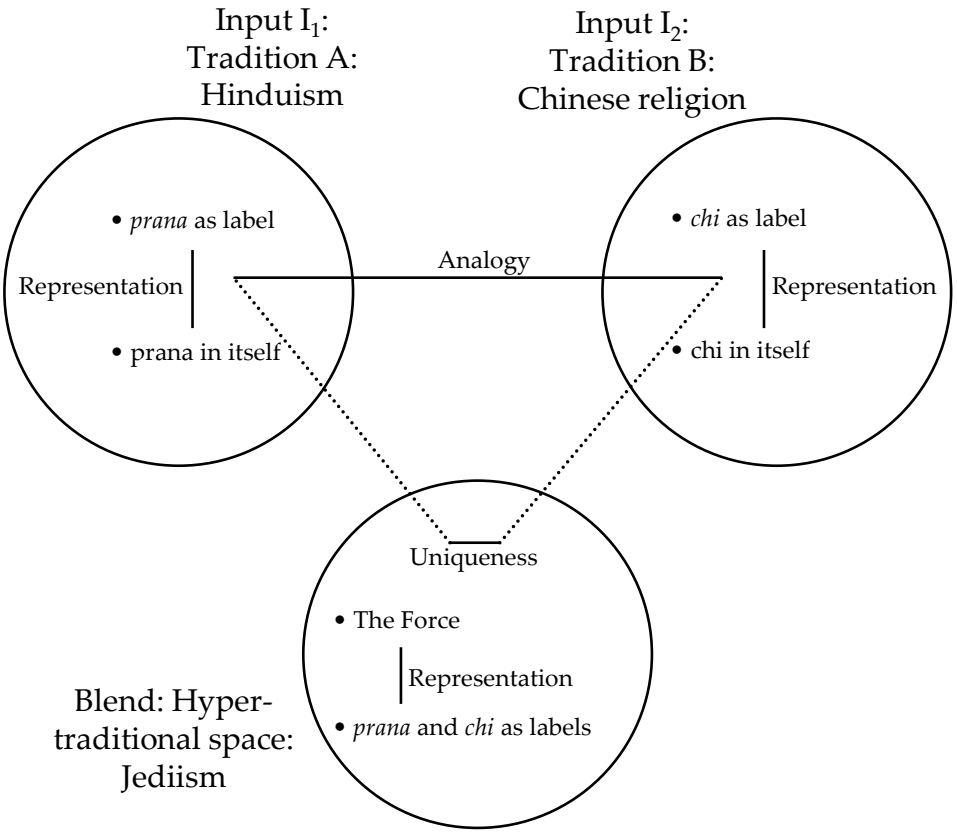
[147] Fauconnier and Turner use the term category metamorphosis, but I prefer to speak more broadly of concept metamorphosis, since CBT can be used to analyse the metamorphosis of concepts (such as 'God') which are not categories.

[148] That the theory of conceptual blending could be useful in the study of syncretism has already been pointed out by Anita Leopold (2009, 705-706; 2011, 274-277; Martin and Leopold 2004, 101). Jesper Sørensen (2007) has furthermore demonstrated the theory's usefulness for analysing the cognitive operations that underlie claims about the efficacy of magic, and Hugo Lundhaug has shown how conceptual blending can be used to analyse metaphorical and metonymical expressions in religious texts (2010).

between elements from the input spaces, and (b) *selective projection* of elements from the input spaces into the blended space. Let me explain the two processes in turn and illustrate them with examples and corresponding figures.

Elements in the input spaces can be connected by means of Vital Relations, including Analogy, Representation, and Part-Whole, and these Vital Relations are often compressed in the blend. When we for instance say of a stamp that 'it is Queen Elizabeth', we have compressed both Representation and Part-Whole into Uniqueness, taking an icon for a person and a face for a body. Also synonymisations involve compression into Uniqueness. As illustration, I have depicted a CBT analysis of the 'life force' example in figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1. Domesticating Synonymisation as Concept Construction through Compression

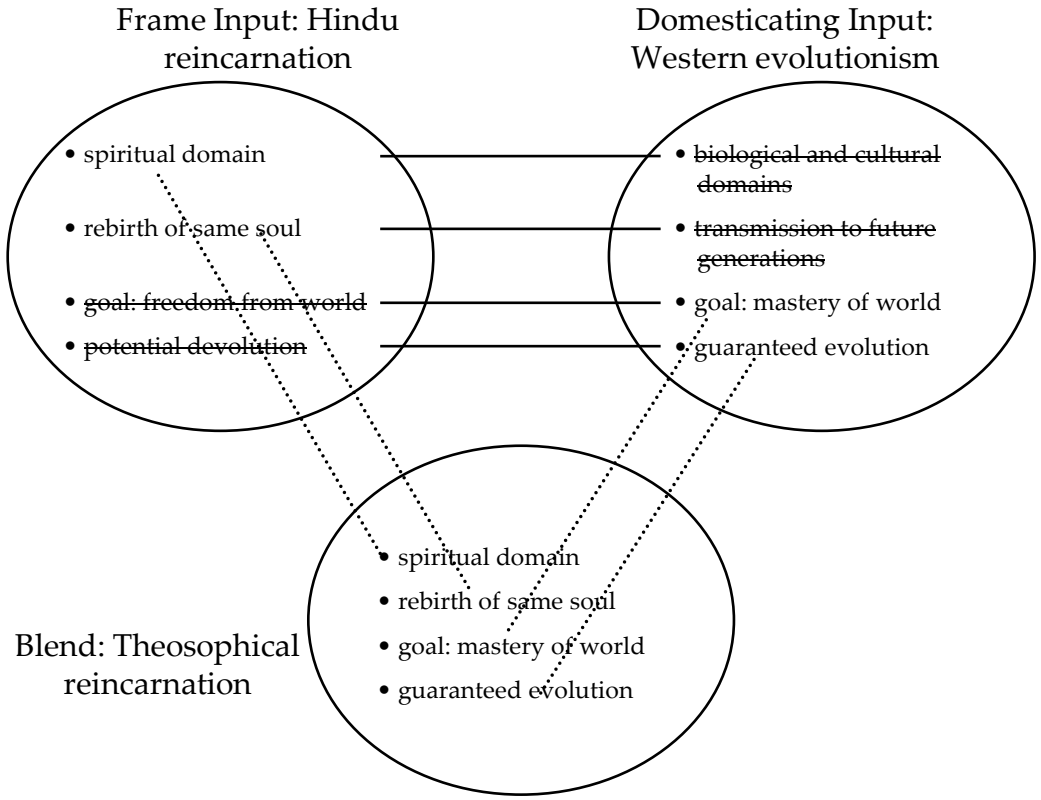


Prana and chi belong to two different input spaces which each include two elements, an object (prana/chi in itself) and a label (*prana*/*chi*). The two object/label-pairs are connected with each other through an inner-space Vital Relation of Representation. The two spaces are connected to each other through an outer-space Vital Relation of Analogy, for chi plays the same role as a concept referring to a cosmic energy in Chinese religion as prana does in Hinduism. This Vital Relation of Analogy is compressed into the Vital Relation of Identity in the blend through the assertion that *chi* and *prana* are labels which refer to the same cosmic power, and further into the Vital Relation of Uniqueness through the

assertion that there are not more cosmic forces, but only one, the Force. In general, pure synonymisations (that do not lead to the introduction of a new concept) compress Analogy into Identity (e.g. by stating that the labels *chi* and *prana* refer to an identical object), but more often than not synonymisation takes an additional step and further compresses Identity into Uniqueness in a process of concept construction, leading to the creation of a new, trans-traditional concept (here: the Force).

Selective projection is a less complicated operation. It simply refers to the projection of some elements (but not all of them) from an input space into the blended space. The process of selective projection is illustrated in figure 4.2, which shows the theosophical resemantisation of the concept of reincarnation. In the Hindu input space, I have listed a number of characteristics of the Hindu notion of reincarnation, but as the dotted lines and strikethroughs show, only some of these are projected into the blend. Here, they are combined with elements from the second input space, Western evolutionism. As in all cases of resemantisation, the two input spaces are not equal in legitimacy and salience, but can be qualified respectively as 'frame input' (supplying the concept to be resemantisised) and 'domesticating input'.

Figure 4.2. Domesticating Transfer as Resemantisation through Selective Projection



Fauconnier and Turner's blending model is designed to analyse semantic elements of a representational kind. For instance, the notion of reincarnation can be split up into meaning-elements, including same-soul rebirth and freedom from the material world as

soteriological goal. Fauconnier and Turner's analyses rarely include meta-representations such as 'this is real' or 'this is important', and do not distinguish such meta-representations from first-order semantic elements.[149] That is because Fauconnier and Turner are interested in how we understand linguistic expressions, not in the degree of referentiality ascribed to concepts. In a religious context, however, claims to reference are crucial, for the meta-representation 'this is real' is a requirement for a representation of the supernatural to be religious rather than fictional or playful.[150] Attention to meta-representations is even more important in a study of fiction-based religion, for an important part of fiction-based religious blending is the blending of fictional elements with religious elements which (among other things) project a semantic effect of reality into the blend. Fortunately, there is nothing in the conceptual blending model that prevents us from adding meta-representations to it, and I will do so throughout, rendering meta-representations with small capitals (e.g. REALITY, FICTIONALITY).

Let me illustrate the projection of meta-representations with two examples of re-semantisation, taken from Tolkien spirituality. Most Tolkien religionists believe that Tolkien's Elves (the Quendi) and the fairies of Celtic folklore (or the fairies from the theosophical take on Celtic folklore) in some direct or indirect way refer to the same beings. Two main views on how this identification should be understood can be distinguished, however. Merely Tolkien-inspired Elf-believers insist that Tolkien's Quendi are indirect or metaphorical references to the *real* elves or fairies of folklore. Tolkien-based Elf-believers, by contrast, hold that the Quendi constitute a real class of beings, possibly existing on another plane. In both cases, a blend of elements from Tolkien's fictional Quendi and the fairies/elves of folklore takes place, though it differs which elements are projected and which input space frames respectively domesticates the blend. Figure 4.3 illustrates how even the Elf-belief of merely Tolkien-inspired individuals actually tends to reflect Tolkien's noble and humanised Quendi rather than the dangerous Celtic sorcerer spirits. Figure 4.4 depicts the blend made by those who say that Tolkien's Quendi refer to real beings inhabiting the astral plane. In this case a semiotic quality of REALITY is projected into the blend from the fairy input space to turn Tolkien's fictional Quendi into allegedly real beings.

[149] I borrow the term meta-representation from Alan Leslie (1987); cf. also Sperber (2000).

[150] I have raised this point already in chapter 2 and will return to it in chapter 5.

Figure 4.3. Quendi-modified Fairy/Elf

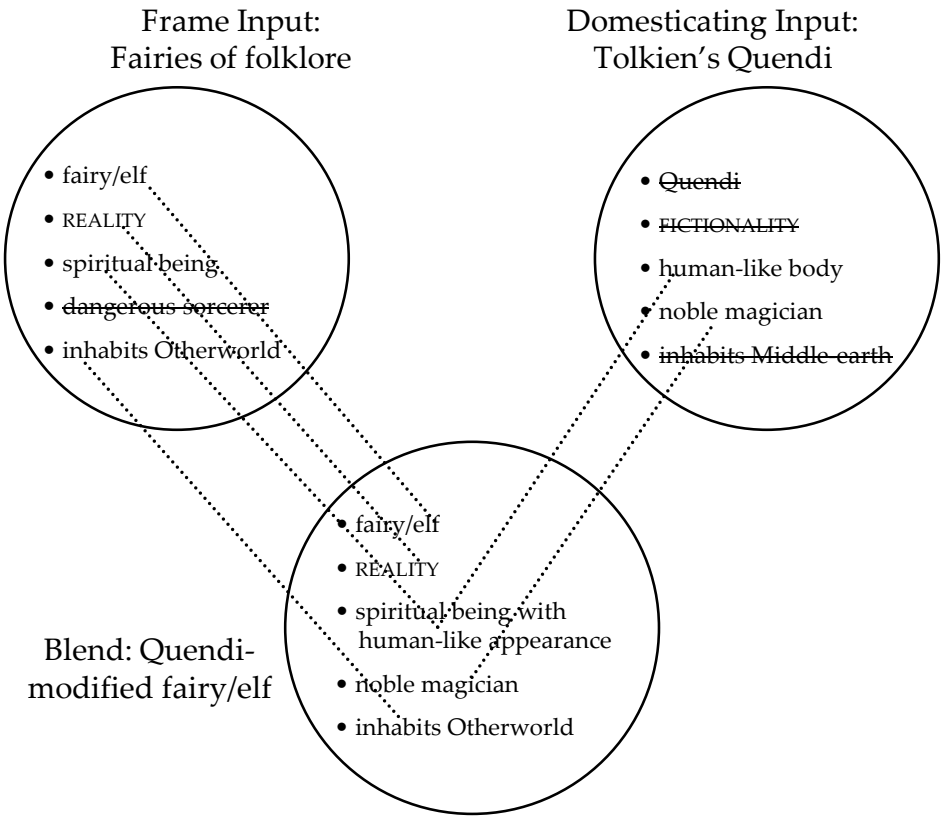
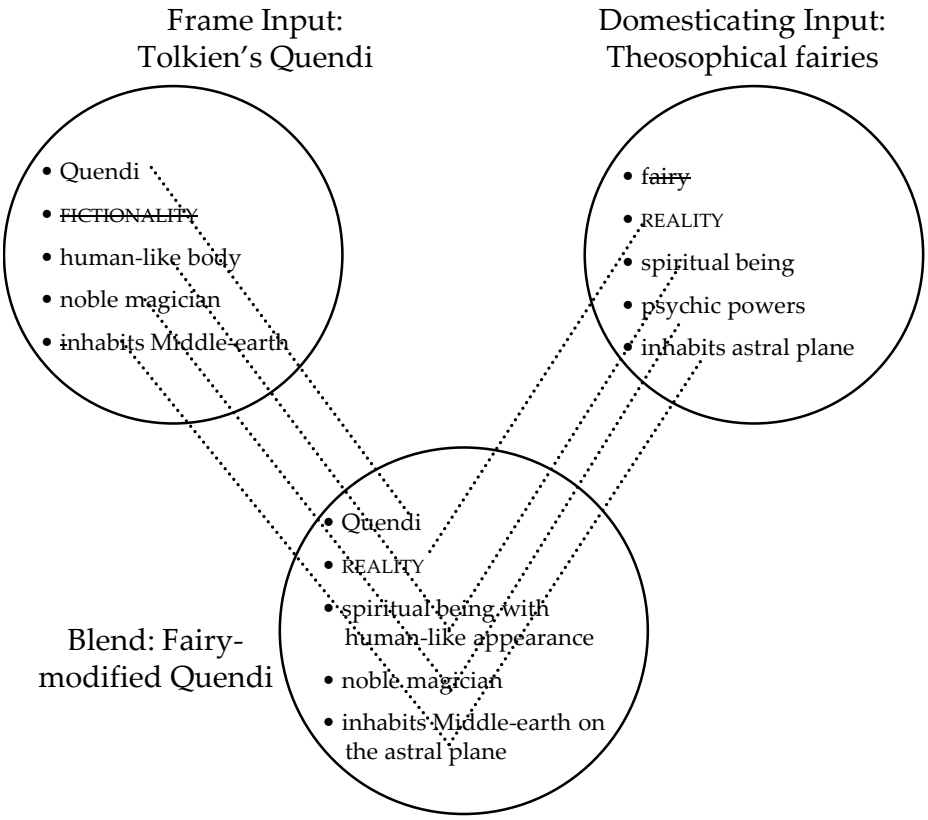


Figure 4.4. Fairy-modified Quendi



In this chapter, the second set of elements for my analytical toolkit has been assembled. In part II, the categories supplementary and integrative bricolage, and mixture, synthesis, assimilation, and inward acculturation will be used to characterise the various forms of religious blending within the spiritual Tolkien milieu. Furthermore, the integrative bricolage of Tolkien religionists will be analysed in terms of transfer, synonymisation, and domestication, and in some cases pulled even further apart with the tools of conceptual blending to zoom in on the processes involved in resemantisation and concept construction.

While it is interesting in itself to demonstrate that CBT and other tools can be used to analyse religious blending, the analyses that these tools make possible are also necessary to facilitate a fine-grained comparison across different cases of Tolkien religion. For while it is trivially true that all Tolkien religionists blend Tolkien material with other religious material, we need distinctions between different types and levels of religious blending to be able to compare and contrast patterns of blending across various groups. For instance, it is relevant not only to distinguish between fiction-integrating and fiction-based religion (cf. ch. 2), but also between three *types* of fiction-integrating religion resulting, respectively, in unstable and temporary *mixture*, in stable and permanent *synthesis*, and in *assimilation* and the disguising of any fictional origins. This distinction makes it possible to raise the crucial questions whether Tolkien spirituality – which does not take the form of Tolkien-*based* religion – tends to appear in the form of mixture, assimilation, or synthesis, and which contextual factors are necessary for a stable Tolkien-integrating or Tolkien-based tradition to form. I can already reveal that Tolkien-based religion is much rarer than Tolkien-integrating religion. If mixture furthermore turns out to be more common than synthesis within the province of Tolkien-integrating religion that would raise the broader question whether this is because fiction in general, qua fiction, is difficult to integrate on equal terms with non-fictional material in new religious traditions. Along the same line of reasoning: If assimilation turns out to be the rule rather than the exception that will both confirm that religionists generally balk at explicitly fiction-based religion *and* have methodological implications for future studies of the religious use of fiction. It will not rule out fiction's influence on cultic religion as such, but will impel us to look for that influence in more subtle manners than have been employed in this study.

Chapter 5. Dynamics of Belief in Religious Traditions

As emphasised in the general introduction, religious belief and believing is one of the large issues on which this thesis attempts to shed light. In this chapter, I formulate a semiotic and dynamic approach to the study of religious belief, and develop an analytical apparatus fit for such an approach.

I should make it clear right away that I use the term 'religious belief' in a broader sense than the usual one. Most people consider 'beliefs' to refer to conscious and reflective *belief assertions*, i.e. the answers people will give you when asked 'what do you believe?' I use the term 'religious belief' more broadly to refer to any piece of discursive knowledge that assumes the existence of supernatural agents, worlds, and processes in the actual world. My concept of religious belief covers both those beliefs that are expressed publicly and those that are kept private. Furthermore, I count on two ways in which religious beliefs can be expressed publicly, namely explicitly and implicitly so. We encounter explicitly expressed public beliefs in the form of reflective belief assertions as mentioned above and in more elaborate form in religious narratives and discursive theology. Public beliefs can also be expressed implicitly, as the beliefs or assumptions which underpin practice. For example, a magician can implicitly express his belief in the reality of magic through his very engagement in magical practice.

I approach religious beliefs from a semiotic perspective. That is to say, I approach religious beliefs as signs.[151] To conceptualise my approach, it is useful to consider Gottlob Frege's (1892) classic distinction between a sign's *Sinn* (its meaning or content) and its *Bedeutung* (its signification or reference). All signs have *Sinn*, but it is an empirical question whether they also have *Bedeutung*. The semiotician of religion brackets the questions of *Bedeutung* or reference. He is interested in the meaning of religious beliefs, and he is interested in this meaning regardless of its reference.[152] In the analysis of religious meaning, however, the issue of referentiality re-emerges. That is so because religious beliefs, despite being assertions about the supernatural which from a scientific and

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[151] My perspective is indebted to Ole Davidsen's formulation of a semiotic exegesis (1993, esp. 5-11; 2007) and his suggestion that the study of religion would benefit from the development of an autonomous subdiscipline of 'semiotics of religion' (1981).

[152] Privately, the semiotician can be convinced that the religious beliefs he studies have signification or he can be convinced that they have none. That does not matter for his scientific work. That is to say, the semiotician is a methodological naturalist (cf. section 0.3.3). As a scholar, he considers religious beliefs to be signs which have *Sinn*, but no *Bedeutung*, i.e. to belong to the class of signs which Jean Baudrillard refers to as *simulacra* (cf. section 2.1.1).

a commonsense point of view cannot possibly be referential, contain within them, *as part of their meaning*, the insistence that they nevertheless refer to real events and states of being in the actual world. It is because of this *claim* to reference that religious beliefs differ from playful make-believe, and that religious narratives differ from fiction (cf. ch. 2). A semiotic approach to religious belief is particularly interested in the religious claim to be referential, i.e. the meta-representation of REALITY which is attached to the representational content of religious beliefs, because it is the tension between the reference claim and the lack of objectively verifiable reference which constitute religious beliefs as particular type of signs.

I combine the semiotic perspective with an approach to religious beliefs as dynamic entities. Of course, it is trivial that religious beliefs are dynamic in the sense that they are combinatory in nature and change over time, but a truly dynamic approach to belief goes further. It studies the very processes of religious blending and rationalisation through which beliefs are changed over time, as well as the processes of justification through which the plausibility of beliefs is protected. The previous chapter thus already introduced an important dimension of a dynamic approach to belief by analysing how semiotic elements from various religious traditions can be combined or merged in processes of religious blending, both on the conceptual level and on the level of traditions. In this chapter, I shift focus to those semiotic processes that constitute the dynamics of belief within individual religious traditions.

The chapter falls into three sections. In the first section, I sketch a model of the structure and dynamics of religious traditions. Two core distinctions frame this analysis. I distinguish between 'lived religion', i.e. the actual belief and practice of religious individuals, and 'prescribed religion', i.e. official discourses stipulating how religious individuals ought to believe and practise. Along another axis, I identify a hierarchy of belief types, sorted according to their centrality for religious practice. This hierarchy comprises first-order beliefs which assume the existence of supernatural beings, worlds, and processes in a straightforward literal sense; second-order beliefs which involve a reflection on the ontological status of first-order beliefs; and third-order justifications of beliefs which reflect on why it is reasonable to hold first- and second-order religious beliefs. Within this frame, I identify four 'loci of belief' (such as religious practice and official theology) and the dynamic relations between them. I look first at the loci of belief and their relations in religious traditions in general, before analysing the dynamics of belief within the spiritual Tolkien milieu in particular. Furthermore, I distinguish between two main types of justification of belief, namely legitimisation which aims at objectivising religious claims, and relativisation which protects the plausibility of religious claims by de-objectivising them.

In the second section, I zoom in on ontology assessment, a particularly central aspect of the dynamics of belief in fiction-based religion. I distinguish between three principal second-order assessments of first-order claims about supernatural entities, i.e. affirmation, disaffirmation, and transformation, and discriminate further between diffe-

rent types of transformation (supernaturalistic and naturalistic; theistic, dynamistic, psychological, and axiological). I also look at the ontology assessment of religious narratives. Religious narratives are large semantic wholes which include many individual claims about supernatural entities and events involving supernatural intervention. As we shall see, religionists assess the reference of these individual claims in a patterned way. These patterns make it possible to develop the basic distinction between fictionalising and historicising reading modes into a typology comprising six ideal-typical modes in which religious narratives – and works of supernatural fiction such as Tolkien's – can be read. These are the mytho-historical, mytho-cosmological, mythopoeic, binocular, euhemeristic, and fictionalising modes.

In the final section, I introduce the 'metaphorical turn thesis', i.e. the thesis that contemporary religious believing is becoming more metaphorical in character, and that religionists increasingly read religious narratives in a fictionalising mode. The metaphorical turn thesis is interesting for this work, because one might expect the turn to metaphorical belief and fictionalising readings of religious narratives to be even more pronounced in fiction-based religion than in contemporary religion in general.

5.1. Structure and Dynamics of Religious Traditions

I do four things in this section. First, I draw up an ideal-typical model of the structure of religious traditions, identifying four 'loci of belief', namely religious practice, folk rationalisations, authoritative narratives, and official theology. Second, I analyse the dynamic relations between these loci of belief, focusing especially on how some of them (folk rationalisation, official theology) emerge as the rationalisation of others (religious practice, authoritative narratives). Third, I adapt the general model to the spiritual Tolkien milieu, paying special attention to the role of the cultic milieu in the dynamics of belief in Tolkien religion. Fourth, I look closer at how religious beliefs can be justified through various strategies of legitimisation and relativisation. I also touch upon the phenomenon of religious doubt.

5.1.1. The Structure of Religious Traditions: Four Loci of Belief

My model of religious traditions is framed by two core distinctions. The first of these is William Christian's distinction between "religion as practised" and "religion as prescribed" (1981, 178). Religion as practised or "lived religion" (McGuire 2008) is religion as it is actually expressed and experienced by religious individuals. As actual practice, lived religion stands in contrast to prescribed religion which is a purely discursive phenomenon found in authoritative narratives, sermons, theology, and so on. Even so, lived religion is intimately linked to prescribed religion, for while prescribed religion cannot determine lived religion completely, it does afford models for belief and practice

that to some extent shape lived religion. The distinction between lived religion and prescribed religion is related to, but not identical with, distinctions between, on the one hand, official, elite, or 'standard' religion, and, on the other hand, unofficial (McGuire 2008), popular (Possamai 2009b), folk (Bowman 2004), vernacular (Primiano 1995), common (Towler 1974), or everyday (Ammerman 2007; 2013) religion. Such distinctions between the official and popular dimensions of religious traditions are important, but they suffer from an ironical weakness. While strongly emphasising that the religious practice of average believers differs from official theology, they naively assume that the representatives of religious institutions believe and practise exactly what they preach. Of course, one cannot assume such a thing *a priori*, but must consider it an empirical question. In other words, the distinctions between lived religion and prescribed religion, and between popular religion and official religion, demonstrate that there really exist three dimensions of religion which must be kept analytically separate: (1) the lived religion of the laity, (2) the lived religion of religious officials, and (3) prescribed religion. As I see it, the most important distinction is not the one between popular religion (1) and official religion (2+3), but that between lived religion (1-2) and prescribed religion (3).[153] In the following discussion, only this latter distinction will play a role. To avoid unnecessary complexity, I bracket here the issue of religious officials' actual practice and analyse only the dynamic relation between prescribed religion and the lived religion of average believers.[154]

The second core distinction which underpins my model of religious traditions is the distinction between first-order beliefs and second-order beliefs. This distinction is inspired by Tanya Luhrmann's contrasts between, on the hand one, belief as the "willingness to make certain assertions and to act as if those assertions are true" (1989, 310), and, on the other hand, reflective "rationalizations" (1989, 317) which evaluate religious practice *post hoc*. The difference between first- and second-order religious beliefs lies in the degree of reflectivity and in the manner in which they claim to refer to the actual world. First-order beliefs unreflectively assert the existence of supernatural agents, worlds, and processes in a straightforward, literal sense. Second-order beliefs, by contrast, emerge through reflection on the ontological status of first-order beliefs and potentially involve a reduction or transformation of the ontology ascribed to supernatural agents, worlds, and processes. In lived religion, we encounter first-order beliefs as those assumptions about supernatural agents, worlds, and processes which are expressed in elemental religious practice. Take as an example the practice of praying to God. This

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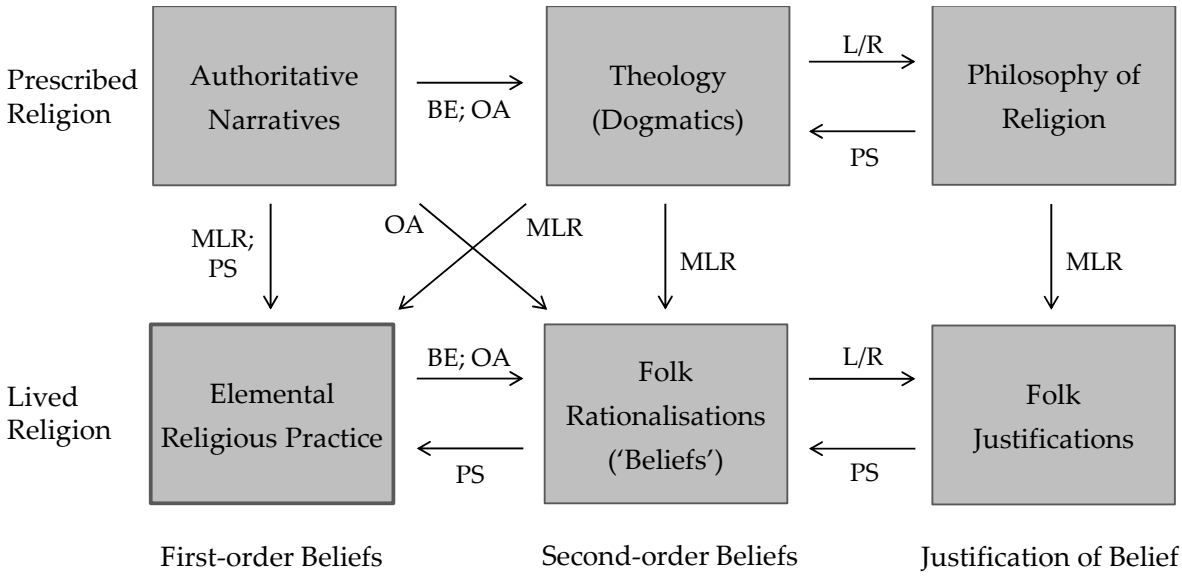
[153] Since McGuire considers 'lived religion' to cover only the lived religion of the laity, her definition differs somewhat from mine. McGuire considers lived religion to be "religion and spirituality [as they] are practiced, experienced, and expressed *by ordinary people (rather than official spokespersons) in the context of their everyday life*" (2008, 12; emphasis added).

[154] This analytical choice is partially determined by the fact that the distinction between (1) and (2) is irrelevant for most fiction-based religions because they have no formally trained officials.

practice expresses the first-order belief that God exists. Furthermore, God is addressed as a real person. During this elemental religious practice, God is simply assumed to exist in a straightforwardly literal way. Second-order beliefs are expressed in people's rationalisations of their first-order beliefs and religious practice. In the context of lived religion we might refer to such rationalisations as 'folk rationalisation'. For example, people who pray to God and hence engage in practice which assumes that he is a supernatural agent who can answer prayers, can nevertheless state reflectively that they 'really' believe God to be an impersonal cosmic principle. The distinction between first-order and second-order beliefs is reproduced on the level of prescribed religion. Religious narratives express first-order beliefs and present the supernatural as real in a straightforwardly literal way within the textual world. In prescribed religion, second-order rationalisations are found in systematised form as official theology, especially dogmatics.

I have now introduced two analytical distinctions, i.e. lived/prescribed religion and first/second-order beliefs, and identified the four 'loci of belief' within religious traditions, i.e. elemental religious practice, folk rationalisations, authoritative religious narratives, and official theology. In figure 5.1 below, I have depicted the dynamics of belief in a 'typical' religious tradition, effectively taking as a model a tradition such as Christianity which possesses canonical narratives and a theological elite.

Figure 5.1. The Dynamics of Belief in an Established Religious Tradition



Legend
PS = Plausibility support; MLR = Model for lived religious belief and practice;
BE = Belief elaboration; OA = Ontology assessment; L/R = Legitimisation/Relativisation

For the sake of comprehensiveness, I have included two boxes to the right representing the justification of belief. I return to the justification of belief in section 5.1.4 below. The model also includes various dynamic relations between the four loci of belief (and the processes of justification). I have placed the model here, to make it easier to follow the

next step in my argument which is a closer analysis of the four loci of belief and the dynamic relations between them.

5.1.2. The Dynamics of Belief in Religious Traditions

I consider religious practice to form the very core of religious traditions. Since 'practice' can be conceived of broadly to include both immediate practice and the second-order 'practice' of reflecting on practice (i.e. folk rationalisation and folk justification), I use the expression 'elemental religious practice' to refer to that first-order practice which I take to be the core of religion. Elemental religious practice is religious practice that assumes the existence of supernatural agents, worlds, and processes in a straightforward, literal sense. I refer to such practices, together with the first-order beliefs that underpin them and the experiences which they induce, as *elemental religion*. Because elemental religious practice always expresses first-order beliefs, it can be considered a locus of belief – indeed the most fundamental locus of belief – within any religious tradition.

It is useful to distinguish with Martin Riesebrodt (2008; 2010) between three kinds of elemental religious practice, namely "interventionist" practices, i.e. interactions with postulated superhuman agents, "discursive practices", i.e. communication among humans about supernatural agents, worlds, and processes, and "regulatory practices", i.e. acting according to the dictates of the superhuman agents. I share Riesebrodt's insistence that not only must religious practice be considered the core of religion, interventionist practices must in turn be considered the most fundamental kind of religious practice (2008, 30).[155] The innermost core of the religious activity of the spiritual Tolkien milieu, thus, consists of ritual communication with superhuman beings from Tolkien's literary mythology (esp. the Valar, but also the Elves and Eru), together with elementary beliefs about these beings (e.g. they exist, they can be contacted) and experiences involving them (e.g. ritually induced visualisations). In the Elven community, elemental religion additionally and primarily involves the self-identification as Elves and practices through which this identity is enacted.

As a rule, the texts which are considered most central and sacred within religious traditions are narratives, and these narratives therefore constitute a central and independent locus of belief in most religious traditions. Contrary to elemental religious practice, religious narratives are obviously discursive phenomena and belong to the domain of prescribed religion. But similar to elemental religious practice, religious narratives, *qua* narratives, assert the existence of supernatural agents, worlds, and processes in a

[155] I disagree, however, with the methodological implication which Riesebrodt draws from his emphasis on interventionist practices. For Riesebrodt, the methodological consequence is that religion is best studied on the level of "liturgies", i.e. codified, institutional ritual scripts (2008, 31). As I see it, the logical inference to be drawn from the proclamation of interventionist practices as the core of religion, is to study *actual* interventionist practice and the subjective meanings ascribed to such practices.

straightforwardly literal way. Religious narratives hence express religious claims of the same immediate and pre-rationalised nature as the beliefs that underlie elemental religious practice. In other words, both elemental religious practice and religious narratives express first-order beliefs. The function of religious narratives within the dynamics of belief differs, however, from that of elemental religious practice. Indeed, the function of religious narratives is to support elemental religious practice in two ways. Like all kinds of prescriptive religion, religious narratives provide models for lived religious belief and practice – especially when they contain narrative religion (cf. ch. 3). Religious narratives that assert their own veracity and/or claim to stem from a divine source (cf. ch. 3) can also serve as plausibility structures for religious practice.

Elemental religious practice and religious narratives can become the object of reflective processes of *rationalisation*. Such processes evaluate, expand, and explain the first-order beliefs expressed in religious practice and narratives, and result in the formulation of reflective, second-order beliefs (rationalised religion). Rationalised religion comes both in a lived and a prescribed variety. On the level of lived religion, we have folk rationalisations, i.e. ordinary people's rationalisations and negotiations of how and why they believe. The function of such folk rationalisations is to provide explanations that clarify the *raison d'être* of religious practice and hence enhance its plausibility. On the level of prescribed religion, rationalised religion consists of official doctrinal theology and sermons which interpret the religious narratives. The function of theology in the dynamics of belief is to rationalise the authoritative narratives and to provide normative models both for elemental religious practice and for folk rationalisations.

Inspired by Tanya Luhrmann (1989) and Max Weber (cf. Goldstein 2009), I distinguish between two aspects of religious rationalisation, namely ontology assessment (Luhrmann) and belief elaboration (Weber). Ontology assessment is the reflective evaluation of the ontological status of those supernatural agents, worlds, and processes whose existence is assumed in first-order beliefs. Belief elaboration refers to the development of a worldview that provides historical and cosmological depth for the religious tradition's core belief postulates, and to the formulation of an ethos that defines the meaning and purpose of elemental religious practice. It must be emphasised that the distinction between belief elaboration and ontology assessment is purely analytical, and that the two dimensions of rationalisation are always intermingled with each other in real life. Obviously, rationalised religion can itself become the object of further processes of ontology assessment, systematisation, elaboration, and so on to form complex chains of rationalisations, potentially spanning over hundreds or thousands of years, such as the processes of religious rationalisation studied by Weber.

That I identify religious practice as the logical core of religious traditions and consider religious narratives to be the most central religious texts does not imply that rationalised religion is unimportant. On the contrary, both folk rationalisations and official theology are crucial for the vitality of religious traditions because they elucidate the meaningfulness of religious practice. The relation between elemental religion, reli-

gious narratives, and rationalised religion is thus one of mutual support. Religions are maintained as living traditions through elemental religious activity; authoritative narratives provide religious traditions with a textual centre that helps keeping the tradition together; and rationalised religion enhances the plausibility and meaningfulness of religious practice and commitment.

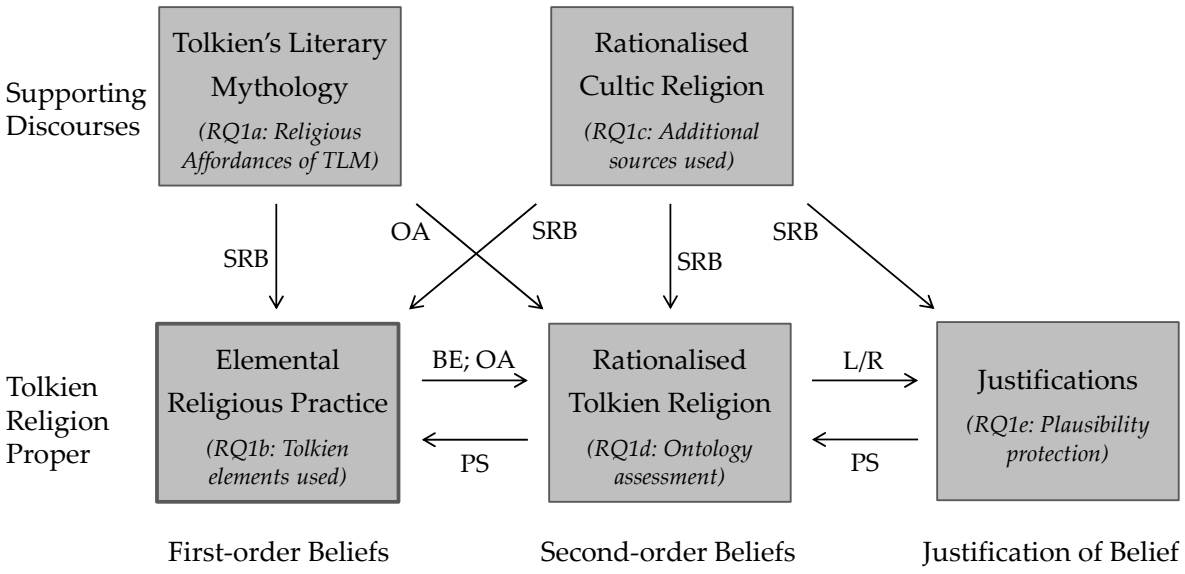
5.1.3. The Dynamics of Belief in the Spiritual Tolkien Milieu

As shown in figure 5.2 below, the dynamics of belief in the spiritual Tolkien milieu differ somewhat from those in institutionalised religions like Christianity. This is partly because no meaningful distinction can be drawn in Tolkien religion between lived religion and prescribed religion or between lay and elite, nor, as a consequence of that, between folk rationalisations and official theology. In the model, the category 'rationalised Tolkien religion' therefore merges the categories folk rationalisations and theology from figure 5.1 together. Rationalised Tolkien religion represents those rationalisations which individual Tolkien religionists make, both of their elemental religious practice and of their use of Tolkien's literary mythology.

While no distinction between lived religion and prescribed religion can be drawn in the dynamics of belief within the spiritual Tolkien milieu, it still makes sense to distinguish between a primary level of practice and a supporting discursive level. On this discursive level Tolkien's literary mythology acts as authoritative narratives, while the place of theology is more or less taken over by the cultic milieu and its repertoire of rationalised doctrine. Tolkien's literary mythology and the cultic milieu do not directly *prescribe* models for lived Tolkien religion, but they provide *religious affordances*, supplying the bits and pieces for those religious blending processes through which Tolkien religion emerges. In the previous chapter, I mentioned that the cultic milieu supplies building blocks, such as ritual scripts, for elemental practice in Tolkien religion. As will be demonstrated in this chapter, the cultic milieu also supplies models for rationalisation and justification. One example of a general rationalisation which is taken up by Tolkien religionists is the Jungian theory of archetypes which is sometimes used to rationalise beings from Tolkien's narratives as archetypal images. On the figure below, I have added the five sub-questions that constitute research question 1 to show how they are designed to cover all aspects of the dynamics of belief in the spiritual Tolkien milieu.[156]

[156] Research question 1 reads: 'Which semiotic structures and processes are involved in the construction and maintenance of Tolkien-based religion?'

Figure 5.2. The Dynamics of Belief in the Spiritual Tolkien Milieu



Legend
PS = Plausibility support; BE = Belief elaboration; OA = Ontology assessment;
SRB = Sources for religious blending; L/R = Legitimisation/Relativisation

5.1.4. Justification of Beliefs: Legitimisation and Relativisation

The purpose of both rationalisation and justification is to make beliefs seem more convincing and attractive to oneself and to others. Rationalisation and justification operate on different levels, however. Religious rationalisations seek to enhance the plausibility and attractiveness of religious beliefs and practices by developing more elaborate ontological claims. For example, some Tolkien religionists rationalise ritual visualisations of the Valar as journeys to the Imaginal Realm, an allegedly real place situated between the material and spiritual worlds (cf. ch. 16). The function of this rationalisation is to enhance the plausibility of the immediate experience of communication with a supernatural world by protecting it against the accusation that the visualisation is merely a product of the imagination. An example of a rationalisation which is more concerned with boosting attractiveness than with achieving plausibility is the claim made by some Elves that they are reincarnated spirits who have come to sunder the Veil and reinstate the protological unity of Fey and humans (cf. section 11.3.1).

Whereas rationalisation produces ontological claims, justification plays out on an epistemological level. With justification the point is not to elaborate on belief, but to justify the act of believing. Olav Hammer (2004) has made a useful distinction between three main "strategies of epistemology" which are used to justify religious beliefs within the cultic milieu. These three strategies, which are all found within the spiritual Tolkien milieu, are "the construction of tradition", "scientism", and "the appeal to experience" (Hammer 2004, 23). Epistemological strategies that appeal to tradition do so by locating the ultimate origin of one's religious beliefs in some old and authoritative cradle of wis-

dom (India, Egypt, and Atlantis are some favourites; Hammer 2004, ch. 4). Epistemological strategies appealing to science use (pseudo)scientific jargon and/or claim that one's beliefs have been proved right by the most advanced, holistic forms of science (Hammer 2004, ch. 5). Appeals to subjective experience maintain that certain religious claims have been proved right by one's own experience, by the experiences of one's peers, or by revelations received by authoritative third-persons (Hammer 2004, ch. 6).

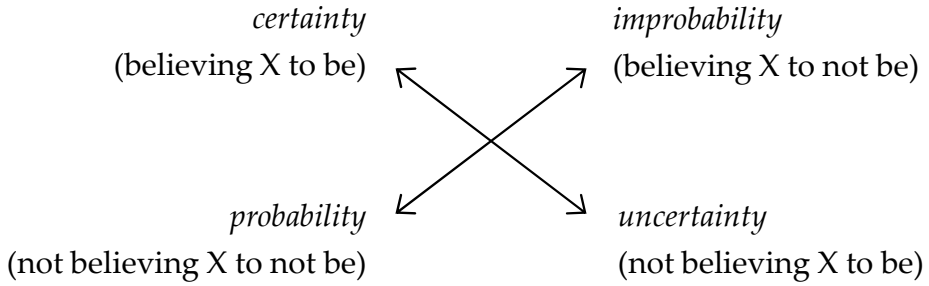
Hammer considers these three epistemological strategies to constitute rhetorical means to make first- and second-order beliefs seem more plausible. That makes good sense, but Hammer implicitly goes further. The justification strategies discussed by him all fall under a particular epistemological meta-strategy which seeks to justify religious beliefs *by proving their objective truth*. This meta-strategy rests on two non-trivial assumptions. First, it assumes a correspondence theory of truth and hence the possibility that linguistic expressions can have reference in Frege's sense. Second, it assumes that it is possible to have objective knowledge not only about natural entities, but also about supernatural ones. In other words, the objectivising meta-strategy does not recognise a distinction between a natural and a supernatural sphere or between an immanent and a transcendent dimension. I agree with Hammer that appeals to tradition and to science always share these assumptions and aim to objectivise religious claims. Appeals to subjective experience typically do so as well. It must be pointed out, however, that there exists another, indeed opposite, epistemological meta-strategy. This strategy seeks to *de-objectivise* religious claims rather than to objectivise them. Many appeals to first-person experiences work this way, namely by bracketing the question of objective truth and justifying beliefs on the ground that they feel right and seem true 'for me'. I suggest referring to justification which seeks to objectivise religious beliefs as *legitimisation* and to refer to justification which seeks to de-objectivise religious claims as *relativisation*.

Relativisation ultimately has the same function as legitimisation and rationalisation, namely to enhance the plausibility of religious claims. But it does so by invoking a relativist epistemology according to which objective truth is unattainable and therefore irrelevant. Following this logic, justifications cannot rely on proof, but must rely on something else. There are different types of relativisation. The most important type of relativisation is *subjectivisation*. This position takes subjective feeling to be the arbiter of truth, *but only of subjective truth*. According to this position, what feels right is true for me, but needs not be true for you. Subjectivisation thus stands in contrast to the use of subjective experience as a source of legitimisation, in which case subjective truth is represented also as objective truth. Another relativisation strategy is *compartmentalisation*, i.e. the position that religious beliefs constitute their own province of meaning and that their truth can therefore not be determined rationally, but only according to its own logic or language game.

Related to relativisation is the phenomenon of *doubt*. Individuals who accept a correspondence theory of truth and take their rationalised beliefs to be assertions about the objective states of affairs in the actual world can still doubt the veridictory status of

these assertions. This can lead religionists to slide between commitments to different but related rationalisations, such as the belief in God as a person and as an impersonal power. Individuals can also apply an epistemic judgement other than 'certainty' to their beliefs. The two principal epistemic judgements which fall between certainty and improbability are 'uncertainty', i.e. that belief X is possible but not certain, and 'probability', i.e. that it is unlikely that belief X is false. Individuals can slide between various epistemic modalities.[157] In figure 5.3 below, I have depicted the epistemic modalities according to Algirdas Julien Greimas. I use this model in chapter 11 to analyse the 'epistemic drift' involved in conversion to Elvishness.[158]

Figure 5.3. The Epistemic Modalities According to Greimas



In this section, I have argued that it is possible to sort the beliefs in Tolkien religion – and in principle in any religious tradition – into a hierarchy of different types of beliefs. I do not think, however, that the typical religious tradition forms a coherent dogmatic system whose structure can be deduced by the anthropologist. Official theology may sometimes approach this ideal, but the repertories of beliefs that average individuals hold and express do not. If we consider the beliefs of a tradition to be the beliefs that religionists actually hold and express as part of their lived religion, then we must conclude that religious traditions are incoherent 'reservoirs of belief' rather than belief systems.[159] The hierarchy of beliefs which I envision is therefore not determined by the centrality of various forms of belief within a logical system of doctrine, but by their centrality *in actual practice*. As depicted in figures 5.1 and 5.2 above, we have, from core to periphery, (a) first-order beliefs expressed in elemental religion (esp. in religious rituals), (b) second-order rationalisations of first-order beliefs, and (c) third-order strategies of legitimisation and relativisation which protect the plausibility of both elemental and rationalised beliefs.

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[157] The border case, in which an individual refuses to adopt any position, can be referred to as vacillation.

[158] Cf. Greimas and Courtés (1988), art. "Epistemiske modaliteter" ("Epistemic modalities").

[159] This view of religious traditions draws on Fredrik Barth (1993; 2002; cf. 55 above), but goes against the American anthropologist Roy Rappaport. From a system theoretical point of view Rappaport has argued that religious traditions are adaptive systems with structural coherence (1979; 1999). According to Rappaport, the most fundamental beliefs are those "cosmological axioms" (1999, 287) which must be (and can be) deduced by the anthropologists and which constitute the structural foundation for lower-order beliefs.

As one moves towards the periphery, the diversity of (often mutually contradictory) beliefs grows. First-order beliefs are simple and stable and can be summed up in a few core assertions. For instance, a core assertion in the Elven movement (ch. 11) is 'we are Elves'. These core assertions can be elaborated upon in countless ways. They can be developed into worldviews that provide historical and cosmological depth, and they can be provided with an ethos that defines the meaning and purpose of the tradition's religious practice. Religious traditions are held together when people share certain core beliefs and express them in practice, but it matters less whether people rationalise these core assertions in the same way. In the Elven movement, everybody shares the identity as Elf, but disagrees on how to rationalise that core belief. Individuals hold to, slide between, and combine three main rationalisations of Elvishness as genetic descent from historical elves, as the incarnation of an Elven soul in a human body, and as the simple matter of having created an Elven culture. To take another example, members of the same Christian church who profess that Jesus is Christ can subscribe to very different rationalised Christologies. Perhaps some assert that Jesus is the Incarnated Logos (following the Gospel of John) while others consider Jesus to be a human being chosen by God (following the Gospel of Mark). For some, Jesus will be one of the Trinitarian God's three persons; for others he will just be an inspired teacher. Also the level of justification is characterised by diversity. Though logically inconsistent, many religionists will both seek confirmation of their beliefs and at the same time maintain that the truth of their beliefs is a matter of 'faith' rather than knowledge.

5.2. Ontology Assessment: Reflective Processes of Affirmation and Transformation

In elemental religious practice and in religious narratives, the existence of supernatural agents is asserted in a straightforward, literal way. Prayers are directed to gods and ancestors, not to 'the Ground of Being' or to 'something'; angels and saints appear in visions, not impersonal principles. Similarly, in religious narratives the supernatural is presented as evidently real. It is not a given, however, that religionists affirm the straightforward ontological status of the supernatural when they engage in *ontology assessment*, i.e. the conscious reflection *post hoc* on the ontological status of their first-order beliefs.

The discussion in this section is indebted to the work of Tanya Luhrmann (1989), who is one of very few scholars who have addressed the issue of ontology assessment in cultic religion. My own categories have come to differ much from Luhrmann's, however, partly because some of her "rationalizations" fall under what I refer to as ontology

assessment while others fall under my category of relativisation.[160] To avoid a cumbersome argument, I have therefore chosen simply to present my own categories and distinctions in the following discussion rather than to develop them in close dialogue with Luhrmann's typology.

The rest of this section falls into two parts. In the first part, I discuss the various ontology assessments which religionists can make of the supernatural entities whose existence is asserted in first-order beliefs. I focus particularly on reflective assessments of the ontological status of supernatural agents. In the second part, I shift focus from the ontology assessment of individual supernatural entities to the assessment of the referentiality of religious narratives and works of supernatural fiction. I identify six principal reading modes in which religious narratives and supernatural fiction, such as Tolkien's literary mythology, can be read.

In part II of the dissertation, I use the analytical categories developed here to analyse the ontological status which religionists ascribe to their first-order beliefs and to Tolkien's literary mythology. Already at this stage, I use examples from Tolkien spirituality in order to illustrate the distinctions drawn and to demonstrate how they can highlight important differences in the material. The applicability of the analytical categories

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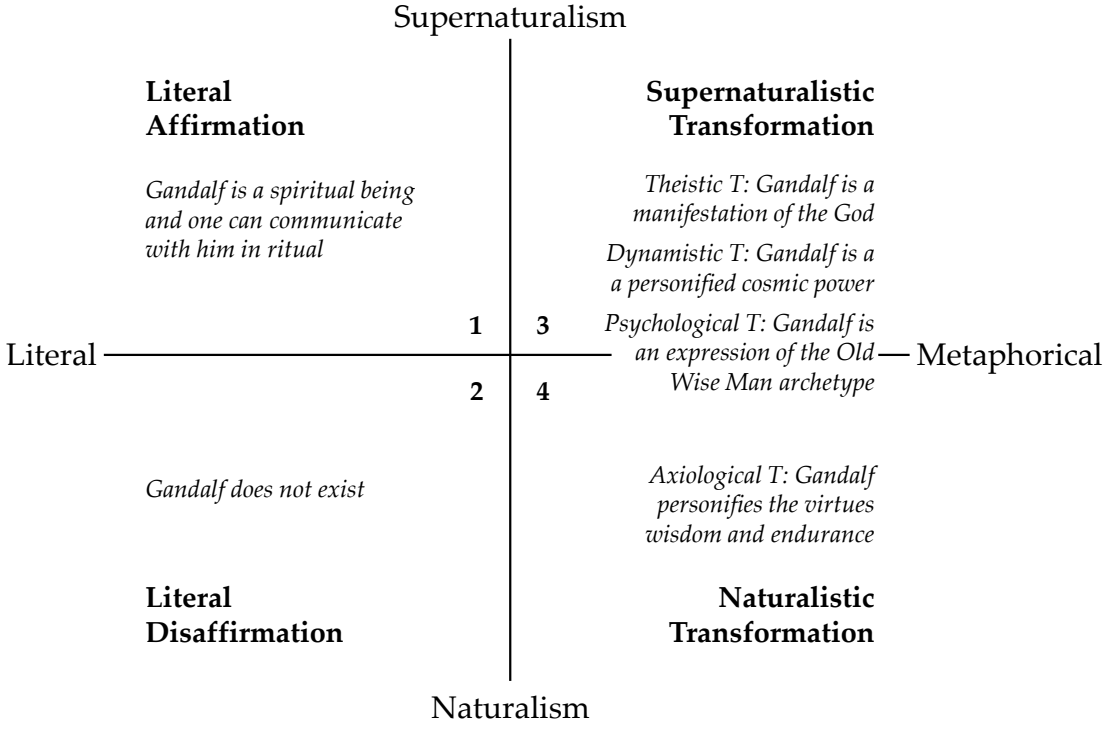
[160] In a chapter entitled "In defence of magic: philosophical and theological rationalization", Luhrmann distinguishes between four rationalisations of the efficacy of magic which she encountered in her fieldwork among magicians in London. The "realist" position simply states that magic works (Luhrmann, 1989, 285). Realist magicians say that they do not "believe" in magic, but that they "know" that magic works (Luhrmann 1989, 285). In my vocabulary these magicians reflectively 'affirm' that belief in the reality of magic which their practice already expresses. In contrast to the realists, "metaphorical" magicians radically reinterpret magical practice. They say that magical claims are objectively false, but valid as 'myth'. According to them, the purpose of magical practice is not to manipulate the physical world, but to develop oneself as a person, to gain spiritual experiences, and so forth (Luhrmann 1989, 293). Luhrmann considers the metaphorical position to be the most sophisticated, but also observes that it is the rarest (1989, 284). This position seems to cover what I refer to as psychological and axiological transformation (see section 5.2.1 below). Luhrmann's third and fourth rationalisations are of a different order than the first and the second, for they do not assess the *ontological* question whether magic is real, but move to an *epistemological* level. The question now becomes whether one can *know* whether magic is real. In my terminology, these two 'rationalisations' therefore fall under the category of justification. Furthermore, they both turn out to fall within the particular *kind* of justification which I refer to as relativisation (cf. section 5.1.4 above). Many of Luhrmann's magicians held what she calls a "two worlds" position. These magicians asserted that their claims about magic were true, but that they could not be evaluated or explained by rational means (Luhrmann 1989, 287). I refer to this position as compartmentalisation. Finally, some of Luhrmann's magicians were "relativists" who argued that truth is subjective and that the magical path was true and right for them, but might not be true for everyone (1989, 290). I refer to this position as subjectivisation. In another chapter, Luhrmann discusses a fifth rationalisation strategy, namely the assertion that magic works, but only on a spiritual and magical plane, and not in the physical world (1989, 274). This strategy falls between the straightforward affirmation of Luhrmann's realists, who hold that magic can influence the physical world, and the naturalising transformation of the metaphorical magicians for whom magic involves no supernatural principles. In my terms, the magical plane position can be considered a form of supernaturalistic transformation.

which I put forward here is not restricted to Tolkien-based or even fiction-based religion, however. On the contrary, the distinctions and categories can be used to analyse ontology assessments in any religious tradition.

5.2.1. Assessing the Ontological Status of Supernatural Entities

Religious first-order beliefs can be rationalised in four different ways as shown in figure 5.4 below.

Figure 5.4. Ontology Assessment of Supernatural Entities (Adapted from Wulff)



The ontological status of the supernatural can either be (1) *literally affirmed*, (2) *literally disaffirmed*, or the original belief can be supplanted by a new and rationalised ontological claim. For lack of a better term, I refer to this middle-position as *transformation*. I distinguish between transformations that (3) result in the formulation of a new supernatural claim (*supernaturalistic transformation*) or (4) in the formulation of a new naturalised claim (*naturalistic transformation*). Both literal affirmation and the two types of transformation consider religious beliefs to be referential signs, i.e. representations (Baudrillard) or signs which possess reference as well as meaning (Frege). Of these, only literal affirmation assumes a simple sign relation in which the religious belief refers to an object in a straightforward literal sense. Transformation, by contrast, counts on a metaphorical sign relation between the belief in question and that to which it allegedly refers.

This four-fold typology is adapted from psychologist of religion David Wulff (1991, 631). Wulff created his original typology to facilitate a systematic comparison of the different degrees and kinds of truth which various schools within the psychology of reli-

gion are prepared to ascribe to religious postulates, especially to the claim that a given unusual experience is caused by a supernatural agent. The matrix drawn up by Wulff is useful for much more than that, however, and can be used as a generic tool to categorise various ontology assessments of religious first-order belief. Figure 5.4 shows an adapted version of Wulff's matrix in which I have left out the psychological schools and substituted some of Wulff's terms with my own.[161] I have used Gandalf as an illustrative example, and plotted four types of transformation (theistic, dynamistic, psychological, and axiological) onto the model. As reflective processes, literal affirmation and disaffirmation are obviously simpler than transformation. Rather than leading to the formulation of a new, reflective belief, an already held immediate belief is simply re-asserted or dismissed. Transformation is more complicated than (dis)affirmation and comes in several different forms. As the next step, let me therefore take a closer look at the various forms of transformation.

Since beliefs about supernatural agents constitute the most fundamental religious beliefs, I focus below on the transformation of supernatural agents. That is not to say, however, that supernatural worlds and processes cannot be transformed. For example, the world of Faery can be rationalised as the collective unconscious, this being an example of a psychological transformation of a supernatural world. The rationalisation that magic works only on a magical plane and not in the physical world constitutes an example of the transformation of a supernatural process.

Theistic transformation refers to the interpretation of a supernatural being, for example one addressed in ritual or experienced in a vision, as the manifestation of another supernatural being. An example of theistic transformation is the belief among many Tolkien-inspired Pagans that the God and the Goddess (i.e. two allegedly real supernatural agents) can manifest themselves in various guises in myths and experiences. According to this view, it is really the God and the Goddess who are invoked when gods and goddesses from various pantheons are addressed in ritual. Hence, a ritual invocation of Gandalf and Galadriel, which on the immediate level treats Gandalf and Galadriel as discrete supernatural beings, is interpreted as being really an invocation of the God and the Goddess. In this case, as in most cases, theistic transformation counts on a limited number of 'core gods' (typically one or two) of whom all other gods are mere

[161] Some psychological schools in Wulff's original matrix are correlation psychology (in quadrant 1), sociobiology (in quadrant 2), analytical psychology (in quadrant 3), and psychoanalysis (in quadrant 4). I have substituted Wulff's term "transcendence" for my own "supernaturalism", and "symbolic" for "metaphorical". Where I speak of supernaturalistic/naturalistic transformation, Wulff draws on Paul Ricoeur to make a distinction between "restorative interpretation" and "reductive interpretation". Since ontology assessment per definition involves interpretation, also when it results in affirmation or disaffirmation, I have substituted Wulff's term interpretation with transformation. Finally, I speak of supernaturalistic (rather than restorative) transformation, because I want to avoid the religionist connotation of the term 'restoration', namely that a real transcendent power exists which can reveal itself in transfigured (e.g. personified) form and whose true nature can be restored or reconstructed through interpretation.

manifestations. In other words, theistic transformation is typically avataric in nature, and one can then speak of avataric mono- or duotheism. In my material, I often encountered Tolkien religionists with a pagan background who slide back and forth between a literal affirmative and theistic transformative interpretation of those beings from Tolkien's literary mythology they address in ritual

Supernaturalistic transformation can also be *dynamistic*. For instance, the God and the Goddess can be seen as personifications of impersonal powers or principles. While these are essentially impersonal, they appear in personified form in myths and experiences, and are also addressed as persons in rituals. This position might be referred to as *avataric dynamism*. Dynamistic transformation of a different kind than the avataric can be found among Christians who consider God to be an impersonal higher power or the Ground of Being.

By psychological transformation I have in mind Jungian transformation, i.e. the reinterpretation of supernatural beings as the expressions of archetypes. On the figure above, this category has been purposefully placed on the border between supernaturalistic and naturalistic transformation. I have done so to reflect that two rationalisations of the ontological status of the archetypes, a naturalistic-psychological and a supernaturalistic-cosmological, can be found side by side both in Jung's own writings and in the use of Jung within the cultic milieu. I thus disagree with Robert Segal who insists that Jung's view of the archetypes was essentially psychological; indeed that Jung considered "both the origin, function and content of religion [to be] *wholly psychological*" (2000b, 65; emphasis added). According to Segal, Jung did not believe the archetypes to be extra-psychic powers revealing themselves in the human psyche.[162] Many of Jung's works allow such a naturalistic-psychological reading, but other scholars, both Jungian scholars (e.g. Anthony Stevens, 2002) and anti-Jungian ones (e.g. Richard Noll, 1996) have emphasised that Jung sometimes went beyond the purely psychological. In a late alchemical work of his, Jung suggested, for example, that

> it may be a prejudice to restrict the psyche to being "inside the body". In so far as the psyche has a non-spatial aspect, there may be a psychic "outside-the-body", a region so utterly different from "my" psychic space that one has to get outside oneself or make use of some auxiliary technique in order to get there (Jung 1970, §410; quoted in Hammer 2004, 438).

Jung believed that the faculty with which one could access the psychic outside-the-body was itself psychological and referred to it as the "transcendent function" of the psyche (1972, 67-91). According to Jung, the transcendent function, when triggered by active

[162] To make this point, Segal contrasts Jung's views with those of the American mythologist Joseph Campbell. Campbell's view of myth is in principle Jungian (Segal 1984; 1987, ch. 11), but according to Segal, Campbell goes one step further than Jung by considering it the function of myth "to reveal the existence of a severed, deeper reality, which he […] deems *metaphysical* as well as psychological" (Segal 1987, 131; emphasis added).

imagination, could facilitate the truly transcendent contact with gods and the dead (Noll 1996, 230).[163] All in all, in Jung's extensive *oeuvre* one can find texts that afford both (a) a purely psychological and hence naturalistic interpretation of myths and religious experiences as expressions of psychological, archetypal structures, and (b) a cosmological and supernaturalistic view in which the psyche is the faculty with which one can access divine realms and cosmic powers that transcend the psyche. In contemporary Jungism, i.e. in the adoption of Jungian ideas within the cultic milieu, one can encounter both views in tension with each other.[164] According to Wouter Hanegraaff, "the usual neo-pagan view" about the "ultimate nature" of the gods (1996, 195-196) is that the gods may be cosmic realities or may be merely products of the human psyche, but that it does not matter. He quotes the Alexandrian Wiccans and Neo-Pagan intellectuals Janet and Stewart Farrar (1985, 153-155) to back up the point.[165] As we shall see especially in chapters 13, 14, and 16, also Tolkien religionists who are inspired by Jung or by Jung-saturated Neo-Paganism waver between a psychological and a cosmological ontology assessment. This has little impact on their ritual practice, however, in which the deities are approached in a straightforwardly literal way.

Axiological transformation, finally, refers to a more abstract interpretation of supernatural entities as the personifications of values, virtues, and so forth. The reduction of God to 'peace and love between humans' falls into this category. The four types of transformation discussed here should not be taken as an exhaustive list of possible ontological transformations of supernatural entities, but I believe to have at least covered those types which are most frequently encountered within the cultic milieu.

In this sub-section, I have focused on the second-order ontology assessment of supernatural elements whose existence has previously been asserted in elemental religious practice. The central issue has been to discriminate between different types of ascribed reference, i.e. of either a literal-affirmative or a metaphorical-transformative kind. In the following sub-section, I shift focus to the ontology assessment of religious narratives. Here, not only the *manner* of ascribed reference is important, but also the *degree* of ascribed reference. Of course, individual supernatural elements in religious narratives can be both affirmed or transformed. Another and more fundamental aspect of ontology assessment of religious narratives and supernatural fiction, however, is to determine which of the supernatural elements in the text, especially the supernatural agents and events involving supernatural intervention, have a counterpart in the actual world at all. Since fiction-based religionists as a rule read their authoritative texts neither as absolutely accurate history nor as completely non-referential fiction, it is necessary to soften the

[163] The essay on "The Transcendent Function" was originally written in 1916. See Noll (1996, 225-230).

[164] On Jungism, see Hammer (2006a) and Noll (1996).

[165] One finds the same view among other intellectual Pagans, such as Vivianne Crowley (1989) and Michael York (2009).

binary opposition between referential and fictionalising reading modes that was introduced in chapter 2. In what follows, I introduce a number of reading modes that fall between these two extremes.

5.2.2. Assessing the Referentiality of Religious Narratives and Supernatural Fiction

Fiction-based religions tend to emerge as individuals experiment with invoking supernatural beings from a fictional text in ritual. If people continue to perform such rituals and come to believe that the supernatural agents invoked in those rituals are real (either in a literal or transformative sense), that necessarily raises the question: if these beings are real, which other parts of the fictional text might then refer to real events or states of affairs in the actual world? It is thus a fundamental aspect of rationalisation processes in any fiction-based religion to assess the referentiality of its authoritative, fictional text. That is true also for Tolkien religion. In all the cases to be discussed in part II, Tolkien religionists ask themselves two questions: 'Which parts of Tolkien's literary mythology refer to real beings, places, events, and so on in the actual world?' and 'Do these parts refer literally or in some non-literal way?'[166]

In the terms of Marie-Laure Ryan's typology of approaches to fictionality (2002, cf. section 2.1.2), Tolkien religionists, and religionists in general, approach their texts as continuum theorists, not as binary theorists. That is to say, they are interested in assessing the degree of actual overlap between the textual actual world (TAW) and the actual world (AW). They are less interested in the more technical issues of whether the author dissociates himself from the narrator or not, or whether the textual reference world (TRW) is the AW itself or a fictional world which only partially resembles the AW. In short, they are not interested in classifying the text as either history or fiction, though they may use these terms in a loose fashion. Nevertheless, their implicit assessments of the relation between author and narrator and of the text's reference world affect their explicit judgement of the text's degree of reference, i.e. the perceived overlap between the TAW and the AW.

Tolkien religionists tend to believe that *some*, but not all, of the beings, events, and states of affairs in Tolkien's TAW have counterparts in the AW. That is to say, their ascription of reference to Tolkien's literary mythology is *selective*. In this respect they are not different from other religionists, for most religionists approach their authoritative narra-

[166] The assessments of the referentiality of Tolkien's literary mythology is a matter of continued debate, and one that goes together with processes of belief elaboration and religious blending. For example, if the Valar are believed to exist, one must embellish this core belief with cosmological details (e.g. where do the Valar reside?) and with ideas about why they are worth interacting with (e.g. perhaps they can intervene in the material world to help or heal). These systematised beliefs can be constructed out of pieces of information from Tolkien's literary mythology (e.g. the Valar live in the Blessed Realm), which can again be combined or merged with notions from other religious traditions (e.g. the Blessed Realm is situated on the astral plane).

tives in this way. To take a Christian example, many Christians affirm the historicity of the Incarnation and the Resurrection, but disaffirm that Jesus ever made water into wine. To take another example, there are Christians who affirm the existence of God, but disaffirm all claims of his intervention in history, including the Incarnation and the Resurrection. Also Jediists who affirm the existence of the Force, but hold that *Star Wars* is fiction and that Master Yoda has never existed, engage in selective reference ascription.

Selective reference ascription is patterned, and we encounter the same patterns in Tolkien religion and across the entire religious field. Individuals, who feel that they cannot believe that their authoritative narratives are absolutely historically accurate, but who do think that the texts contain a referential core, use one or more of the following three strategies of selective reference ascription. Strategy one is to affirm only the most important supernatural claims, and to disaffirm the rest. Rudolf Bultmann's programme of demythologisation is a famous example. Hence, those Christians who maintain that God intervened in the AW at the moments of Incarnation and Resurrection, but who disaffirm the wonder stories, fall into this category. I have chosen this example to illustrate that when engaging in selective reference ascription, it is perfectly possible to affirm not only the existence in the AW of certain members of the text's supernatural inventory, but also to affirm that some of the events of supernatural intervention in the text (but not all) have taken place in the AW.

Strategy two is to affirm the *existence* of supernatural agents, worlds, and processes, but to disaffirm all claims about concrete interventions of supernatural agents at specific times and places in the AW. Christians who believe in God but not in the Incarnation, and Jediists who believe in the Force but consider *Star Wars* to be fiction, fall into this category. I refer to this position as *mytho-cosmological* because it affirms claims about supernatural forces in the cosmos, but not about supernatural intervention in history. The third strategy of selective reference ascription is to claim that the narrative in question does not refer to the material world, but only to a spiritual world or plane. This strategy is particularly apt for fiction-based religions whose texts by definition do not claim to refer to the AW. Otherworldly reference ascription comes in both a cosmological and an historical variant, i.e. the text tells of supernatural entities on another plane or the text tells the history of a parallel world. Seen from a thisworldly point of view, however, both variants can be considered sub-types of the mytho-cosmological mode because they both avoid making claims about supernatural intervention in the material world. Tolkien religionists who claim that Middle-earth exists on another plane engage in selective reference ascription of this otherworldly kind.

Based on these patterns of selective reference ascription we can distinguish between a mytho-historical and a mytho-cosmological mode in which religious narratives and supernatural fiction can be read. These are the two most important modes, but there exist also two additional religious reading modes, the mythopoeic and the binocular, as well as two non-religious reading modes, the euhemeristic and the fictionalising. The six modes are summarised in table 5.1 and will be discussed in turn below.

Table 5.1. Readings Modes for Religious Narratives and Supernatural Fiction						
Reading mode	**M-H**	**M-C**	**MP**	**B**	**E**	**F**
Text classified as	Dramatised history	Fiction (or hybrid)	Fiction (or hybrid)	Fiction & palimpsest	Distorted history (Legend)	Fiction
Text sustains religion in the AW	+	+	+	+/-	-	-
Author believed to be inspired	+/-	+/-	+	-	-	-
$TAW_I = AW_I$	+	+	(+)	(+)	(+)	-
$TAW_H = AW_H$	+	-	-	(+)	(+)	-
TRW = AW	+	-	-	-	+	-

M-H = mytho-historical mode; M-C = mytho-cosmological mode; MP = mythopoeic mode; B = binocular mode; E = euhemeristic mode; F = fictionalising mode; AW = actual world; TAW = textual actual world; TRW = textual reference world; AW_I/TAW_I = inventory of AW/TAW; AW_H/TAW_H = history of AW/TAW; (+) = strongly distorted or metaphorical reference.

The *mytho-historical* reading mode considers the text to tell about real supernatural agents and their actual interventions in the AW. Formulated more technically, it considers the inventory and the history of the TAW to correspond to the inventory and the history of the AW, and it considers the AW to be the TRW. The mytho-historical reading considers texts to be referential and hence historical. But it is not blind to the fact that religious narratives are typically dramatised much more than ordinary historical discourse. A mytho-historical reading expects some confabulation and hyperbole and considers these to be legitimate narrative devices. A strictly historical reading, by contrast, would perceive such elements as errors and lies. Attempting to sort the historical wheat from the mythological chaff, mytho-historical readers differ in degree of affirmation. Mytho-historical readings occupy a scale from the very selective (i.e. the text has an historical-supernatural core, but most details are confabulated) to the almost absolute (i.e. the text is a truthful and quite precise historical account of *wie es eigentlich gewesen*).[167]

The mytho-historical mode is most closely related to the *mytho-cosmological* mode. These two modes have in common that they consider narratives in question to include

[167] In table 5.1, I use the term 'dramatised history' to denote dramatised narratives that have or are attributed referentiality (TRW = AW). My use of the term differs from that of Ryan who uses it to refer to dramatised narratives that are almost historically correct, but stage themselves as fiction (TRW ≠ AW) and thus fall into the category of true fiction (1991, 561).

literal references to real supernatural entities in the AW. They differ, however, in that only the mytho-historical mode considers the actions of the supernatural beings in the narrative to refer literally to real interventions of these beings in the AW. The mytho-cosmological reading treats the narrative as a text which neither tells of events which have taken place in the AW nor claims to do so. Technically speaking, the mytho-cosmological reading therefore considers the narrative to be fiction. At the same time, however, the mytho-cosmological reading considers the TAW to have imported allegedly real supernatural entities from the AW, entities of whose existence the fictional text is taken to be indirect evidence. Stated differently, the mytho-cosmological mode recognises an overlap only in *inventory* but not in *history* between the TAW and the AW. In this respect, the mytho-cosmological mode differs from the mytho-historical mode which considers both the inventory and the history of the TAW to correspond to the inventory and the history of the AW. A common mytho-cosmological reading of Tolkien's literary mythology affirms the existence of the Valar and the Blessed Realm (inventory), but considers the narrated events in *LR* and *S* (history) to be entirely fictional. Implicitly, readers who adopt the mytho-cosmological mode classify the text as 'an imaginary story about real supernatural entities'. Or they approach the text as a hybrid, i.e. as a fictional text embedding passages about the supernatural fit for a referential reading.

The mytho-cosmological position is actually self-contradictory because it maintains the existence of supernatural agents who *can* intervene in the actual world – indeed this very assumption underlies ritual communication with these agents – but refrains from affirming claims about any real intervention. Despite of this, many contemporary religionists seem more comfortable with a mytho-cosmological position than with a mytho-historical one, because the mytho-cosmological position clashes less obviously with their non-religious knowledge. Indeed, this might be one of the reasons for the increasing use of fiction as a source of religious inspiration, for one can treat a narrative as fiction (in the sense of not attributing reference authority to the narrative *events*) and still hold that it refers to 'real' supernatural entities.

As already stated, the mytho-historical and the mytho-cosmological modes have in common that they consider texts to refer *literally* (albeit selectively) to real supernatural entities in the AW. Religious narratives are usually approached in one of these two modes. The two other religious reading modes, the mythopoeic and the binocular, differ by ascribing only *metaphorical* reference to the textual supernatural. When speculative fiction is interpreted religiously, it is most often read in one of these two metaphorical modes. Even so, speculative fiction *can* be approached in one of the literal modes, just as religious narratives can be read in the mythopoeic or binocular mode. The mythopoeic and the binocular modes differ from each other in the *manner* in which they ascribe metaphorical reference. It is easiest first to discuss the binocular mode and then to subsequently compare it to the mythopoeic mode.

The *binocular* reading takes the narrative in question to be fiction through and through, but at the same time points out that some aspects of the textual supernatural

are so strikingly similar to real supernatural entities in the AW that they indirectly bear witness to them. In the case of Tolkien spirituality, we encounter the binocular mode among those Pagans who insist that Tolkien's mythology is fiction, but who nevertheless hold that some of the fantastic elements, such as the elves and the otherworlds, provide "metaphorical binoculars" (Harvey 2000) which make the reader curious about the 'real' elves and otherworlds (cf. ch. 8). We here have a form of affirmation, for the Pagans affirm the existence of real otherworlds and elves in the AW. But it is not literal affirmation, for the supposedly real otherworlds and elves are different from those described by Tolkien. I speak in this case of binocular affirmation. In most cases the binocular reading considers the text in question to be a palimpsest, i.e. a rewriting of another and more authentic text. In the case of Tolkien spirituality, Tolkien's literary mythology can be considered a rewriting of mythology, especially Celtic mythology, which Tolkien used as a source of inspiration. In any case, the original text is in turn read in one of the affirmative modes, i.e. in the mytho-historical, mytho-cosmological, mythopoeic, or euhemeristic mode. The authors referred to in section 0.2.1 above who see Tolkien's literary mythology as an allegory of the Christian Gospels or of the fundamental narratives of some other religion also approach it in the binocular mode.

The *mythopoeic* reading considers myths and mythopoeic fiction to refer to supernatural entities in the AW, but in a supernaturalistically transformed way. Under this label fall readings that consider the text's supernatural inventory to represent, in a metaphorically transfigured way, 'real' theistic, dynamistic, or archetypal entities in the AW. The mythopoeic reading thus aims to reconstruct the supernatural entities that have allegedly *revealed themselves* in the text. In other words, the mythopoeic mode takes for granted that the author of the text has been inspired and that supernatural forces have manifested themselves in the text by their own volition rather than the author's. In the spiritual Tolkien milieu, some religionists adopt this reading and claim that Tolkien received revelations which he penned down, and that the Valar in his text, *for that reason*, refer to real supernatural entities. By contrast, it is binocular affirmation to say that Tolkien's Elves are fictional, but that they indirectly refer to the real elves because Tolkien reworked Celtic mythology which *does* refer to real beings.[168] Even so, the mythopoeic mode is always also binocular in character. Jungian readings, for instance, will always consider myth and mythopoeic fiction to be expressions of those real archetypes which Jung has described more accurately than any myth. That is to say, a mythopoeic reading interprets the text (e.g. Tolkien's literary mythology) in the light of another text (e.g. Jung's archetype theory), and attributes mytho-cosmological reference to this other text.

Taken together, the four religious reading modes stand in contrast to readings of religious narratives and supernatural fiction that reject that the texts reveal something

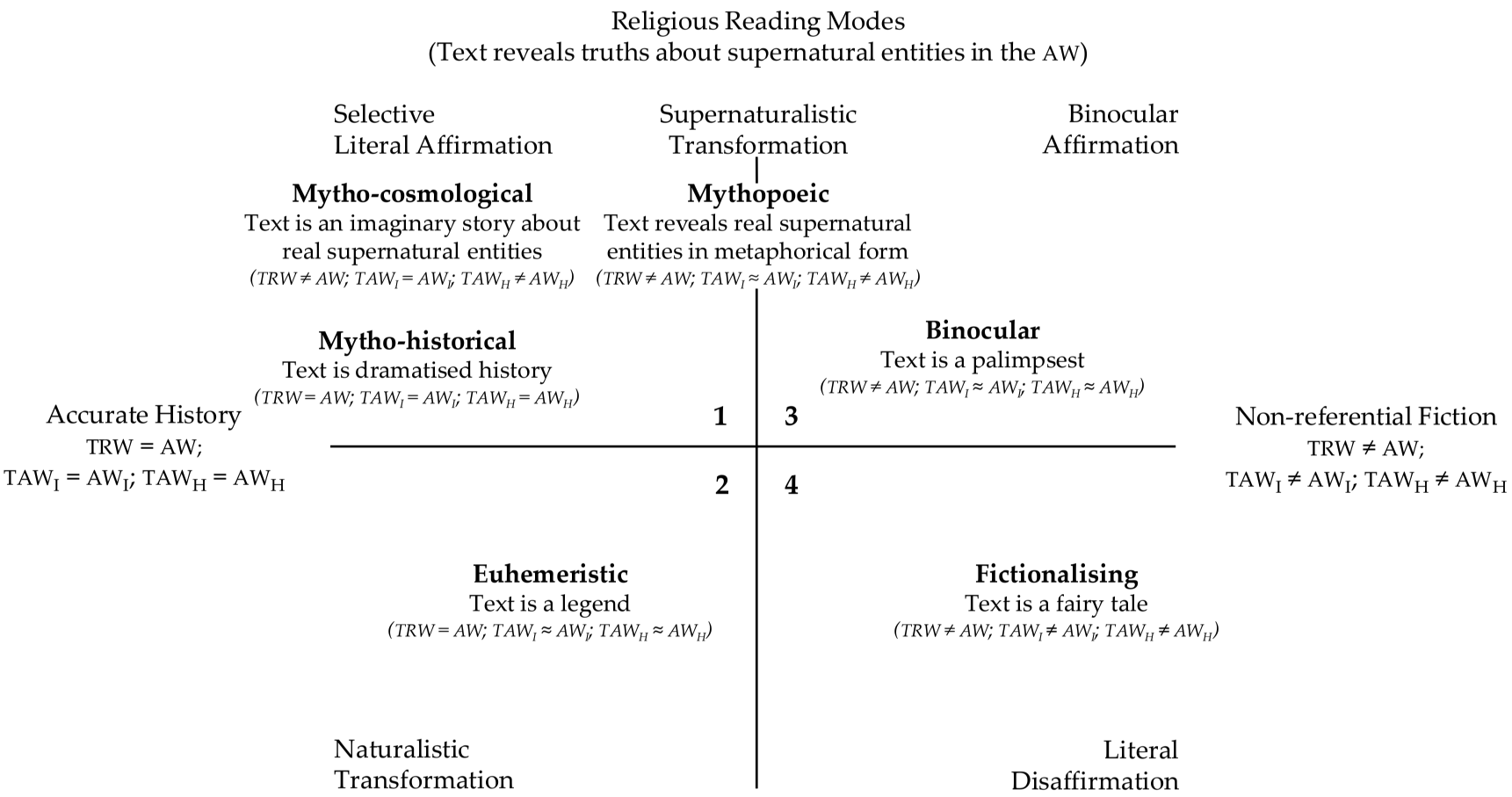
[168] With C.S. Peirce (cf. Greenlee 1973) we can say that the mythopoeic mode counts on a sign relation between the textual supernatural and the allegedly real supernatural that is symbolic *as well as* indexical in character, while the binocular mode counts on a sign relation that is iconic.

about supernatural entities in the AW. We can distinguish between two such non-religious readings modes. The *fictionalising* mode takes the narrative to be without any reference whatsoever. Though the TAW can still be considered to have imported some elements from the AW, the fictionalising reading discounts any overlap between the TAW's inventory of supernatural elements and the inventory of the AW. We might say that this reading not only considers the text to be fiction, but implicitly classifies it as a special type of fiction, namely as fantasy or fairy tale, i.e. fiction about the imaginary supernatural. Most readers of Tolkien's narratives and other works of supernatural fiction adopt the fictionalising mode. Also religious narratives can be read in the fictionalising mode. That is for example the case when contemporary readers enjoy Greek and Germanic mythology as mere fantasy literature.

The other non-religious mode is the *euhemeristic* mode.[169] Like the mytho-historical mode, the euhemeristic mode takes religious narratives to have an historical core; but contrary to the mytho-historical mode, it greatly reduces or wholly eliminates the supernaturalism of the text. The euhemeristic mode considers the text in question to be a 'legend' in the sense of greatly distorted and transfigured history. A euhemeristic reading which we will encounter often is the interpretation of the elves and fairies of myth as references to historical human tribes – possibly tribes possessing real magical powers. In principle, only texts with reference ambition can be read euhemeristically. Tolkien's literary mythology is therefore itself never read in this way, but the alternative historians considered in chapter 12 and many of the self-identified Elves treated in chapter 11 indirectly approach Tolkien's narratives euhemeristically by reading them as palimpsests of more original texts which they in turn read in the euhemeristic mode. In figure 5.5 below, I have depicted the six principal modes in which religious narratives and supernatural fiction can be read. This figure gives the same information as table 5.1 above, but in a graphic format that makes it easier to compare the various reading modes with the typology of ontology assessments of supernatural entities (cf. figure 5.3 above). Please note, however, that contrary to figure 5.3 the horizontal axis in figure 5.5 does not represent the *manner* of ascribed ontology, i.e. from literal affirmation to metaphorical transformation, but the *degree* of ascribed reference from accurate historicity to fictionality.

[169] Euhemerism is named after Euhemerus of Messina (*c*. 330-260 BC) who claimed that the Greek gods were human heroes and rulers who had become deified. The term can refer specifically to the notion that gods are really apotheosised humans or more broadly to any historical-naturalistic explanation of myth. I use the term in the broad sense.

Figure 5.5. Reading Modes for Religious Narratives and Supernatural Fiction (Graphically)



AW = actual world; TAW = textual actual world; TRW = textual reference world;
AW_I/TAW_I = inventory of AW/TAW; AW_H/TAW_H = history of AW/TAW

5.3. The Metaphorical Turn Thesis

In an interesting article entitled "Metaphor or Invocation?", Martin Ramstedt (2007a) has argued that a convergence is taking place between "modern paganism and fantasy fiction" and more broadly between "alternative spiritualities" and "popular culture" (2007a, 1). One half of this convergence thesis is uncontroversial. It is beyond doubt that popular culture draws on alternative spiritualities and that fantasy fiction specifically borrows from pagan mythologies. That is true for fantasy fiction in general and even more so for the sub-category of 'Pagan fantasy' which draws inspiration not only from pagan mythologies, but also from contemporary Pagan practice (cf. section 8.3.3 below). It is more daring to state, as Ramstedt does, that a "metaphorical turn" has been taking place in the religious field since the 18th century (2007a, 1, 3). As a result of this turn, he states, "many people have come to perceive the symbols and stories of the traditional religions not anymore as literal truth but as metaphors" (Ramstedt 2007a, 1). According to Ramstedt, the convergence of alternative spiritualities and popular culture is only one manifestation of this general process. Rather than being restricted to post-traditional religion, the metaphorical turn plays out also within Christianity and other forms of traditionalised religion.

Throughout Ramstedt's article it becomes apparent that he uses the terms 'metaphorical' and 'belief' somewhat loosely. Significantly, Ramstedt does not distinguish between first- and second-order beliefs. When he speaks of 'beliefs' he really means reflective rationalisations, not the beliefs expressed in actual practice. What Ramstedt observes is thus a metaphorical turn in people's religious rationalisations; but that is something different from a metaphorical turn in religion as such. It is therefore not warranted when Ramstedt claims that ritual is collapsing into play (2007a, 3), though he may well be observing a change in how people rationalise the first-order beliefs they express in ritual.

Furthermore, for Ramstedt 'metaphorical' belief can mean different things. It can refer both to dynamistic and psychological transformations of the supernatural and to selective ascription of reference to religious narratives. Ramstedt analyses the religious rationalisations of Dutch Pagans and demonstrates their lack of interest in religious claims about the intervention of supernatural agents in the historical past. That is crucial, because it is this cosmological rather than historical orientation which makes it possible for Ramstedt's Pagans to draw inspiration from fiction. That the religious orientation of these Pagans is cosmological rather than historical does not imply, however, that it is also metaphorical rather than literal, though indeed some of them engage in Jungian rationalisation.

It thus seems that Ramstedt has identified a real change, namely a turn away from an historical understanding of religion – a *de-historicising* turn – that sometimes but not always is accompanied by a metaphorical turn towards a dynamistic or Jungian conception of the divine. Let me therefore reformulate Ramstedt's thesis in my own termino-

logy. Thus conceived, the metaphorical turn thesis predicts two related trends in contemporary religion, namely that (1) religious narratives are increasingly read in the mytho-cosmological or mythopoeic mode rather than in the mytho-historical mode, and that (2) supernatural agents are increasingly rationalised as impersonal powers or psychological principles. It seems to follow logically that if these two processes occur, then contemporary religionists must also be expected to (3) increasingly protect their religious claims by means of relativisation rather than legitimisation.

Other scholars of alternative religion have made claims about the changing or unchanging nature of religious belief in contemporary times that either affirm Ramstedt's thesis or go against it. One ally of Ramstedt's is Wouter Hanegraaff (2003), who has argued that contemporary magicians no longer count on forces and processes that can influence the empirical world. As Hanegraaff puts it, the world has become disenchanted, and in the disenchanted world, magic only survives as disenchanted magic. As a consequence, contemporary magic is no longer focused on the world, but on the "reified imagination" (Hanegraaff 2003, 370). That is to say that rather than being a technique for manipulating the physical world, magic "has been interpreted increasingly as a series of psychological techniques for exalting individual consciousness" (Hanegraaff 2003, 371). While magicians continue to speak of magical forces and to invoke angels and spirits in their rituals, this should be interpreted as mere metaphorical references to what they now believe to be purely psychological forces and processes.

Other scholars have argued against Hanegraaff and Ramstedt's view that contemporary religion and magic are becoming increasingly disenchanted, psychologised, and metaphorical. Egil Asprem (2008, 142; 2012, 74-77), for example, has criticised Hanegraaff's account of the disenchantment of magic. As Asprem argues, magic has indeed become psychologised in so far as it is the *mind that works the magic*, but modern magic is not disenchanted, for most magicians still expect it to work real effects in the physical world. Citing Luhrmann's study (1989), Christopher Partridge (2004, 40-41) has made the same point against Hanegraaff.[170] In general, Partridge (2004) argues that the world is not becoming disenchanted, but *re-enchanted* at the moment. Partridge observes that people increasingly believe in the existence of supernatural agents and forces inhabiting the cosmos. Furthermore, Olav Hammer reminds us that in the New Age movement, people generally believe literally. New Agers rationalise their religious experiences, including those involving supernatural agents, in a pre-critical and affirmative way as "faithful representation[s] of underlying reality" (Hammer 2006b, 860). They also consider their

[170] Ironically, Hanegraaff (2003, 370) also backs up his position with Luhrmann (1989). Hanegraaff cites Luhrmann's assertion that most magicians rationalise their magical practice as being effective only on a magical plane (Luhrmann 1989, 276), but he fails to mention that Luhrmann also states that many magicians are in fact realists who *do* believe that magic can affect the physical world (Luhrmann 1989, 285). Partridge refers to other passages in Luhrmann's work (1989, 164, 177-178) in which she stresses that even magicians who believe in a magical plane and attempt to separate magical practice from everyday life find it very difficult to keep the two worlds separated in practice. See also footnote 160 above.

historical claims, for instance about the past existence of Atlantis, to be literal rather than metaphorical.

The situation is thus that scholars of contemporary, alternative religion disagree whether a metaphorical turn is taking place within the cultic milieu or not. One of the things I want to do in part II is to see whether my material supports or challenges the metaphorical turn thesis. Of course a study of a small group of Tolkien religionists will not be enough to settle the case. It is interesting to test the metaphorical turn thesis on my material, however, because one would expect a de-historicising and metaphorical turn, if it is taking place in cultic religion in general, to be even more pronounced in fiction-based religion. That is to say, if Tolkien-based religion turns out to be cosmological and metaphorical, that is simply what could be expected and changes nothing. But if rationalisations in Tolkien-based religion turn out to be literal-affirmative and if Tolkien religionists seek to objectivise rather than to de-objectivise their claims, then that would be a serious blow to the thesis that a metaphorical turn is taking place in the cultic milieu and in contemporary religion in general.

Part II

The Spiritual Milieu Based on J.R.R. Tolkien's Literary Mythology

Chapter 6. Method: Data Collection and Analytical Strategy

The present chapter on method falls into two parts. In the first section, I describe how I gained entrance into the spiritual Tolkien milieu and how I proceeded to study the religious use of Tolkien's literary mythology within this milieu. I also present an overview of the collected data and of the groups studied. In the second section, I lay out the strategy for my analysis of the spiritual Tolkien milieu. I draw on the discussions and distinctions from chapters 3 through 5 to operationalise my research questions further by breaking them down into a number of sub-questions. I also formulate four hypotheses related to the research questions which will be tested on the empirical material.

6.1. Methods of Data Collection

6.1.1. Sampling and Possible Island Effect

It was coincidence that made Tolkien spirituality the empirical focus of my dissertation. I had originally planned to study Jediism and two other cases of fiction-based religion when I, in May 2009, received an email from Gwineth. Gwineth had read about my research by coincidence and suggested that it might be interesting for me to look at her Internet-based group. The group, Ilsaluntë Valion (The Silver Ship of the Valar), was devoted to the spiritual or 'gnostic' exploration of Tolkien's literary works. I was very grateful for Gwineth's offer and interviewed her and several other members of her group. Ilsaluntë Valion became my entrance point into a whole milieu of Tolkien spirituality, and eventually the historical depth and rich internal variation within this milieu caused me to give up my original cases and to focus my project entirely on Tolkien religion.

I knew that Tolkien's books had inspired many Neo-Pagans back in the 1970s, and in Graham Harvey's *Listening People, Speaking Earth: Contemporary Paganism*, I had read about Heathens and Chaos Magicians performing Tolkien-inspired rituals (2007, 54, 86, 97). Harvey had not provided any concrete references to existing Tolkien-based groups in his book, however, so I wrote to him and asked if he could put me in contact with any such groups. Harvey replied that he was not in contact with any active or formerly active Tolkien-based groups, but reaffirmed his conviction that such groups must exist. He also told me that he had the hunch that more Tolkien spirituality had been going on in the 1960s and 1970s than today (Harvey 280110). With Harvey unable to provide me a second entrance into the field of Tolkien spirituality, I asked the members of Ilsaluntë Valion if they knew of any groups similar to their own.

Luckily, the members of Ilsaluntë Valion had been searching the Internet for like-minded individuals for years, and with their help I was introduced to a number of other Tolkien-based and/or Elven groups and key persons who again could help me further. That is to say that I snowballed my way through the milieu, always asking people to name other individuals or groups they knew to be engaged in Tolkien-based religion. Snowballing is often the only way to get a sample when studying small and loosely organised religious milieus (cf. Berger, Leach, and Shaffer 2003, xviii-xx), but the method has a potential weakness. One's snowball sample may come to suffer from the so-called island effect if one mistakes a particular network of individuals and groups that is tightly connected (the island) for the whole field (which might include other islands as well).

Fortunately for researchers of loosely organised religion, the Internet has diminished this problem by making it easier for geographically isolated individuals and groups to connect with each other in larger networks, and for researchers to uncover these networks. To diminish the island effect, I thus searched the Internet for Tolkien-based groups myself. I used the Google search engine and looked at social networking sites such as Yahoo! Groups and LiveJournal. I limited myself to searches in English, partly for the pragmatic reason of demarcation, and partly because the international character of Ilsaluntë Valion suggested that also individuals who do not have English as their mother-tongue join English/international groups (besides native English-speakers, Ilsaluntë Valion has (had) Dutch, Romanian, Portuguese, and Israeli members). Searching the Internet in this way, I found several online groups, but none that the members of Ilsaluntë Valion had not already discovered. All eight online groups that I found and studied for this project were to some extent interconnected and formed one large online network of Tolkien spirituality. A larger number of tiny, marginal, or short-lived groups were connected to the Tolkien network as well, as were several individual homepages.[171] The existence of a (major) English-using Tolkien-spiritual online group outside this network must be considered highly unlikely.

Through my online contacts, especially Calantirniel of Tië eldaliéva (The Elven Path), I also got in contact with a few offline groups, including a circle of the Tribunal of the Sidhe. She also put me in touch with several individuals, including the Silver Elves, who have practised Tolkien-inspired Elven spirituality since the 1970s, and a certain Morcelu Atreides who has instructed others in his Tolkien-based, duotheistic tradition. Also of note is the Fifth Way Mystery School, whose members fashioned a Valar-based ritual back in 1993 which subsequently circulated among Pagans in New Zealand and America before being been made available online. Though the Fifth Way Mystery School was not primarily Tolkien-based, it constitutes a node within the larger Tolkien network because Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion used the Fifth Way Mystery School's Valar ritual as a source of inspiration for developing their own communal rituals.

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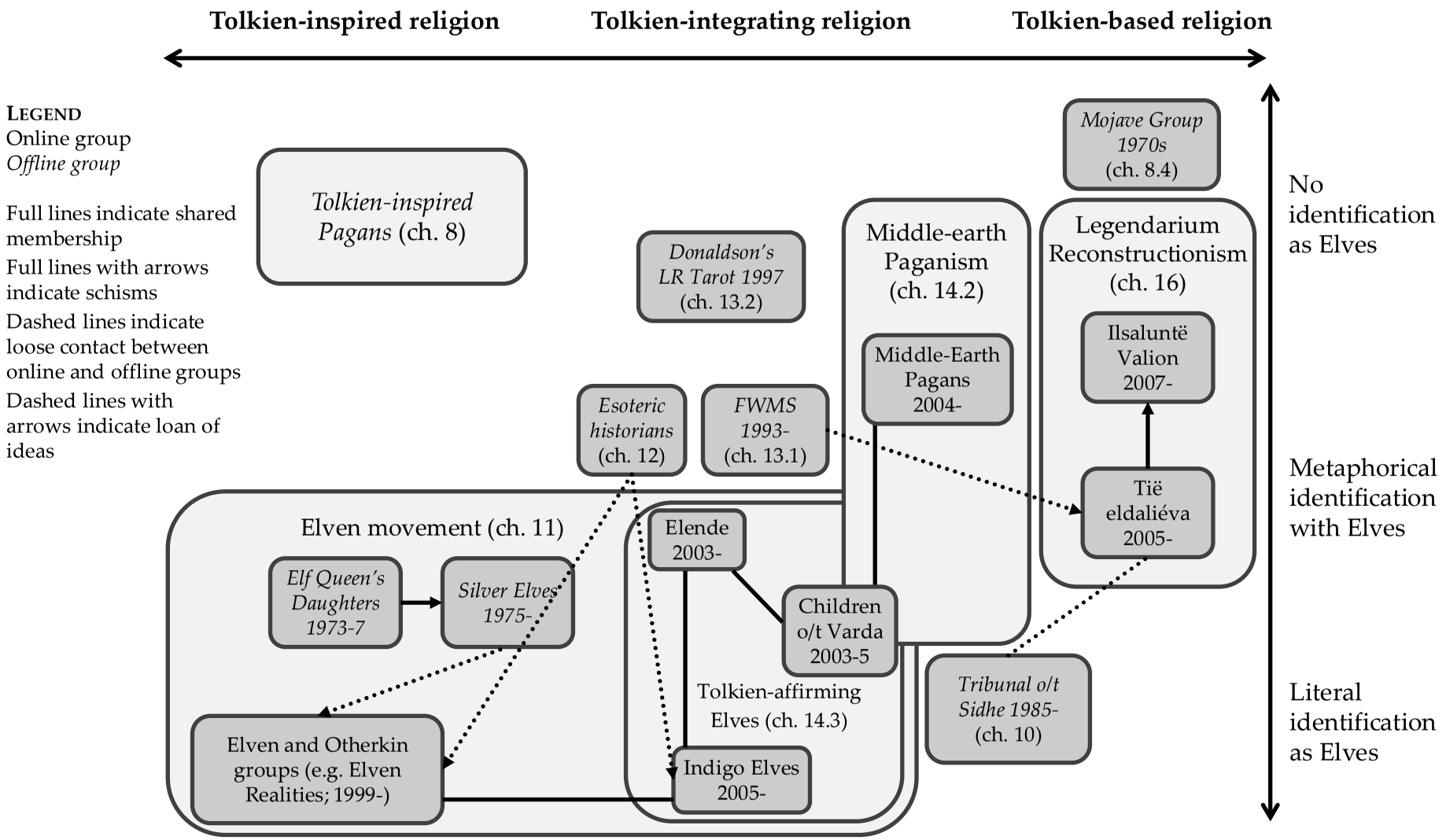
[171] Some of these groups and individual homepages will be cited in later chapters (esp. chs. 10, 11, and 16), but will not be included in the data overview in this chapter.

I quickly found out that some groups within the spiritual Tolkien milieu share more interests, beliefs, practices, and members with each other than with other groups, and that all the online groups (and some of the offline ones) could therefore be grouped into a number of clusters. Two of these clusters, Middle-earth Paganism and Legendarium Reconstructionism, focus on ritual interaction with characters from Tolkien's literary mythology. Middle-earth Pagans mix Middle-earth imagery with Wiccan circle-casting and duotheism, while Legendarium Reconstructionists attempt to construct a purely Tolkien-based tradition bottom-up. Together, these two clusters form the core of the online spiritual Tolkien milieu. Besides Middle-earth Paganism and Legendarium Reconstructionism, we also have the Tolkien-inspired movement of self-identified Elves. When the Elven movement emerged in the 1970s, the self-identified Elves all agreed that Tolkien's literary mythology was a main source of inspiration, but also agreed to approach it metaphorically. Today, most self-identified Elves have left this middle-position. One group considers Tolkien's books (and especially Peter Jackson's movie adaptations) to be marginal or even illegitimate sources due to their fictionality. Another group identifies explicitly with Tolkien's Elves, the Quendi, and claims that Tolkien's works are non-fictional. The Tolkien-affirming Elves constitute a third cluster within the spiritual Tolkien milieu proper. The non-Tolkienesque majority of the Elven movement lies on the margin of the spiritual Tolkien milieu, but has been included in this study because of its size and because it constitutes an interesting case of fiction-based religion that actively seeks to hide its fictional roots. Despite their varying emphases, the four clusters are by no means isolated from each other, and members of all online groups knew about groups belonging to other clusters than their own. In figure 6.1 below, I have graphically depicted some major nodes in the combined online/offline milieu of Tolkien spirituality.

All the offline groups which I have studied had some online presence, either a homepage or a group page on a social networking site, and were in that way connected to the online Tolkien network. Besides the few offline groups I have found, there could very well exist other offline groups and individuals who integrate Tolkien elements into their spirituality, but who cannot easily be found on the Internet. Considering that only one of more than twenty circles of the Tribunal of the Sidhe is connected to the online network, Harvey could very well be right that there exist many Pagan groups who work Tolkien-inspired rituals at least occasionally. The great interest among Pagans and magicians for the Fifth Way Mystery School's Valar ritual suggests the same, as does the fact that Calantirniel knew more individual Pagans like Morcelu who integrate Tolkien material in their spiritual paths. All in all, there is good reason to believe that more Tolkien spirituality is going on offline than I can document in this dissertation. If this is true, it means that while I have probably found all the online groups there are to find, my *offline* material suffers from the island effect. Because I have only identified isolated islands of offline material, I cannot know to which degree my data are representative for the archipelago of offline Tolkien spirituality (if it exists at all).

Figure 6.1. The Main Groups of the Spiritual Tolkien Milieu



6.1.2. Overview of the Empirical Material

Since this dissertation constitutes the first academic study of Tolkien spirituality, my discussion necessarily builds primarily on new, qualitative data collected for this project. Only the discussions of the related phenomena of (spiritual) fandom (touched upon in the introduction) and the reception of Tolkien in the counter-culture and the Neo-Pagan movement (in chapter 8) build on secondary sources.

I have conducted nine in-depth interviews using Skype chat with members of Ilsaluntë Valion (6), Tië eldaliéva (2), and the Tribunal of the Sidhe (1), all of which were followed up with (sometimes very extensive) email correspondence. Also, I have conducted seven interviews via email or ProBoard with members of Ilsaluntë Valion (2), the Silver Elves (1), Indigo Elves (1), the Fifth Way Mystery School (1), and Middle-Earth Pagans[172] (1), and with Morcelu Atreides. Apart from my communications with these sixteen individuals across eight groups, I have conducted a more sketchy analysis of the discussion forums of Ilsaluntë Valion, Middle-Earth Pagans, and Indigo Elves, and of the discussion lists of Elende, Children of the Varda, and Elven Realities. From the Fifth Way Mystery School, Tië eldaliéva, and (especially) Ilsaluntë Valion I have collected roughly a hundred ritual formats or Skype recordings of rituals, and with members of Tië eldaliéva I have participated in one Skype-mediated ritual. Apart from the groups which I have been in contact with directly, I have second-hand knowledge of two older groups, namely the Elf Queen's Daughters and a group that was active in the Mojave Desert in the 1970s. To make this study of the religious use of Tolkien's literary mythology complete, I also analyse Terry Donaldson's *Lord of the Rings* Tarot Deck and the integration of Tolkien material into the bloodline speculations of esoteric historians. These two latter cases fall outside the spiritual Tolkien milieu proper, however, and can better be considered part of the milieu's plausibility structure. In total, I have data on 15 groups or cases:

[172] This group spells its name with a capital E even though Middle-earth would be the correct spelling. The name of this group should not be confused with the term Middle-earth Paganism which I use as a general designation for Tolkien spirituality in which elements from Tolkien's literary mythology are combined with Pagan (often Wiccan) material.

Table 6.1. Overview of Data Collected from the Spiritual Tolkien Milieu							
Group	**Founded**	**Tolkien texts**	**Primary location**	**Cluster[A]**	**Members[B]**	**Activity[C]**	**Primary data[D]**
Mojave desert group	1973	*LR*	Offline		*c.* 8		[* Second-hand data from Prof. Robert Ellwood, from his book *Frodo's Quest*, 2002, and from personal email contact, 2010, 2012].
Elf Queen's Daughters (EQD)	1973	*LR*	Offline	EM	*c.* 10		[* Second-hand data from the Silver Elves and from Margot Adler's *Drawing Down the Moon*, 1979].
Silver Elves (SE)	1975	*LR*, *S*	Offline	EM	2		* Email correspondence, 2009-2010. * Article on "Elven Group Dynamics" in *Circle Network News*, 1986. * Zardoa Love's Master's Thesis in Depth Psychology, 2005. * 26 Self-published books by the Silver Elves, 2001-2013, including their Magical Elven Love Letters published since 1980. * Comments on a draft of chapter 11, 2013.
The Tribunal of the Sidhe (TS)	1985	*S*	Offline	(TAE/ MEP)	*c.* 150		* Interview (chat and email) with circle leader Lady Danu, 2009. * Presentation pamphlet by Ivy Rose, 2009.
Fifth Way Mystery School (FWMS)	1993	*S*, *LR*	Offline	(MEP)	*c.* 7		* Interview (email) with Vincent Bridges, 2010. * Valar Working, 1993.
Morcelu Atreides	1990s	*S*	10	(MEP)	1		* Interview, 2010.
Terry Donaldson's *LR* Tarot Deck	pub. 1997	*LR*, *S*	Offline	(MEP)	N/A		* The *Lord of the Rings* Tarot deck, accompanying booklet and book.
Elven Realities (ER)	1999	(*S*), movies	Online (Yahoo!)	EM	714	0,9 (2010) 57,1 (2000)	* Email discussions.

Esoteric historians	2000-2004	*S*	Offline	(EM)	N/A		* Laurence Gardner, *Realm of the Ring Lords*, 2000/2003. * Nicholas de Vere, *The Dragon Legacy*, 2004.
Elende	2003	movies, *S*	Online (Yahoo!)	TAE	146	0,8 (2010) 2,4 (2003)	* Email discussions.
Children of the Varda (CV)	2003-5	movies, *S*	Online (Yahoo!)	TAE/ MEP	80	0,2 (2010) 3,9 (2004)	* Email discussions.
Middle-Earth Pagans (MEP)	2004	movies, *S*	Online (Yahoo!, ProBoard forum)	MEP	YG: 41 PB: 78[E]	0,1 (2010) 3,2 (2004)	* Interview (email) with group leader Laurasia Sluyswachter, 2009. * ProBoard discussions (4.134 posts per 031013).
Indigo Elves (IE)	2005	movies, *S*	Online (ProBoard forum)	TAE	156		* Short interview with group leader Ravenwolf, 2009. * ProBoard discussions.
Tië eldaliéva (T-e)	2005	*HoMe*, *S*	Online (homepage; FreeBB forum 2006-2007)	LRC	59		* Interviews (chat) with Calantirniel and Llefyn Mallwen, 2009. * Extensive email communication with Calantirniel, 2009-2014. * Participation in Skype ritual with Calantirniel and Llefyn, 2009. * Recordings of 12 Skype rituals, 2007-2008. * Written ritual formats for two rituals (2005; 2009). * Flyer explaining the nature of the Valar for use with ritual demonstration at Pagan Pride Day. * Homepage, version 2005 and version 2014. * Podcast about the group on Eclectic Pagan Podcasts, by Calantirniel and Nathan Elwin, 2007. * 2 short pieces on Varda, the Star Queen, written by Calantirniel, one of which was published in *Llewellyn's the 2008 Witches' Companion*, 2008. * 2 interviews with Calantirniel, in *Psychic Times International* (2009) and in Emily Carding's *Faery Craft* (2012, 257-260). * Comments from Calantirniel and Alyras on a draft of chapter 16, 2014.

Ilsaluntë Valion (IV)	2007	*HoMe, S*	Online (phpBB forum)	LRC	13		* 6 long interviews (chat) with Gwineth, Eruannlass, Elwin, Ellenar, Lomelindo, and Turwaithian, 2009. * 4 additional interviews with Gwineth, 2009-2014. * Extensive email communication with Gwineth, Eruannlass, and Elwin, 2009-2014. * 2 short interviews with Elfwillow and Sinziana, 2009. * Recordings of 2 Skype rituals (with Tië eldaliéva), 2008. * Written ritual formats of 79 rituals 2008-2012. * Homepage with forum discussions. * Comments from Gwineth and Elwin on a draft of chapter 16, 2014.

Notes

A: EM = Elven movement; TAE = Tolkien-affirming Elves; MEP = Middle-earth Paganism; LRC = Legendarium Reconstructionism

B: Membership figures for offline groups are estimates. The Mojave desert group does not exist anymore. Membership figures for online groups are per 3 March 2010, except for Middle-Earth Pagans whose figure is per 2 March 2012, and Tië eldaliéva whose figure is the number of members on the group's forum per 14 August 2007.

C: For Yahoo! Groups I have indicated the average number of posts/day for 2010 and for the most active year.

D: I have asked all my informants by which name they wished to be referred. Most preferred to be called by their online aliases and some did not mind me mentioning their given names. In the cases where individuals asked me to protect their privacy by using a pseudonym, I have done so.

E: Membership figure per 14 November 2009.

6.2. Analytical Strategy

Two analytical streams run through part II: one is devoted to an analysis of the religious affordances of Tolkien's literary mythology, the other to a discussion of the religious use of Tolkien's works within the spiritual Tolkien milieu. Chapters from these two streams alternate with each other to provide a roughly chronological organisation of the material. I begin with an analysis of the religious affordances of *LR* (ch. 7), followed by chapter 8 on the more or less religious reception of *LR* among hippies and Neo-Pagans in the 1960s and 1970s. Chapters 9 through 16 all treat additions to Tolkien's literary mythology (*S*, movies, *HoMe*) that were published after *LR*, as well as new forms of Tolkien religion based on these new texts. After an analysis of the religious affordances of *S* (ch. 9), chapters 10 through 13 treat the first-wave Tolkien groups that emerged in the 1970s through 1990s and use both *LR* and *S*. Chapters 14 and 16 treat the second wave of Tolkien religion that arose after Peter Jackson's movie adaptations. Chapter 14 focuses on the religious affordances of the movies and on those groups (esp. Middle-Earth Pagans) for whom the movies are the most central Tolkien texts. Chapter 15 treats the religious affordances of *HoMe* and of Tolkien's non-narrative texts, such as his letters and his essay *On Fairy-Stories*; the Legendarium Reconstructionists who draw their main inspiration from these texts are discussed in chapter 16.

6.2.1. The First Analytical Stream: Tolkien's Literary Mythology

The analytical stream on Tolkien's literary mythology tackles research question 1a.

> **RQ 1a**. Which religious affordances does Tolkien's literary mythology contain?

To answer this question I analyse Tolkien's narratives and highlight those elements – the religious affordances – which they share with religious narratives and which should therefore in theory make them usable as authoritative sources for religion. I look for the four categories of religious affordances outlined in chapter 3, namely fantastic elements and narrative religion (on the narrate level), and thematisation of textual veracity and divine source claims (on the level of narration). The analysis of the narrate level has the character of a motif analysis aimed at cataloguing those extraordinary and divine beings, otherworlds, and so on that appear in the texts and might be used as building-blocks for religious beliefs and practices in the actual world. The analysis of the level of narration is trickier, for Tolkien's literary mythology is a work of fiction and by its very nature claims to be neither history nor revelation. This part of the analysis will therefore be geared to look for textual traits which a reader might interpret as *indirect* evidence for the text's veracity. I will look for (a) anchorage, i.e. explicit overlaps between the textual world and the actual world, (b) intertextuality, especially in the form of obvious loans from real-world mythology, and (c) thematisation of the veracity of narratives and visions *within* the narrative universe. The analysis of the religious affordances of Tolkien's texts is focused on the narratives about Middle-earth, but especially in chapter 15, I move

beyond Tolkien's literary mythology proper to analyse also how Tolkien's letters, essays, and short-stories add to the religious potential of the main mythology.

For each part of Tolkien's literary mythology (*LR*, *S*, movies, *HoMe*) I assess, given the total sum of religious affordances, whether it is likely that the text in question can work at all as an authoritative text for religion. Furthermore, I formulate a number of hypotheses about how Tolkien religion based on that particular text is likely to look given the text's religious affordances. Doing so I weigh in both the narrate level and the level of narration. The religious affordances on the narrate level translate into a very simple hypothesis. I expect Tolkien religionists to direct their rituals towards those beings who are considered divine and made the object of cult within the narrative universe. For example, religion based on a text with a Valar pantheon can be hypothesised to involve religious rituals directed at the Valar. Subsidiarily, if the authoritative text includes no narrative religion that can be used as model for real-life rituals, it may be expected that Tolkien-based rituals will be centred on beings who are considered spiritual and extraordinary, albeit not divine, from the perspective the narratee. Two less self-evident hypotheses are based on the religious affordances on the level of narration. Firstly, I hypothesise that the point of view of the narrative – which can be Hobbit, human, or Elven – is important. I predict that narratives told from an Elven perspective (*S*) will be more likely to inspire Tolkien-religion involving a self-identification as Elves, while narratives told from a Hobbit or human perspective (*H*, *LR*) will be likely to spawn religion considering the Elves to be supernatural others. I hypothesise, second, that the level of anchorage is important because it can influence whether Tolkien religion based on a particular text will equate the narrative world with the material world or constitute it as a spiritual Otherworld. To summarise, I propose the following first main hypothesis:

> **H 1**. The character of Tolkien religion based on a particular Tolkien text will largely be determined by the supernatural content, narrative perspective, and level of anchorage of that text.

6.2.2. The Second Analytical Stream: The Spiritual Tolkien Milieu

The second stream of analysis concerns the actual religious use of Tolkien's literary mythology in a variety of groups and movements. This analysis is carried out in chapters 10-14 and 16.[173] In principle, each chapter is divided into four sections devoted in turn to research questions 1b (use of Tolkien's literary mythology), 1c (other sources and

[173] I do not include chapter 8 here, for though that chapter also concerns the religious reception of Tolkien's literary mythology, its function is to provide historical background, not to help answer the research questions. The hippies and Neo-Pagans treated in chapter 8 are forerunners for Tolkien spirituality due to their Tolkien-inspired lifestyle and (at least in the case of the Neo-Pagans) their Tolkien-inspired spirituality, but they do not belong to the spiritual Tolkien milieu proper.

manner of religious blending), 1d and 1e (rationalisation and justification), and 2 (plausibility structures). Due to differences in the empirical material, not all research questions can be addressed extensively in each case, and the research questions will sometimes be treated in a different order than the one in which they are discussed here.[174] In each case study, I discuss the place of the group in question within the Tolkien milieu in general.[175] Let me now unpack the research questions concerning the religious use of Tolkien's works and formulate three additional hypotheses.

Taking the various cases as instances of *Tolkien-based/Tolkien-integrating religion* I seek to answer research question 1b.

> **RQ 1b**. Which elements of Tolkien's literary mythology are actually used as models for religious practices, beliefs, and identities in the spiritual Tolkien milieu?

I analyse which Tolkien sources (*H*, *LR*, *S*, *HoMe*, movies, *Letters*) are used in each case and which of these sources are most central. More concretely, I consider exactly which elements of the various texts are religionised, i.e. used as models for actual religious practice and beliefs. Furthermore, since my chapters are structured around the main sources used (ch. 7-8 on *LR*, ch. 9-13 on *S*, ch. 14 on the movies, and chs. 15-16 on *HoMe*), chapters 8, 13, 14, and 16 will be concluded with a section that restates research question 1b more generally and asks: What form does religion based on the Tolkien text in question generally take, and how does that conform to the text's hypothesised religious potential?

The analysis of the actual text use in the spiritual Tolkien milieu will be held up against my predictions based on the various texts' religious affordances as to test hypothesis 1 (formulated above). That is to say, patterns of text use in Tolkien religion are not only interesting in themselves, but have implications for my theory on religious affordances. If actual Tolkien religion conforms to my predictions, that is obviously good news for the theory. In that case, it is probable that the notion of religious affordances can also be used to assess the religious potential of other narratives, including fictional ones. A discrepancy between the actual use and the predicted use will, on the other hand, challenge the theory and force me to revise it.

Taking the beliefs, rituals, and/or identity of the various cases of Tolkien spirituality as expressions of *religious blending* (cf. ch. 4) I seek to answer research question 1c.

> **RQ 1c**. Which other sources besides Tolkien's literary mythology are used in religious blending within the spiritual Tolkien milieu, and in which ways is Tolkien material combined with material from these other sources?

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[174] Chapter 10 has no section on rationalisation and justification, chapter 11 has no section on religious blending, and chapters 10, 12, and 13 have no sections on plausibility structures.

[175] This discussion is placed either in the chapter introduction (chs. 11, 12, 14, and 16) or in a separate section (chs. 10 and 13).

This question really consists of two sub-questions. The first of these concerns the *sources* of religious blending: 'with which other religious traditions is the Tolkien material blended?' As we shall see, these traditions include currents within contemporary Paganism (Wicca, Goddess spirituality, Celtic and Heathen Reconstructionism, fairy spirituality, and Neo-Shamanism), western esotericism (theosophy and western magic), and Christianity (in biblical literalist and metaphysical forms). Tolkien material is blended with ritual complexes, identities, and religious cosmologies and historiographies from these other traditions. The second sub-question concerns the blending *process*: 'is the blending of Tolkien material with other material patterned, and in which ways?' Depending on the material for each case, I will analyse how the group's belief system has been constructed as a result of integrative bricolage (esp. chs. 10, 14, and 16) and/or focus on how a specific ritual (sections 13.1 and 16.2) or identity (ch. 10) has been created as a result of religious blending.

In all cases I pose questions on the level of the entire tradition: Is Tolkien material given more or less weight than other material, i.e. do we have an example of Tolkien-based or Tolkien-integrating religion? Is the blend of Tolkien material openly acknowledged (mixture; synthesis), or is an attempt made to hide all traces of the integration of Tolkien-material into a non-Tolkienesque tradition (assimilation) or of non-Tolkienesque material into a strictly Tolkienesque tradition (inward acculturation)? In the case of acknowledged combination, is the blend then of a stable and permanent nature (synthesis) or of an unstable and temporary one (mixture)? Sorting and typologising the material like this is instructive in itself, but I hope that the fine-grained analysis will reveal a limited set of processes governing religious blending in fiction-based religion.

In the analysis of specific rituals the key questions will be similar, namely: What are the sources of the various ritual elements, and which tradition provides the structure for the ritual? I will also pay attention to any genuinely innovative material, such as rites based on knowledge received in visions, and consider whether the integration of such material follows a Tolkienesque or a non-Tolkienesque logic. In the chapter focusing on identity bricolage (ch. 10) and in the chapters focusing on the correlation of Tolkien's mythology with other doctrines and theories (chs. 12 and 13.2), I also analyse blending processes on the concept level.

It goes without saying that processes of integrative bricolage are dependent on the religious background and interests of individual Tolkien religionists (e.g. people who are already Pagans can be expected to combine Tolkien's mythology with Paganism), but I hypothesise that that at least one additional, general principle governs integrative bricolage within the spiritual Tolkien milieu.

> **H 2**. Wherever Tolkien's literary mythology lacks religious affordances, Tolkien religionists will adopt or adapt building-blocks from other religious traditions to overcome these lacks.

Tolkien's literary mythology hardly includes any rituals, and, by its very narrative nature, it includes no rationalised accounts of the deities or otherworlds, such as one can find in discursive, theological texts. If hypothesis 2 holds, then Tolkien religionists will seek to fill these two gaps. First, we can thus assume that Tolkien religionists will adopt ritual formats from other traditions to structure their communication with the supernatural beings of Tolkien's narrative world. Second, we can expect them to apply strategies of rationalisation and justification from established religious traditions to their interpretation of Tolkien's literary mythology.

Seeking to answer research questions 1d and 1e, I further analyse *processes of rationalisation and justification* (cf. ch. 5) in the various cases of Tolkien religion.

> **RQ 1d**. To what extent do Tolkien religionists ascribe reality to those elements from Tolkien's literary mythology which they employ in their religious practice, and is there a difference between the level of reality ascribed in immediate religious practice (especially in rituals) and in *post hoc* rationalisations of this practice?
>
> **RQ 1e**. Do Tolkien religionists employ legitimisation or relativisation to construct and protect the plausibility of their fiction-based religious beliefs and practice, and in which ways?

Most basically I seek to find out to what extent Tolkien religionists ascribe reality to their religious claims, to the experiences they have of ritual encounters with characters from Tolkien's literary mythology, and (in the case of self-identified Elves) to their Elven identity. This question really includes a number of sub-questions. Concerning ontology assessment one must ask questions such as: Do Tolkien religionists take Tolkien's works to refer mytho-historically to events that have taken place in the actual world, or do they consider the truth in Tolkien's mythology to be merely mytho-cosmological, i.e. referring to supernatural states of affairs in the actual world, but not to events? Do they interpret ritual visions of Elves and Valar to reflect a real contact with another world inhabited by spiritual beings or are the characters of these visions interpreted as the expression of archetypal forces in the Jungian sense? Concerning justification: Do Tolkien religionists seek to legitimise and objectivise their beliefs, for instance by claiming that their knowledge of an Otherworld is based on revelation or that archaeological evidence demonstrates the historicity of the narrated events in Tolkien's literary mythology? Or do they employ the opposite strategy and relativise and de-objectivise their fiction-based religious claims? In general it is worth considering how stable or unstable people's beliefs, rationalisations, and legitimisations are. Concluding the discussion in chapter 5 on belief, I reformulated Martin Ramstedt's metaphorical turn thesis in my own terminology. I adopt this as my third hypothesis.

> **H 3**. In the spiritual Tolkien milieu individuals will tend to (a) consider Tolkien's literary mythology to be fiction and read it in the binocular, mythopoeic, or mytho-cosmological mode rather than in the mytho-historical mode, to (b) rationalise those supernatural agents from Tolkien's mythology which they address in ritual

> as impersonal powers or psychological principles, and (c) relativise their religious claims rather than seeking to legitimise them.

My analysis of rationalisation and justification in Tolkien religion is not restricted to those elements of the various groups that are based on Tolkien's literary mythology. I also analyse if and how those belief and practice elements that are drawn from other traditions are rationalised, legitimised, and relativised. This makes it possible to raise the additional, comparative question whether Tolkien material is treated the same or differently than other material in the group's dynamics of belief. The question is whether the use of Tolkien material is considered (a) straightforward and unproblematic, (b) a delicate or embarrassing thing in need of extraordinary legitimisation or relativisation, or, on the contrary, (c) a strong reference to an authoritative source able to legitimise more precarious claims.

Finally, I look at the *plausibility structures* through which Tolkien religion is socially maintained as credible and worthwhile. I do so in order to answer research question 2.

> **RQ 2**. In which ways and to what degree does the social organisation of the spiritual Tolkien milieu and social and cultural structures outside the spiritual Tolkien milieu itself enhance (or challenge) the plausibility of Tolkien-based religion?

I am interested in determining how being a member of a group or network enhances (or challenges) the convictions of Tolkien religionists. The variety of groups studied gives me a chance to compare offline groups with online groups, loosely organised networks with tightly organised communities, and groups based on various Tolkien texts with each other. I hypothesise that four group characteristics will promote plausibility and group cohesion:

> **H 4**. The perceived plausibility of Tolkien-based religion and institutional stability will be higher in groups in which members (a) have much contact with each other, (b) perform rituals together, and (c) share an explicit identity, and in groups in which (d) capable movement intellectuals have constructed an elaborate local tradition which gives direction and intellectual depth to the group.

An implication of this hypothesis is that online communities can be as successful in promoting cohesion and plausibility as offline communities, but only in so far as they indeed constitute social communities rather than merely loose networks of individuals.

The answers that I accumulate throughout part II to the four question complexes of the second analytical stream will be systematically revisited in the conclusion. I will evaluate whether the hypotheses have been confirmed or (partly) rejected by the empirical findings and reflect on the implications of both confirmed and rejected hypotheses. These implications might be both empirical and theoretical in character. Empirically speaking, there may be reason to assume that some of the patterns of religious blending, rationalisation, and justification found in the spiritual Tolkien milieu are generalisable to fiction-based religion in general or perhaps even to individual, post-traditional, or contemporary religion in general.

Due to the organisation of the thesis, i.e. the development of an analytical model followed by its application to the empirical material, the research questions are generally not geared to test theory. The only exception to this rule is hypothesis 1 on the relation between the theoretically hypothesised religious potential of Tolkien's literary mythology and the actual religious use of it. Even so, since the usefulness of theory is determined by its ability to illuminate empirical material, the conclusion will revisit the adequacy and relevance of the theory used.

Chapter 7. The Religious Affordances of *The Lord of the Rings*

This chapter catalogues the religious affordances of *LR*. I inventories the fantastic elements in *LR* (section 7.1), the pieces of narrative religion in the text (section 7.2), and *LR*'s thematisation of its own veracity (section 7.3). The fourth principal type of religious affordances, divine source claims, is not present in *LR*. The fantastic elements and narrative religion are found in the main narrative, but the text's veracity is thematised especially in the prologue in which a voice which belongs to either Tolkien (as text-external author) or to a text-internal narrator constructs a frame narrative that connects the narrative world to the world of the reader. This ambiguous voice claims that Tolkien is not the author of the work at hand, but that he compiles and relates lore which has been passed down through the ages and which was originally authored by some of the characters of the narrative. This curious prologue makes *LR* stand out from standard novels and so does the inclusion of more than a hundred pages of appendices on matters of history, genealogy, and languages and an index of names and terms.[176] The mythology and legends alluded to in the main narrative become more intelligible and richer in the light of the appendices, and a systematic exploration of this background material is greatly facilitated by the index. Both prologue and appendices are intended to give *LR* a semi-historical feel and this play with the text's veracity adds to its religious affordance.

H includes many of the same religious affordances as *LR*. It has no narrative religion, but has both the compiler frame narrative and many of the fantastic elements. But in contrast to *LR*, which is clearly written for an adult audience, *H* is a children's book cannot work as a source for religious inspiration on its own. Therefore, I shall mention the religious affordances of *H* only on occasion and mostly in the footnotes. It is my hunch that this chapter will be most interesting to people who are already familiar with Tolkien's literary mythology and interested in the details of it for its own sake. Readers who wish to move quickly to the religious *use* of Tolkien's narratives may want to skip ahead to sections 7.3.3 and 7.4 where I summarise the religious affordances of *LR* and formulate a few hypotheses about how *LR*-based religion might be expected to look.

[176] There are six appendices: Appendix A: Annals of the kings and rulers; Appendix B: The tale of years; Appendix C: Family trees; Appendix D: Shire calendars: For use in all years; Appendix E: Writing and spelling; Appendix F: The languages and peoples of the third age.

7.1. Fantastic Elements in *The Lord of the Rings*

As the reader will remember from chapter 3, the notion of fantastic elements refers to everything which is real within the narrative world, but supernatural form the perspective of the actual world. *LR* includes a high number of such fantastic elements. Many of these, such as the existence of Elves, are plain and well-known facts within the narrative world, but much knowledge of the magical and spiritual is only presented discursively by those characters that possess most wisdom and authority within the narrative universe. These characters include especially Gandalf, Master Elrond of Rivendell, Lady Galadriel and Lord Celeborn the Wise of Lothlórien, and Aragorn. Some information is also given by the (apparently all-knowing) compiler voice in the appendices, in the prologue, and occasionally within the narrative itself. In what follows, I discuss four fantastic motif clusters on beings and races, otherworlds, magic, and intuition as a source of knowledge.

7.1.1. Beings, Races, and Bloodlines

Arda (the Earth) abounds with intelligent beings. Besides humans, a number of human-like mortal races exist, including the small and cosy Hobbits, the mountain-dwelling Dwarves, and the evil Orcs (called Goblins in *H*). *H* and *LR* are told from a Hobbit perspective. Most of the heroes (Bilbo, Frodo, Sam, Merry, and Pippin) are hobbits, and we hear more about Hobbit culture than about the customs of the other races. A central characteristic of this hole-dwelling, bare-footed people is their love of peace and quiet, good food, pipe-weed, gifts, and parties (*LR* 1-16).

If the Hobbits are characterised by commonplace interests and childlike behaviour and appearance, the near-immortal Elves are their exact opposite. They look much like humans, but are incredibly old, wise, skilled, and beautiful.[177] They need no sleep (*LR* 429) and are so light that they can run on top of snow without sinking in (*LR* 291). The Elves (or Quendi) come in two main kinds, the so-called High Elves (including Elrond) and Grey-elves (including Legolas) who respectively have or have not lived with the Valar in the Blessed Realm in the past (cf. section 7.1.2 below). Originally the two groups spoke different languages, Quenya (High-elven) and Sindarin (Grey-elven), but at the time of *LR*, all Elves in Middle-earth use Sindarin as the everyday tongue and Quenya only for ritual or formal purposes (*LR* 1128; cf. *S* 150). Because the High Elves in a sense live simultaneously in the Blessed Realm and in Middle-earth, they possess special

[177] Tolkien had not always imagined the Elves like this. In *The Father Christmas Letters*, which he wrote for his children between 1920 and 1942 (Tolkien 1976), the Elves are diminutive, red-capped creatures fighting goblins and making presents. The merry Elves of *H* have more in common with Father Christmas' helpers than with the spiritual lore-masters of *LR*, and also Gandalf and Beorn the Bearman as these figures appear in *H* are clearly developed out of Father Christmas and Polar Bear from *The Father Christmas Letters*.

powers against the Undead and can take on the shining form which they have in the Blessed Realm (*LR* 214, 222-223).[178]

Besides these demi-human races, the narrative world includes a number of extra-ordinarily powerful individuals. Three of them, Gandalf, Saruman, and Radagast, are referred to as Wizards and indeed possess magical powers. Other inhabitants of Middle-earth with comparable powers include Tom Bombadil and Goldberry River-daughter (*LR* 131, 265) and the evil Lord Sauron. A final class of creatures are the monsters, such as the giant spider Shelob, the Balrog of Moria, the Undead host in the mountain, the dragon Smaug, and the Ringwraiths or Nazgûl and their flying, ghastly steeds.

Not only is Tolkien's world inhabited by fantastic creatures – the natural world itself is partly animated. The living trees or so-called Huorns constitute the best example. The Huorns are found in the Old Forest bordering on Buckland (*LR* 109, 112-4, 116, 130) and in the Fangorn forest (*LR* 442, 467, 468, 470, 497, 491, 542, 546-7, 552, 553, 556). We hear, that it was the Elves who began waking up trees (*LR* 468), but it is the Ents or Tree-herders, a race as old as the Elves, who now look after them. One of the Huorns, Old Man Willow, almost kills Merry and Pippin in the Old Forest before Tom Bombadil comes to the rescue (*LR* 116-120), and the Huorns of Fangorn participate in the attack on Isengard (*LR* 556). In the battle at Helm's Deep they avenge the damage done to their forests by orcs (*LR* 542).[179]

Four motifs on race are worth noting. Most common in the material is the notion of higher and lower races: At the council in Rivendell, Elrond tells how Númenórean blood throughout history has been blended with that of "lesser men" (*LR* 244).[180] Later in the narrative, Faramir of Gondor explains to Sam that there are three sorts of Men: "High" Númenóreans and their descendants in Middle-earth, "Middle" Men like the Rohirrim of Rohan, and "Wild" Men, many of whom have rallied to Sauron (*LR* 678-679).[181] Aragorn, in whose veins Númenórean blood flows undiluted, can expect a life-span of several hundred years.

A second motif, which really is a variation of the first, concerns the relation between Men and Elves. Despite all their differences, the two races are able to interbreed and in that sense they constitute one single species. Aragorn tells Frodo about the Elf princess Lúthien the Fair who married the human Beren and through whom Elven blood entered what became the line of the kings of Númenor (*LR* 194) and later of Gondor. This is well-known in Gondor: when the Prince of Dol Amroth appears with his knights

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[178] This is a loan from Celtic mythology in which the fairies can be referred to as the shining people.

[179] Nature in general appears animated at a number of other occasions (*LR* 283, 292).

[180] I discuss the role of Númenor in the history and cosmology of Middle-earth in section 7.2.3 on cosmology below.

[181] Further references to the difference between higher and lower races are found in the appendices (*LR* 1046, 1047).

ready to defend Minas Tirith, the men of the city are said to remember the old tales that Elven blood runs in the veins of Gondor's lords (*LR* 824).

A third motif which only appears *en passant* in *LR*, but which Tolkien extensively tinkered with in other tales,[182] is the notion of racial memory: Gandalf explains that Bilbo and Gollum knew the same riddles (cf. *H* ch. 5) due to a shared racial or ancestral knowledge (*LR* 54), and it is suggested that Faramir's recurrent dream about the destruction of Númenor is the resurfacing of an ancestral memory (*LR* 962).

Finally and possibly reflecting early British history, a fourth motif is that descendants of former civilizations still linger on the fringes of the world. The Woses, or Wild Men of the Woods, are thus presented as the descendants of the Púkel-Men, a civilization which prospered in the past in the lands which at the time of the narrative make up the kingdom of Rohan (*LR* 834).

7.1.2. Otherworlds: Rivendell, Lothlórien, and the Blessed Realm in the West

Tolkien's narrative universe includes otherworlds on several levels. From the perspective of the reader, Middle-earth – or indeed the entire fictional world, Arda – constitutes a fantastic otherworld. But also from the perspective of an inhabitant of Middle-earth there exist non-ordinary, but real otherworlds. Indeed, all the major Elven dwellings are experienced as enchanted places by non-elves. In Rivendell, the main stronghold of the High Elves in Middle-earth and home to Elrond the Wise, it is difficult for the hobbits to stay awake (*LR* 237) and the place has healing powers.

The Faery-world Lothlórien, Lady Galadriel's Elven forest realm and home to the Silvan Elves, is an even richer example (*LR* 333-379). Frodo experiences his entrance into the Naith or inner part of Lothlórien as "stepping over a bridge of time into a corner of the Elder Days" (*LR* 349), and both Sam and Frodo feel that Lothlórien is permeated by "deep" magic (*LR* 361). Sam describes his stay in Lothlórien as being "*inside* a song" (*LR* 351; original emphasis). While inside, Frodo and Sam experience a change of perception and slowing of time (*LR* 388-389). When the fellowship leaves the place, it seems to them as if Lothlórien fades away or withdraws from the real world (*LR* 377).[183]

Another type of otherworld within Tolkien's world is the Blessed Realm in the West, which is called Aman (Qu: the Blessed Realm) in the appendices (*LR* 1037).[184] The Valar, a group of god-like beings, live in the Blessed Realm (*LR* 223, 238) in a place called Valimar (*LR* 377-8) or Valinor (*LR* 235, 974). Before settling in Middle-earth, most of the Elves also lived in the Blessed Realm (*LR* 223), in a place referred to as Eldamar (*LR* 235,

[182] Namely in *The Lost Road* and *The Notion Club Papers*, cf. section 15.1.2 below.

[183] In *H*, Bilbo and Thorin's band of dwarves have a similar experience of enchantment in the Wood Elf realm in Mirkwood (*H* 175-179).

[184] When translations of terms in Quenya or Sindarin, the two Elven languages, are given in Tolkien's text, I give them here as well in brackets.

372, 597) or Elvenhome (*LR* 192, 235, 676, 679, 956).[185] The lands of the Valar and the Elves in the West are also referred to as the Undying Lands in the appendices of *LR* and as Otherworld in Bilbo's song about Eärendil the Mariner (*LR* 234).

An important theme in *LR* is that the High Elves long to return to Aman, and that a longing for the Blessed Realm has also been awakened in the Grey-elves. Some of the Elves (including Arwen) have begun to fade and will die if they do not leave Middle-earth. By the time of the compiler/narrator, the last Elves have left Middle-earth (*LR* 16, 1137). Normally only Elves are able to travel to the Blessed Realm, but in the final chapter of *LR*, Bilbo and Frodo are allowed passage on an Elven ship setting out from the Grey Havens. Also Gimli is said to have left Middle-earth with Legolas (*LR* 1080-81).

7.1.3. Magic

Magical items and magical acts abound in *H* and *LR*. Some main magical items include the Ring of Power itself (*LR* 50, *passim*), Galadriel's mirror which allows one to see the future (*LR* 362-4), Gandalf's wizard staff, the Palantíri or seeing stones, and the phial of Eärendil (*LR* 707, 720, 729, 902, 915). Other magical items are Bilbo's (and later Frodo's) sword Sting which can detect the presence of Orcs, the entrance door into Moria which is opened by uttering a password (*LR* 309), Elven Lembas bread which is both extremely nutritious and strengthens the will (*LR* 370; cf. *S* 240), and Boromir's horn which his brother Faramir can hear hundreds of miles away (*LR* 666).

Anyone in possession of a magical item can use its power, but only a few individuals can wield magic by themselves. Saruman is able to possess Théoden (*LR* 515) and to control the weather (*LR* 292, 299), and his voice has a magical ability to persuade (*LR* 578-580). Among other feats, Gandalf unleashes magical fire on the attacking Wargs (*LR* 299), seals a door with a shutting spell (*LR* 327), and is able to free Théoden from Saruman's spell (*LR* 515, 1093). Sauron uses magic to create a huge cloud of 'Mordor Darkness' so that his Orcs do not have to suffer the sunlight (*LR* 801). Also two of the most powerful High Elves are able to work magic. Elrond helps the fellowship escape from the Nazgûl by summoning a flood that drowns their steeds (*LR* 214, 224); Queen Galadriel can telepathically communicate with others (*LR* 357) and is said to possess a special protective power (*LR* 338, 351). Galadriel, who is the only one to talk about what magic is, naturalises it. She tells Frodo and Sam that her powers are "what your folk would call magic" (*LR* 362), implying that for her it is closer to technology or art and certainly not supernatural.

[185] In *H*, Elvenhome is referred to as Faerie in the west (*H* 194).

7.1.4. Intuitions, Dreams, Visions, and Prophecies as Sources of Knowledge

A recurrent theme in *LR* is that intuitions, visions, dreams, and prophecies are reliable sources of information. In all cases where an intuition is reported, it turns out to be correct. Three related motifs can be discerned.

Firstly, the heart, as the seat of intuition, is presented as a font of knowledge of current states of affairs or things to come on numerous occasions: When Aragorn finds Frodo's track after Frodo and Sam have left the fellowship, that only confirms what his "heart guessed" (*LR* 405), namely that the two had indeed left by their own will and had not been captured by orcs. On a later occasion Aragorn "know[s] in [his] heart" that the orcs who have taken Merry and Pippin captive and whom he is pursuing with Gimli and Legolas have not rested (*LR* 426). Before Théoden rides to war, his heart tells him that he shall not see Aragorn again (*LR* 797), and Éowyn's heart tells her that Merry will need gear of war before the end (*LR* 802).[186] On all occasions, the intuitions of the heart are proven right, suggesting that intuition is superior to reason as a source of knowledge. At least intuitive knowledge is purer and more resistant to magic, for even when Saruman succeeds in ensnaring Gandalf's wits with his magic, Gandalf's intuitive knowledge of the heart remains untouched (*LR* 251). Sam possibly summarises the moral of the entire story when he scolds himself after learning that Frodo, who has been captured by orcs, is not dead as he thought: "You fool, he isn't dead, *and your heart knew it*. Don't trust your head, Samwise, it is not the best part of you" (*LR* 740; emphasis added).

Next to these intuitions, which are experienced while awake, a number of characters receive dream visions.[187] Frodo has most of these visions, and many of them are forebodings of his journey to Aman. In Crickhollow, Frodo dreams of the sea (*LR* 108), and during the second night in Tom Bombadil's house, he has a vision of Aman itself (*LR* 135), a vision which comes to him again later while awake (*LR* 1029).[188] In another dream vision, during the first night with Tom Bombadil, Frodo sees Gandalf escape from Saruman's fortress Orthanc (*LR* 352), and in fever dreams, he has visions of the Shire (*LR* 202) and of the Nazgûl (*LR* 204). Frodo and Sam are allowed to look into Galadriel's mirror, and one of Sam's visions (of Frodo being captured) later comes true (*LR* 731). In another vision in Lothlórien, Frodo sees Aragorn clothed in white, a foreboding of his coronation (*LR* 127; cf. 220). Significantly, most of these visions are experienced in special places, namely in Tom Bombadil's house, in Rivendell, and in Lothlórien. As with the intuitions of the heart, all visions reveal reliable knowledge, either of the future or of distant events. The only exceptions are the visions in Galadriel's mirror, some of which show the future as it will come to pass if one does not act to stop it. Also other characters besides

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[186] This motif of the heart as the site of intuitive knowledge appears five additional times in *LR* (84-85, 212, 266, 962, 975).

[187] On dreams and visions in *LR*, see also Amendt-Raduege (2006).

[188] A further sign that Frodo will later go to Aman is that Sam sees him shine like a High Elf (*LR* 652).

Frodo and Sam have visions, the most curious being Merry's extra-personal memory at the barrow (*LR* 143) in which he re-experiences an historical battle which is mentioned in the appendices (*LR* 1041).[189] Boromir and Faramir have visions as well (*LR* 246).

Closely related to the motifs of intuition and visions, old prophecies come true on a number of occasions. This suggests that not only are foreboding visions always true, their truth can also be reliably passed down and retained over time.[190] The most important prophecy concerns the witch-king of Angmar about whom it is told that no man can kill him (*LR* 819, 1051, 1070). Eventually he is slain by Éowyn and Merry, a woman and a hobbit (*LR* 841-842).[191] Two other prophecies concern the king of Gondor. It is prophesised that when the king returns to end the reign of the stewards, he will enlist the Dead under the mountain (*LR* 781) and be recognised on his abilities as a healer. Aragorn summons the dead oath-breakers of Dunharrow (*LR* 788-790), and is indeed recognised as the true king while healing the wounded in Minas Tirith (*LR* 862).

7.2. Narrative Religion in *The Lord of the Rings*

The very word religion does not occur a single time in *LR* and the narrative is remarkably void of organised religion, religious specialists, temples, and the like. Tolkien had good reasons to downplay religion in the narrative, for even as it stands, he was criticised by fellow Catholics for having created a pagan mythology. In his letters, Tolkien explains that it was indeed his Catholic faith (and his anticipation of hostile reactions) that restrained him from constructing an explicit narrative religion full of pagan idolatry (*Letters* 144, 193, 204, 220, 281, 283-284, 355). Nevertheless, *LR* (but not *H*) includes some narrative religion, i.e. religious activity and discourse engaged in by the characters. In the three sub-sections that follow I will describe in turn the theology, cosmology, and rituals that are found in *LR*.

7.2.1. Divine Powers in *The Lord of the Rings*: The One and the Valar

Nowhere in *LR* is an explicit theology developed or discussed, but there are several references to a supreme, divine power. In the appendices, this power is sometimes referred to as the One, but in the main narrative, the references are more opaque. On a couple of occasions Gandalf interprets events as being caused by a divine will of some sort. That Bilbo found the Ring of Power is for instance interpreted as the work of "something else

[189] In an article devoted to this episode, Flieger (2007) examines Merry's vision as an expression of racial memory.

[190] I return to this motif in section 7.3 on the frame narrative.

[191] This is not the only place in *LR* in which Tolkien takes up a theme from Shakespeare's Macbeth and does it justice. Just as Éowyn and Merry take the place of Mcduff, Tolkien lets the Huorns of Fangorn march to war, a real army of trees and not just an army of men covered with branches and leaves.

[...] beyond the design of the Ring-maker". According to Gandalf "Bilbo was *meant* to find" the ring and Frodo was "*meant* to have it" (*LR* 56, original emphases). Similarly, Gandalf foresees numerous times that Gollum has a destiny (*LR* 59, 251, 815, 947), and the nature of this destiny is revealed when Gollum accidentally destroys the ring at the end (*LR* 946). Other references to fate are found throughout *LR* (222, 242, 681).

Not only does history seem to unfold according to a divine plan, occasionally a divine power intervenes directly to sanction voluntary actions with blessing or punishment. Gandalf explains that Bilbo was "rewarded" an extraordinary resistance to the ring's power because he did not kill Gollum (*LR* 59). Saruman, by contrast, is punished for betraying his fellow Wizards and joining forces with Sauron. After Saruman has been slain, his spirit rises up, but then "out of the West [from Aman] came a cold wind, and it [the spirit] bent away, and with a sigh dissolved into nothing" (*LR* 1020). Contrary to humans, whose spirit survives physical death (cf. section 7.2.3 below), Saruman's spirit is simply destroyed. Sauron shares this fate. After the ring of power has been unmade, also Sauron's spirit rises up and is swept away by the wind (*LR* 949). Consider, by contrast, what happens when Gandalf is slain. After Gandalf the Grey has died in the fight with the Balrog, he is returned to the world as Gandalf the White. Recounting to Gimli and Legolas what happened to him, Gandalf explains: "Then darkness took me; and I strayed out of thought and time, and I wandered far on roads that I will not tell. Naked *I was sent back* – for a brief time, until my task is done" (*LR* 502, emphasis added). We do not hear which power sends him back, but sense again the existence of a supreme, divine power.[192] The appendices contain two references to other actions by the divine power who in both cases explicitly referred to as the One. It is the One who has given humans 'the gift' of mortality (*LR* 1063) and who destroyed the Númenor when the Númenóreans rebelled against the Valar (*LR* 1037) (cf. section 7.2.3 below).

Occasionally, we hear more about the Valar, though they, like the One, never appear in Middle-earth during the narrative and only intervene indirectly in the narrated events. In the main narrative, the references to the Valar are so vague that a casual reader is likely to miss them. Faramir tells Frodo that Gandalf is a messenger from "the West" where he was called Olórin (*LR* 670). In other words, Gandalf was sent to Middle-earth by the Valar as one of the Istari (or Wizards) mentioned in the appendices. Later, after the final victory over Sauron, an eagle brings tidings about the outcome of the battle from "The Lords of the West" to Minas Tirith (*LR* 963). The supernatural character of the event is stressed: We hear that "a wind rose and blew [...] and the Shadow [the magical

[192] Based on the narrative itself, one cannot rule out that the Valar rather than the One sent Gandalf back, but Tolkien himself has settled the matter in a letter. In a passage on Gandalf's return he writes: "'Naked I was sent back – for a brief time, until my task is done'. Sent back by whom, and whence? Not by the 'gods' [the Valar] whose business is only with this embodied world and its time; for he passed out of thought and time" (*Letters* 203). This can only mean that the One, who resides outside the world and thus outside thought and time, sent Gandalf back.

shadow conjured by Sauron] departed, and the Sun was unveiled [...] and men sang for the joy that welled up in their hearts from what source they could not tell" (*LR* 963). Nevertheless, a casual reader can easily read this passage as if the message was sent by Aragorn and the other lords. Only the careful reader who remembers that the human lords are consistently referred to as "the Captains of the West" (e.g. *LR* 966) and who consults the appendices where the Valar are twice referred to as the Lords of the West (*LR* 1037, 1081) will comprehend that the Valar are here intervening.[193]

Throughout the main narrative, there are a few other references to the Valar. Most references are made by the characters. Faced with a charging oliphaunt, Damrod, a ranger of Gondor, exclaims: "May the Valar turn him aside" (*LR* 661). Gandalf crowns Aragorn with the words: "Now come the days of the King, and may they be blessed while the thrones of the Valar endure" (*LR* 968). More remarkably, the narrator compares Théoden, king of Rohan, to the Vala Oromë as he rides to war:

> Fey he seemed, or the battle-fury of his fathers ran like new fire in his veins, and he was born up on Snowmane like a god of old, even as Oromë the Great in the battle of the Valar when the world was young (*LR* 838).

This is the only appearance of the word 'god' in *LR*. In the appendices, where the Valar are mentioned 13 times, it is explained that Vala (singular of Valar) means "angelic power" (*LR* 1123). Of the Valar, only a few are mentioned by name. Oromë and Aulë are referred to only by the narrator, but Varda/Elbereth is invoked several times by the characters of the story (cf. section 7.2.4 on rituals below).

7.2.2. Morality and Values in *The Lord of the Rings*

Catherine Madsen (2004) has argued that while explicit rituals and systematic theology are absent in *LR*, the presence of enchantment (otherworlds; magic), destiny (Frodo as divinely chosen ring-bearer), and morality (all main characters act unselfishly for the common good) amounts to a form of "natural religion". Madsen calls this religion natural because there is no distinction between a natural and a supernatural sphere within the fictional world. The Hobbits admire the Elves, and the Elves venerate the Valar, but neither Elves nor Valar are supernatural beings. Furthermore, it is naturally given what is morally right. Values are not dictated by divine law, nor moral actions taken out of fear of divine punishment or hope of divine reward (even though both actually occur). Morally just actions flow naturally from the order of the cosmos and from the intuitions of the heart.

Even so, certain values are consistently conveyed through the choices and actions of the characters. Most of these values are not extraordinary, but rather constitute a romantic take on the moral consensus. One critic sums up:

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[193] In *S* it is specified that the great eagles are messengers between Manwë, king of the Valar, and Middle-earth (*S* 124).

> the positive values to which the work appeals are those of a life which is civilized (in the widest sense) as well as altruistic. It celebrates not only the arts (especially poetry and song, and architecture) but friendship, love and marriage, work (especially craftsmanship), domesticity, the pleasures of food and drink, and the exploratory enjoyment of landscape and of the multitudinous kinds of nature – of plants and flowers for their fragrance and beauty, birds for their song, horses for their grace and swiftness, 'oliphaunts' for their terror and splendour (Rosebury 2003, 53).

This is not all, however, for the dramatic events require that the characters make difficult decisions in which their own life is at stake. In an oft-quoted passage Éomer and Aragorn discuss the nature of moral choices under such circumstances:

> [Éomer:] "How shall a man judge what to do in such times?" "As he ever has judged," said Aragorn. "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" (*LR* 438).

Reflecting *LR* in general, morality here is no social construct; the distinction between good and evil is embedded within the very cosmos. It is not up to individuals to *decide* what to do, but to discern *what is right and good in itself*. Consequently, the heroes of *LR* embody virtues such as vigour, altruism, trustworthiness, and loyalty and present themselves as role models for less heroic readers. In other words, *LR* includes *moral affordances* and can be read as *Bildungsliteratur* regardless of whether the reader reacts to the religious affordances of the narrative. It was clearly Tolkien's intention to be didactic. As he says in one letter,

> I would claim, if I did not think it presumptuous in one so ill-instructed, to have as one object the elucidation of truth, and the encouragement of good morals in this real world, by the ancient device of exemplifying them in unfamiliar embodiments, that may tend to 'bring them home'. But, of course, I may be in error (at some or all points): my truths may not be true, or they may be distorted: and the mirror I have made may be dim and cracked (*Letters* 194).

7.2.3. Cosmology, Eschatology, and Afterlife in *The Lord of the Rings*

Appendices A and B recount a part of the prehistory of Middle-earth. We get no account of the creation of the world, but enter the story at the end of the First Age (*LR* takes place in the Third Age) when the Valar make war in Middle-earth upon the evil Morgoth, a fallen Vala and Satan figure. In the course of this chronicle, the reader gets much information on the topics of cosmology, eschatology, and afterlife.

Several motifs in the cosmology of Middle-earth are borrowed from Norse, Celtic, Classical, and Biblical mythology. From Norse mythology come (for instance) the very term Middle-earth (Miðgarðr), Gandalf's name (from the dwarf Gandálfr in Vǫluspá),

and the motif that deep below monsters gnaw at the roots of the world (cf. the dragon Niðhǫggr) (*LR* 501). The most significant loan from Biblical mythology is the Satan figure or fallen angel/Vala. This role is first played by Morgoth and is taken over by his servant Sauron after Morgoth's fall. Classical inspiration is visible in the story of the cataclysmic war between the Númenóreans and the Valar which takes place after the defeat of Morgoth. The war commences after Sauron has come to Númenor[194], a large island between Middle-earth and the Blessed Realm, where he deceives the Númenóreans to do his bidding. Like Plato's Atlantis, Númenor is destroyed – here as a result of the intervention of the One – and as in Virgil's *Aeneid*, a few righteous individuals escape – in this case to found a new kingdom in Middle-earth. As a further result of the Númenórean revolt, the One removes the Undying Lands so it becomes impossible to sail there, expect for the Elves. This cosmological transformation is made explicit in the appendices (*LR* 1037), but also alluded to in the narrative by Tom Bombadil. Referring to himself as "Eldest", Bombadil tells the hobbits that he was in Middle-earth already "before the seas were bent", when "the seas flowed straight to the western Shore" (*LR* 131). The notion that there exists an Otherworld (Lyonesse) somewhere in the West which was once a part of the physical world comes straight out of Celtic mythology.[195]

Eschatology is not discussed by Men, Hobbits, or other simple creatures in *LR*, but it is alluded to by the wise: When Galadriel and Celeborn take leave of Treebeard, the old Ent says that the world is "changing" and that this is "the end". By this he seems, however, not to mean the end of the world as such, but only of the world of Elves and Ents. Galadriel thinks that there might come a new "Spring" (capitalised in original) where "the lands that lie under the wave [Númenor] are lifted up again" and when she and Treebeard will meet again (*LR* 981). This new Spring, which has the character of world rebirth, seems inspired by the similar eschatological vision in Norse mythology (e.g. Vǫluspá 59) of a new earth rising from the sea after Ragnarǫk.

Individual eschatology is different for Elves and Men. Men are mortal and their afterlife is discussed only in the appendices. The mortality of Men is here curiously referred to as a gift (*LR* 1035, 1063). On his deathbed, Aragorn expresses the most articulated belief in a human afterlife, taking leave of Arwen with the words: "In sorrow we must go, but not in despair. Behold! we are not bound for ever to the circles of this world, and beyond them is more than memory. Farewell!" (*LR* 1063). Aragorn here voices the idea that when humans die, they leave the created world (the circles of this world) and go to the One (cf. also *LR* 194). The words "more than memory" refer to Arwen's refusal to go to Eldamar with the rest of her kin where Aragorn would have been only a memory. Since Arwen has chosen human mortality and will also die,

[194] In the main narrative, Númenor is often referred to as Westernesse (*LR* 146, 194, 221, 236, 659, 962).

[195] Tolkien's sources of inspiration are explored in depth by Whittingham (2008).

Aragorn expects to be reunited with her. It is the prospect of leaving the world to be with the One and to be reunited with one's loved ones that ultimately makes mortality a gift.

Elven eschatology is different. Elves are not immortal, though they seem so to humans. It is clear that the Elves will slowly fade if they stay in Middle-earth (*LR* 971, 1059), but it remains unclear whether Elves in Aman are indeed immortal. Elves seem immune to sickness, but they can die in Middle-earth when slain. It remains unclear, though, what happens to slain Elves. According to Aragorn, the only elf to ever "die from the world" (*LR* 193-194, 1034) was Lúthien, but she had *chosen* mortality (like Arwen) to be with her human lover Beren. This seems to imply that Elves either have no afterlife or go to Aman when they die, but not out of the world to the One like humans. The short exchange between Galadriel and Treebeard mentioned above suggests that the Elves expect to be reborn with the world after the end of this one.

7.2.4. Rituals in *The Lord of the Rings*

There are very few religious rituals in *LR*. At many points in the narratives where one expects a religious ritual, there is none. No religious ceremonies are staged on the occasions of the Council of Elrond (*LR* 239-271), Boromir's funeral (*LR* 418), the burial of the fallen after the battle of Helm's Deep (*LR* 545), Théoden's funeral (*LR* 976), or the marriage of Aragorn and Arwen (*LR* 973).

On other occasions, however, the Valar are addressed in songs and rituals. Groups of elves sing while wandering to Grey Havens (*LR* 79), as they are gathered in Rivendell (*LR* 227-238), and when lamenting Gandalf's death in Lothlórien (*LR* 359). Most of these songs concern Valinor and/or the Vala who is called Varda (The Exalted) in Quenya and Elbereth (Star-Queen) in Sindarin. Indeed, Elbereth is the focus of Elven 'religion' in *LR*. Five entire songs mentioning Elbereth are embedded within the narrative (*LR* 79, 236, 238, 377-8, 1028), three of which address her directly (*LR* 79, 238, 1028). To take an example, Arwen's short hymn to Elbereth goes:

> A Elbereth Gilthoniel,
> silivren penna míriel
> o menel aglar elenath!
> Na-chaered palan-díriel
> o galadhremmin ennorath,
> Fanuilos, le linnathon
> nef aear, sí nef aearon! (*LR* 238).

LR includes no translation of the Sindarin text into English, but Gwineth of Ilsaluntë Valion has kindly translated the text for me:

> Oh Elbereth, Star Kindler!
> white-glittering, sparkling like a jewel
> slants down the glory of the starry host
> Having gazed into the distance

> from this tree-woven land of Middle-earth
> Snow-white, I will sing to Thee
> on this side of the Sundering Sea![196]

Elbereth's name is uttered for protection or empowerment on six other occasions, by the elf Gildor who takes leave of Frodo with the words: "May Elbereth protect you!" (*LR* 84), by Legolas (*LR* 387), and by Frodo and Sam (*LR* 195, 214, 729, 915). By uttering her name one can master powers of evil, such as the Nazgûl (*LR* 198) and the magical watchers at the Orc fort in Mordor (*LR* 915).

I mentioned above (in section 7.2.1) that Gandalf refers to the Valar when crowning Aragorn (*LR* 968). In *LR* there is one additional reference to the Valar in a ritual context. Before breaking their fast, Gondorians always turn to face west in a kind of grace known as the "Standing Silence" (*LR* 955). Faramir explains the meaning of this rite as follows: "So we always do, we look towards Númenor that was, and beyond to Elvenhome that is, and to that [Valinor] which is beyond Elvenhome and will ever be" (*LR* 676). Aragorn's coronation and the Standing Silence are the closest we come to Valar-directed rituals in *LR*.

Some additional information is given in the appendices on the 'liturgical year' of Elves and Men. In appendix D on calendars, it is explained that the elves in Rivendell observed a week of six days concluded by a holiday which was named after the Valar and reserved "for ritual rather than practical purposes" (*LR* 1107). The Elves also used a calendar with six seasons of uneven length and marked new-year and mid-year with important festivals. The two-day new-year's celebration in the spring spanned the last day of the old year (Mettarë) and the first of the new year (Yestarë; April 6th by Shire reckoning); the mid-year festival spanned three 'middle-days' (Enderi) (*LR* 1107-1108).[197] No information is given about the content of these festivals, but the reader guesses that Valar-directed rituals took place in analogy with the weekly Valar holiday.[198]

Finally a note is given on the "new reckoning" introduced by Aragorn. Its basic structure is 12 months of 30 days plus five or six loose days. Two days are singled out as particularly important holidays. On the year's first day, which corresponds to our March 25, the fall of Sauron and the deeds of the Ring-bearers were commemorated.[199] On

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[196] As we shall see in chapter 13, this hymn was used in the Fifth Way Mystery School's Valar Working.

[197] The year was comprised of Yestarë (1 day), Tuilë (Spring; 54 days), Lairë (Summer; 72 days), Yávië (Autumn; 54 days), Enderi (3 days), Quellë (Fading; 54 days), Hrívë (Winter, 72 days), Coirë (Stirring; 54 days), and Mettarë (1 day) (*LR* 1107-1108). The five festival days did not belong to any particular season. Since the 365 days of the calendar were somewhat short of a sun year, Enderi was doubled every 12th year. Next to this sun calendar, a moon calendar was also used (*LR* 1110).

[198] Given this information, it is surprising that we hear nothing of Elven rituals during the many weeks which the fellowship spends in Rivendell and Lothlórien. This can be explained, however, by Tolkien's diligent effort not to have *LR* appear excessively pagan (cf. the introduction to section 7.2).

[199] As commentators have pointed out, this is no random date. According to the Catholic tradition, March 25 is the very date of the Incarnation (Hutton 2006, 232).

September 22, Frodo's birthday (and Bilbo's; *LR* 21), Ring-day was celebrated.[200] Enderi was celebrated on September 23-25 (*LR* 1112).

To sum up so far, scattered throughout the narrative and (especially) the appendices, Tolkien gives quite some information about the nature of the world including the Blessed Realm (cosmology), about afterlife and the end of the world (eschatology), about the supreme divinity, the One, and the lesser 'gods', the Valar, (theology), and on the Elbereth cult of the Elves (rituals). The reader is likely to miss most of this, however, unless he or she engages in careful exegesis of the more than 100 pages of appendices. Even in that case most of the theological and cosmological references only attain their full meaning in the light of *S*.

7.3. Thematisation of the Veracity of *The Lord of the Rings*

LR thematises its own veracity in two ways. Most importantly, the compiler voice of the prologue and the appendices relays a kind of frame narrative about the 'real' authorship, transmission, and compilation of *LR*. It is claimed that hobbits rather than Tolkien wrote the story, and that the narrative builds on historical facts. *LR* also thematises its veracity in a more indirect way. Authoritative characters frequently state that old tales always include a core of factual truth, and the reader is left to wonder whether this, given the frame narrative, applies to the main narrative of *LR* as well.

7.3.1. The Frame Narrative in *The Lord of the Rings*

Already in an author's note in *H* and in a prologue to the first edition of *LR*, Tolkien playfully claimed to publish material which had been written long ago by some of the characters of the story and had survived to the present day when it had come into his possession. Disavowing the authorship, he claimed to have only translated, edited, and commented on the work of others. In the prologue to the first edition of *LR*, Tolkien also ensured the reader that the map of the Shire included in the book had "been approved as reasonably correct by those Hobbits that still concern themselves with ancient history" (1954, 8). These remarks were combined with statements that were clearly authorial, such as the dedication of *LR* to Tolkien's sons and daughter and to the Inklings (Tolkien 1954, 7). In the prologue to the first edition of *LR*, Tolkien did thus not clearly distinguish himself (as author) from the compiler voice (his narrator), but completely conflated the two. The original prologue could thus be read as Tolkien's serious claim that hobbits still exist and that hobbits had really written his book.

[200] As we shall see in chapter 14, these days are included in the ritual calendar of the group Middle-Earth Pagans.

Indeed, some readers took Tolkien on the word. According to William Ratliff and Charles Flinn, Tolkien had told them "that in England most of the lending libraries over his protests classified the trilogy as history and non-fiction" (1968, 143). Even if this is an exaggeration, Tolkien's statement in the prologue, that *LR* was "almost forgotten history" (1954, 8) certainly *could* be naïvely read as an established scholar's testimony to the tale's historicity.

Tolkien later considered this mingling of "real personal matters with the "machinery" of the Tale" to be "a serious mistake" (Anderson 2007, xi). In the second edition to *LR* (1965-66), he therefore kept the author and narrator voices more clearly separated, replacing the original prologue with an authorial foreword and a new prologue that was clearly the utterance of a narrator. In the foreword, Tolkien the author condemns the many allegorical interpretations of *LR* by literary critics who for instance had seen the ring as a symbol for the atomic bomb (*LR* xxiv-xxv). Against such readings, Tolkien states that "as for any inner meaning or 'message', [*LR*] has in the intention of the author none. It is neither allegorical nor topical" (*LR* xxii). He continues,

> I cordially dislike allegory in all its manifestations, and always have done so since I grew old and wary enough to detect its presence. I much prefer history, *true or feigned*, with its varied applicability to the thought and experience of readers. I think that many confuse 'applicability' with 'allegory'; but the one resides in the freedom of the reader, and the other in the purposed domination of the author (*LR* xxiv; emphasis added).

Tolkien here seems to prescribe a reading of *LR* as feigned (or fictional) history.

The compiler idea is retained in the new prologue and in the appendices. As in the first edition of *LR*, the compiler claims that the narratives published as *H* and *LR* were taken from parts of a copy of *The Red Book of Westmarch* written by the hobbits Bilbo and Frodo respectively (*LR* 1, 14). In the prologue to the second edition, this idea is further developed and explicated in a new *Note on Shire Records* where the compiler states the following:

> This account [the main narrative] […] is drawn mainly from the Red Book of Westmarch. […] It was in origin Bilbo's private diary [in which he wrote *H* (*LR* 1)], which he took with him to Rivendell. Frodo brought it back to the Shire, together with many loose leaves of notes [of Bilbo's], and during S.R. [Shire Reckoning] 1420-1 he nearly filled its pages with his account of the War [of the Ring, told in *LR*]. But annexed to it and preserved with it, probably in a single red case, were the three large volumes, bound in red leather, that Bilbo gave him as a parting gift. To these four volumes there was added in Westmarch a fifth containing commentaries, genealogies, and various other matter concerning the hobbit members of the Fellowship (*LR* 14).

We hear more about this red volume towards the end of the narrative when Frodo passes to Sam a "Red Book" including Bilbo's diary and Frodo's account of

> THE DOWNFALL OF THE LORD OF THE RINGS AND THE RETURN OF THE KING (as seen by the Little People; being the memoirs of Bilbo and Frodo of the Shire, supplemented by the accounts of their friends and the learning of the Wise.) Together with extracts from Books of Lore translated by Bilbo in Rivendell (*LR* 1027).

Tolkien must have intended the "three large volumes" (*LR* 14) or "extracts from Books of Lore" (*LR* 1027) to correspond to or include *S*.[201] The appendices to *LR* are constructed as abridgements and selections from *S* and from the fifth book (*LR* 1033). The effect of compilation is retained in the appendices which supposedly also draw on sources authored by Gimli (*LR* 1043) and Merry (*LR* 1044; also 8-9). To further support the idea of compilation, a complicated account is given of how the various sources were handed down through time (*LR* 14-15).

The compiler remains unnamed throughout *LR*, but appears very much like Tolkien. To begin with, the compiler is a *contemporary* of the reader and far removed in time from the narrated events. This is clear, for instance, in the prologue where the compiler remarks of the events in the main narrative that "those days, the Third Age of Middle-earth, are now long past, and the shape of all lands has been changed" (*LR* 2). To take another example, in appendix D the compiler compares "our calendar" (the Gregorian) with the calendars of the Shire, Gondor and the elves of Rivendell (*LR* 1106-1112) and tells us that he has "used our modern names for both months and weekdays, though of course neither the Eldar nor the Dúnedain nor the Hobbits actually did so" (*LR* 1109). Second, the compiler is clearly *human*. In the prologue he tells the reader that there used to be many hobbits in the world, but that they are now few and have learned to disappear in the presence of humans or ""Big folk" as they call us" (*LR* 1). Finally, the compiler is a *scholar* as the very inclusion of the many appendices makes clear. What is more, the compiler is a scholar who is knowledgeable in old languages just as Tolkien. This is most apparent in appendix E on writing and spelling, where the compiler for instance informs us that "[t]he Westron or Common Speech has been entirely translated into English equivalents" (*LR* 1113). Because the compiler is so similar to Tolkien, the second edition of *LR* still affords a reading that identifies the two with each other. This is so even if it was Tolkien's intention to distance himself (as author) from the text-internal compiler (as narrator).[202]

During the main narrative, the narrator becomes explicit twice, in both cases relating the narrated events to his own time. He compares the size of oliphaunts then and

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[201] Tolkien never stated this explicitly, but this is what the text lets the reader guess. Robert Foster (2003, 335) and Christopher Tolkien (*LT I* 6) have assumed the same.

[202] Throughout the text references to the compiler frame narrative are made on many more occasions than I can discuss here, in the prologue (*LR* 1, 2, 7, 13, 14-15), in the main narrative (*LR* 31, 32, 40, 105, 231, 235, 269, 270, 273, 277, 278, 950, 956, 987-8, 1016, 1026-7, 1029), and in the appendices (*LR* 1033, 1043, 1081, 1097, 1108, 1107, 1108, 1111, 1133, 1136, 1138). See also Flieger (2005a, 67-73) for another discussion of Tolkien's construction of feigned historicity.

now (*LR* 661), and the physical appearance of Elves at the time of the narrative with apparitions of Elves in "later days", i.e. his own time (*LR* 373). The narrator's claim that Elves can still be seen today is most significant. When Frodo leaves Lothlórien, the narrator informs us that Galadriel seemed to him "as by men of later days Elves still at times are seen: present and yet remote, a living vision of that which has already been left far behind by the flowing streams of Time" (*LR* 373). This passage interprets (or can at least be used to interpret) visions of elves in the relatively recent past of pre-Christian Europe and visions of elves today as echoes of *what was*, rather than as visions of what is (factually so) or as hallucinations of what is not (or of what is only in the imagination). The logic is not unlike Merry's extra-personal memory which was also a vision of a thing of the past. Taken together with Gandalf's statement about the shining high elf Glorfindel showing himself to Frodo as he "is upon the other side" (*LR* 223), the Galadriel passage can be read as a claim on behalf of the narrator that Elves can still show themselves to humans in the physical world in the narrator's time which is also the time of the reader.

7.3.2. The Motif of 'True Tales' in the Discourse of Authoritative Characters

The mytho-historical reading of *LR* which is afforded by the frame narrative is supported by the recurrent motif in *LR* that old tales always contain a core of truth (*LR* 109, 230, 374, 499, 502, 549, 824, 864, 958, 1137). On three occasions authoritative characters explicitly scold less wise characters for dismissing legendary lore as old wives' tales. Celeborn, who is counted as one of the three wisest elves, lectures Boromir: "[D]o not despise the lore that has come down from distant years; for oft it may chance that old wives keep in memory word of things that once were needful for the wise to know" (*LR* 374). Gandalf similarly scolds Théoden for not believing in the fireside stories about Ents (*LR* 549; cf. also 499), and later rebukes the herb-master of Minas Tirith who does not remember the "rhymes of old days" and therefore has lost the knowledge of healing plants passed on by them (*LR* 864).

In appendix F, even the compiler expresses a mytho-historical view. He refers to the legendary king Arthur as an historical figure (*LR* 1134) and laments that "memories have not been fresh enough among Men to keep hold of a special plural ['dwarves' instead of 'dwarfs'] for a race *now abandoned to folk-tales, where at least a shadow of truth is preserved*, or at last to nonsense-stories in which they become mere figures of fun" (*LR* 1137; emphasis added). The compiler never doubts his own commentary or the accounts he brings together. These accounts also do not reflect on their own veracity, and if they say anything of their own sources, they refer to "tales" or "what was told" about this or that king (or other topic), tales which always turn out to be true, at least in their core.

7.3.3. The Levels of Communication in *The Lord of the Rings* and the Reading Modes they Afford

In order to systematise the findings about how veracity is thematised in different parts of the text, let me introduce a few narratological key terms into the discussion. First, it is useful to distinguish with Gérard Genette (1997b) between different types of paratexts, especially *authorial paratexts* written by the author of the main text and *allographic paratexts* written by third persons, such as the publisher, translator, and reviewers. In the anniversary edition of *LR*, allographic paratexts include the front and back cover (with excerpts from reviews), the colophon, a "Note on the text" explaining *LR*'s publication history, and a further "Note on the 50th Anniversary Edition". Tolkien's foreword is obviously an authorial paratext.

As we have seen, Tolkien experimented with different types of authorial prefaces. The author's note in *H* and the foreword to the first edition of *LR* both belong to the category which Genette calls *disavowing authorial prefaces* (1997b, 280-284). These prefaces are authorial in so far as they are signed by the author and disavowing because they disavow ultimate authorship. Since disavowing authorship in the case of a novel is by definition impossible, Genette considers disavowing authorial prefaces to be a sub-category of fictional prefaces. Their fictionality is not stated explicitly (indeed it is explicitly denied), but implicitly signs in the text make it clear that the claim to historicity is made tongue-in-cheek. In the second edition of *LR*, Tolkien gives us instead a standard *authorial preface* (Tolkien's foreword) in which he more clearly guides the reader's interpretation of the text, explicitly asking the reader not to read the main text as allegory, but as feigned history.

The prologue to the second edition of *LR* and the appendices are, of course, authored by Tolkien, but they are put in the mouth of a narrator. This makes prologue and appendices part of the narrative discourse rather than part of the authorial paratext. However, since prologue and appendices have a semi-paratextual function *within* the narrative discourse, we might refer to them as *narratorial prefaces*.[203]

So much for the paratext. To analyse the different layers and speaker position within the main narrative, it is necessary to introduce another set of narratological terms. I use the terminology suggested by Algirdas Julien Greimas (cf. Courtés and Greimas 1988) and Ole Davidsen (1993, 25-33, *passim*).[204] The narratological lexicon used by Greimas and Davidsen is compatible with the possible worlds theory introduced in chapter 2 above, but zooms in on the structure of communication, rather than on the relation between the textual world and the actual world. In this lexicon, the term *narrative discourse* (or enunciate) refers to the narrative text, excluding the paratext. The narrative

[203] Like Genette, I use the term preface here in a broad sense that also includes postscripts such as appendices.

[204] The articles in Greimas' semiotic dictionary (Courtés and Greimas 1988), which I draw on, synthesise the work of especially Genette (1980) and Émile Benveniste (1966) besides that of Greimas himself (1966).

discourse constitutes the information which the author (as addressor) seeks to transfer to the reader (as addressee) in a process of communication. Both author and reader are positioned in the actual world outside the narrative discourse. The discourse projects a textual world. Within this textual world are situated the text-internal counterparts of the author and reader, which are termed the *narrator* and *narratee* (or implied reader). The characters of the narrative are referred to as *narrative subjects* and a distinction can be made between two levels within the narrative text: the *narrate* (or story) which comprises the material (the events, actions, descriptions) which the narrator relates, and the *narration* which is the narrative mode of addressing (the rhetoric of the narrative, including focus and narrative chronology). With Émile Benveniste we can further distinguish between two types of narration, *enunciative narration* in which narrator and narratee are explicitly present in the text in first and second person, and *utterative narration* in which they are only implicitly present (cf. Davidsen 1993, 176).[205]

Armed with these concepts, we can analyse the narrative discourse of *LR*. The entire narrative discourse, both of the main narrative and of the narratorial prefaces, constitutes the utterance of the narrator/compiler. The mode of narration is mostly utterative, though the narrator becomes explicit (and the narration hence enunciative) twice during the main narrative and several times in the narratorial prefaces. The content of the narrative, the narrate, is what I have focused on in my analysis of the fantastic elements and the narrative religion within the fictional world. This narrate includes a number of embedded discourses in the form of the direct speech of narrative subjects such as Gandalf and Frodo. The communicative structure of *LR* is laid out schematically in table 7.1.

All layers of the text contribute to guide the reader's interpretation of the text as either fiction or mytho-history. As explained in section 2.1.2 above, fiction here means a narrative told by a narrator (implied speaker) who is dissociated from the author (actual sender) and situated in a textual reference world which is both different from and claimed to be different from the actual world (IS ≠ AS; TAW ≠ AW; TRW ≠ AW). The textual parts promoting a reading of *LR* as fiction in this sense are (a) Tolkien's authorial preface (to the second edition) in which he prescribes a reading of the text as feigned history, (b) the allographic paratext which markets the book as a novel, and (c) the many passages in the main narrative which include supernatural elements. The first two of these directly assert the text's fictionality by emphasising the dissociation of author and narrator and the text's lack of claim to refer to the actual world. The supernatural passages in the main narrative more indirectly indicate the text's fictional status by demonstrating the objective difference between the actual world and the textual actual world.

[205] These embedded discourses project alternative possible worlds within the textual actual world (cf. section 2.1.2 above).

Table 7.1. Levels of Communication and Narration in *LR*				
Book part	**Type and aim of communication**	**Addressor**	**Addressee**	**World of communication**
Paratext				
Book cover, colophon, notes	Allographic preface Marketing, explanation of publication history	Publisher	Reader	Actual world
Foreword	Authorial preface Guiding reading and interpretation of the narrative discourse	Author (J.R.R. Tolkien)	Reader	Actual world
Narrative Discourse				
Prologue, appendices	Narratorial prefaces Frame narrative constructing the world of the narrate as the prehistory of the world of the narrator/narratee	Narrator (compiler) *Enunciative narration* Human point of view	Narratee	Textual reference world Narrator's and narratee's present
Main narrative	Narrate (story)	Narrator *Utterative narration* Hobbit point of view	Narratee	Textual actual world Narrator's and narratee's past; narrative subjects' present
	Embedded discourses Esp. discourse spoken by authoritative figures to 'disciple-type' characters (Hobbits, humans) on such subjects as cosmology, and theology, and the truth of myths, legends, and songs	Narrative subject A [Gandalf, Aragorn, Elrond, Galadriel, Celeborn]	Narrative subject B [Hobbits, humans]	Textual alternative possible worlds The textual APWs as a rule constitute non-fictional accurate discourse within the fictional world; hence TAPW = TAW = TRW

There are also parts of the text which promote a referential reading of *LR* as history, i.e. as an honest author's dramatised (and hence possibly exaggerated) presentation of a string of events involving supernatural entities that are claimed to have taken place in,

and actually have taken place in, the actual world (IS = AS; TAW = AW; TRW = AW). The text parts which promote an historical reading are (a) the narratorial prefaces, especially the appendices, (b) the occasional instances of enunciative narration within the main narrative, (c) Tolkien's prologue to the first edition of *LR*, and (d) the motif that tales always have an historical core. The narratorial prefaces, the enunciative narration, and Tolkien's old prologue promote a referential reading by implying that *LR* tells of the prehistory of the reader's world (TRW = AW; TAW = AW) and by identifying Tolkien with the narrator (IS = AS). The motif that tales always have an historical core promotes the referential reading in a more indirect manner. Taken together, the four textual parts identified here afford and promote a referential and mytho-historical reading of *LR* as the dramatised history of our world's supernatural past. The mytho-historical reading is promoted with less strength than the fictional reading, being in principle overruled by Tolkien's prescription in his preface to read the historical frame narrative as a fictional ploy.

The reader's actual choice of reading mode will hinge primarily on what he or she makes of the relation between the narrator/compiler and Tolkien. The most obvious choice is to keep the two apart as I have done in the table above and hence to read *LR* as fiction. But it is possible on the basis of the text to conclude that the compiler is Tolkien himself and that what he is telling refers to the actual world. Such a referential reading does not necessarily entail a belief in the historical truth of the entire tale, but it allows for the belief that *LR* possesses a core of historical truth. This reading option constitutes a major religious affordance of *LR*. It must be emphasised, however, that *LR* also affords religious use for readers who classify it as fiction. Such readers can still approach *LR* for example in the mytho-cosmological mode and consider it a fictional tale about supernatural entities in the textual world.

7.4. Summary: The Religious Affordances of *The Lord of the Rings*

Before moving on to the actual reception of *LR* let me briefly summarise the findings of this chapter and reflect on the kind of religious use of *LR* we might expect given the text's repertoire of religious affordances.

It is apparent that *LR* *does* provide some of the religious affordances found in religious narratives, though some types of religious affordances are more clearly present than others. In any case, the narrative contains an abundance of fantastic elements. There are many non-ordinary beings, ranging from Hobbits and Elves to Ents and Dragons; the magical forest Lothlórien and the Blessed Realm are examples of supernatural otherworlds; the narrative abounds with magic and magical artefacts; and intuition and visions are presented as reliable sources of knowledge. The text includes much less narrative religion. We hear almost nothing about the Valar and the One and there are no narrative rituals which could serve as a model for how to communicate with these divine powers. The scattered bits of information about the Valar and about the Elven and Gon-

dorian Valar religion are found primarily in the appendices and are almost unintelligible without knowledge of *S*. As far as thematisation of veracity goes, we have just seen that *LR*, while most forcefully promoting a fictional reading, also affords a mytho-historical reading that takes the narrative to include a core of historicity. Nowhere in *LR*, however, does the text claim about itself to have an ultimately divine source.

It is possible to formulate a few hypotheses about the character religion based on *LR* can be expected to take. First, given the near absence of narrative religion in *LR*, we must hypothesise that the text will generally be unable to function as the primary basis of a new religious movement. However, since many of the fantastic elements in *LR* are similar to those found in pagan mythologies, one might expect that the text can inspire people to believe in (or support existing belief in) magic, the reality of otherworlds inhabited by spiritual beings, and intuition as a superior form of (spiritual) knowledge. Second, given the fact that we hear very little about the Valar but much about the Elves, we must expect *LR*-inspired religion to adopt the Hobbit/human perspective and treat the Elves (rather than the Valar) as the spiritual powers with whom to engage in ritual. Finally, we can hypothesise, that in the unlikely case that a new religious movement based primarily on *LR would* form, this would be grounded on a mytho-historical reading of the text.

In the following chapter we shall see how *LR* was received and how spirituality inspired by *LR* took form in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Though the publication of *S* in 1977 changed the textual basis of Tolkien-based religion, *LR* and its religious affordances continued to play a role also for the instances of Tolkien-based religion discussed in later chapters.

Chapter 8. An Unexpected Success: Hippies, Neo-Pagans, and *The Lord of the Rings*

As good as everything to do with Tolkien's literary mythology happened unexpectedly and surprised no-one more than Tolkien himself. It took Tolkien by surprise when he, while correcting School Certificate papers, suddenly scrawled on a blank leaf: "In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit" (*Letters* 215). As Tolkien continued writing the story – as entertainment for his own children and in order to find out for himself what hobbits were and why they lived in holes – it startled him to discover that the story was set in the same world as those Elven languages and myths that he had been tinkering with since the 1910s. Even more, it surprised Tolkien that Stanley Unwin wanted to publish *H*, but so it happened. *H* became a success and publisher and audience immediately demanded a sequel. When *LR* was finally ready for publication in 1954, it was expected to be positively received, despite its excessive length. Nobody had foreseen, however, that a decade later *LR* – a sequel to a children's book written by a conservative professor of philology – would become an icon for the hippies and a great source of inspiration for the emerging Neo-Pagan movement.

The present chapter is concerned with *LR*'s unexpected sub-cultural success. In the first section, I briefly review the reception of *LR*, focusing on the 1960s when a paperback edition made the book mainstream reading. The second section treats the reception of *LR* in the hippie movement and in related parts of the counter-culture. In the third section, I present the Neo-Pagan movement and discuss the use of *LR* among Pagans. I furthermore discuss the Pagan reception of *LR* as an example of how fiction inspires and sustains Neo-Paganism in general, and how the Neo-Pagan movement is thus a prime example of what I term fiction-inspired religion (in contrast to fiction-integrating or fiction-based religion). At the end of the chapter, I assess whether religion inspired by *LR* indeed took the form hypothesised in chapter 7, i.e. that *LR* can inspire and sustain certain beliefs, but is unlikely to work as the main authoritative text for a new religious movement; that *LR*-inspired will take a human/Hobbit perspective and focus on the Elves as spiritual others; and that *LR*-based religious movements, if they will emerge at all, will be founded on a mytho-historical reading of the text.

8.1. The 1965 Paperback of *The Lord of the Rings*

LR had been published as three hardback volumes in 1954-55 by George Allen & Unwin in Britain and by Houghton Mifflin in America. Upon publication, the work received plenty of attention and praise and it was soon translated into Dutch (1956-58), Swedish (1959), and Polish (1960-63). In America, critics compared the book to the Odyssey and Beowulf and described it as "a major creative act" that was "worthy to stand beside almost anything written in this century" (quoted in Beatie 1970, 692).[206] In the Netherlands, the place outside the Anglophone world where *LR* was most enthusiastically received, Guus Sötemann published the first Dutch review of the *Fellowship of the Ring* less than two months after its release, on 20 November 1954. Sötemann, a respected intellectual and professor of modern Dutch literature at the University of Utrecht, praised *LR* as 'a fantastic epic'[207] (Van Rossenberg 1992, 15). More than 100 reviews of the Dutch translation appeared between 1956 and 1958 (Van Rossenberg 2006, 456), and Tolkien was invited to the Netherlands by his Dutch publisher Het Spectrum. On 28 March 1958 Tolkien was celebrated in Rotterdam with a well-attended Hobbit feast (Van Rossenberg 1992, 23-32).

Despite the public interest at home and abroad, *LR* did not sell very well initially and was primarily appreciated in "professional and professorial circles" (Helms 1978, 104). This had everything to do with the price of the books, which was high even compared to normal hardbacks because of their high quality. While a normal hardback book in the Netherlands sold for *ƒ* 6.90 or *ƒ* 7.90 at that time, the three volumes of *LR* cost *ƒ* 12.50 each, making it *ƒ* 37.50 for the entire work (Van Rossenberg 1992, 16). In the US, the hardback trilogy sold at 15$. It was therefore not surprising that sales rose significantly when the science fiction company Ace Books put a paperback edition on the market in 1965 for a mere $2.25 (Foster 2006).

Taking advantage of unclear copyright legislation in the United States, Ace had published an unauthorised version and paid no royalties to Tolkien (Carpenter 1977, 302). To regain copyright, Tolkien had to put a revised version on the market, and eventually an authorised, second edition was published late in 1965 by Houghton Mifflin's paperback partner Ballantine Books (Carpenter 1977, 304). On its front cover was printed a personal message by Tolkien in which he urged readers to boycott the Ace edition.[208] The copyright issue received much media attention, and this contributed further to the rising sales. Tolkien's fans massively supported the official, but slightly more expensive

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[206] Not all critics joined the panegyric chorus. A number of very influential literary critics, including Harold Bloom and Edmund Wilson, were very antagonistic. Wilson found *LR* to be a "children's book which has somehow gone out of hand" (quoted in Beatie 1970, 692).

[207] Dutch: "een fantastisch epos".

[208] The note read: "This paperback edition and no other has been published with my consent and co-operation. Those who approve of courtesy, at least, to living authors will purchase it and no other".

Ballantine edition, and eventually also Ace agreed to pay Tolkien royalties over all their sales (Foster 2006, 14).

With the 1965 paperbacks, "students and young people, drawn primarily from college campuses" became the largest Tolkien reader group in America according to Philip Helms (1978, 105). *LR* even outsold the Bible in 1967 and 1968 in the US, and commentators have resorted to religious language when characterising its success. They describe Tolkien as a "campus cult figure" (Ellwood 1994, 134) and *LR* as a "campus religion" (Helms 1978, 104). According to Humphrey Carpenter, Tolkien received letters from fans who had been married in ceremonies based on his books.[209]

The initial success of *LR* among college students acted as a catalyst for the book's general appreciation across American society (Helms 1978, 108; Walmsley 1984, 73, 85). Tolkien soon became a mainstream success outside America as well. Following the publication of new paperback editions in 1965 and 1966 respectively, sales rose also in the Netherlands (Van Rossenberg 2006) and in Britain (Glover 1984; Carpenter 1977, 307). A late 1960s paperback edition made *LR* very popular in Sweden (Beregond 2006), and after the appearance of a Danish translation, *LR* became "cult reading" in Denmark in the 1970s (Skyggebjerg 2006, 121).[210] Both *LR* and *H* currently belong to the most widely read books ever. On Wikipedia's list of bestselling books, *LR* ranks an all-time third with *c*. 150 million copies of the entire trilogy sold, while *H* comes in fourth with *c*. 100 million copies.[211]

8.2. Tolkien in the Counter-Culture

It has been argued that Tolkien's books in themselves express a Romantic, anti-industrial critique of modern society (e.g. Veldman 1994, 112, 304). But it was only when *LR* was taken up by various parts of the counter-culture during the 1960s and 1970s that its subversive potential began to be realised in social change movements and experiments with alternative lifestyles and spiritualities. While Parisian students in May 1968 went to the barricades shouting "l'imagination prend le pouvoir!" ('imagination usurps power!'), Tolkien's fantasy provided powerful symbols for social protest in the American counter-culture. According to Chris Mooney,

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[209] Documentary, *J.R.R. Tolkien: Creator of Middle-earth* (2002).

[210] A new wave of translations of *LR* immediately followed the sales success of the paperbacks of 1965-66. Between 1967 and 1975, *LR* was translated into Italian (1967-70), German (1969-70), Danish (1968-1972), Japanese (1972-75), French (1973), Finnish (1973-75), and Norwegian (1973-75).

[211] Wikipedia, art. "List of best-selling books" [300112]. Only Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities* and Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *Le Petit Prince* (both *c*. 200 million copies) have sold more. The list does not claim to be complete and, for instance, lacks the Bible at the very top. Nevertheless, the sales figures given seem fairly reliable and at least give a good indication of the truly massive impact of Tolkien's works.

> "Frodo Lives" graffiti and T-shirts abounded. Despite Tolkien's conservative – some would say reactionary – Catholic politics, *The Lord of the Rings* became required reading for counter-culturists during the Vietnam era. In the wizard Gandalf's counsel that the powerful but corrupting Ring be destroyed, rather than used as a weapon against Sauron, antiwar activists saw a clear allusion to the scourge of nuclear weapons. Environmentalists, meanwhile, pointed to Tolkien's beloved Ents, the ruminative tree-creatures who are "roused" to protect their forest of Fangorn from the axe-loving wizard Saruman – who, with his "mind of metal and wheels ... does not care for growing things, except as far as they serve him for the moment." And then there are the hobbits' frequent time-outs to enjoy mushrooms and "pipe weed". Pot smokers felt they knew exactly what Tolkien was driving at (Mooney 2001; quoted in Barker 2006, 94).

That a sub-culture comprised of young people could use the literary works by an Oxford don incarnating conservatism, elitism, and orthodox Catholicism may seem odd at first. But despite their different political, moral, and religious views, many counter-culturalists shared Tolkien's Romantic nostalgia. Young people who felt caged by the complacent middle-class family life of the post-war era, looked elsewhere for more 'authentic' lifestyles: to the East, to the past, to the indigenous, and to worlds of utopian fiction, such as Robert Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land* (1961), Frank Herbert's *Dune* (1965), and Tolkien's *LR*.

8.2.1. Hobbits and Hippies: Shire-Life as Social Model

The counter-cultural fascination with Tolkien began with the hippies who wore "Gandalf for President" badges and adhered to the Hobbit values of friendship, community, love for nature, distrust in industry, and love for peace and quiet and good meals. Writing in 1967, Warren Hinckle declared *LR* to be "the absolute favorite book of every hippie" (1967, 25). According to Nigel Walmsley, hippie lifestyle "bore direct similarities to Hobbit culture" (1984, 76). Indeed, Walmsley observes that

> the description that Tolkien gives of Hobbits early in the Prologue [of *LR*] provided a model, a set of stylistic indicators, for the alternative society's appearance: Clothes of vivid primary colours, long hair, bright eyes (an effect, as it happened, of LSD ingestion), mouths given to laughter (ditto), and a general mien of delight (1984, 81).

In other words, the depiction of the Shire provided a model for an alternative society in the form of a social role and identity (as Hobbit), practices (smoking, eating, relaxing), and values (carelessness, freedom, primitivism, environmentalism) that could be used for the construction and consolidation of lifestyles and communities.[212]

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[212] The hippies paid no heed to the more authoritative voices in *LR* – the narrator, Aragorn, Gandalf, and even Bilbo and Frodo – who all find the careless Shire lifestyle naïve, childish, and irresponsible because it depends on the protection by those who conscientiously *do* engage in the affairs of the world. The hippies

Walmsley believes that an important reason for *LR*'s sub-cultural success was the fact that it appeared simultaneously with an increase in LSD use (1984, 74-75). There existed no iconic LSD literature comparable to Aldous Huxley's descriptions of the mescaline experience and to William Burroughs' literary portrayal of methedrine and heroine use (Walmsley 1984, 75, 80). *LR* could serve as LSD literature by virtue of both LSD and *LR* being visually imaginative "journey[s] into or away from reality" (Walmsley 1984, 75). Indeed it did. William Ratliff and Charles Flinn reported that *LR* was "the favorite piece of contemporary fiction" of "LSD High Priest" Timothy Leary (1968, 142), and Michael Clifton, who was himself into both Tolkien and psychedelics, has characterised *LR* as a "vision-inducing work" (1987). Clifton interprets Frodo's dreams and visions in Lothlórien as "altered states of consciousness" akin to those generated by meditation, deep hypnosis, and psychedelic drugs (1987, 98). He further claims that the reader can experience Frodo's altered states of consciousness vicariously simply by reading the passages in which they occur (Clifton 1987, 99).

Both LSD and *LR* could induce visions, but most potent was the *combination* of the two. According to Ratliff and Flinn,

> [s]ome hippies [...] consider the trilogy (or part of it) a "psychedelic manual" [...] Passages from *The Lord of the Rings* read before or during an LSD "trip," for instance, may greatly stimulate the individual's mind and make his "trip" seem much more meaningful (1968, 144).

The marketing of *LR* contributed to establishing a link to the LSD sub-culture. Both the Ace and Ballantine editions of the American *LR* paperback where marketed with psychedelic covers,[213] and an advertisement in the British Underground magazine Oz in the late 1960s invited the potential buyer to "[t]ake *your* trip to Middle Earth [*sic*] with *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien's phychedelectable monsterpiece" (quoted in Glover 1984, 194; original emphasis).

8.2.2. Tolkien and the Commune Movement: The Case of De Hobbitstee

Many counter-culturalists took a new name to signify a break with the straight world and some of these names were taken from characters in *LR*, such as Treebeard (Zicklin 1983, 22). The Copenhagen commune Maos Lyst (Mao's Delight) provides an illustrative example of this naming practice. In 1969, the commune members decided to all take the

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also did not seem to notice the old-fashioned values of loyalty, monarchy, and patriarchy, and paid little attention to the social hierarchy among the Hobbits, exemplified by the relation between the aristocratic Baggins family – Bilbo is referred to as a "gentlehobbit" (*LR* 22) and an "esquire" (*H* 350) – and its faithful servant Sam Gamgee who consistently addresses Frodo as "Mr. Frodo" or "master". The hippies were also not too concerned about the bachelordom of Bilbo and Frodo, nor about the otherwise strictly monogamous Hobbit culture.

[213] Tolkien found the covers "absolutely foul" (Ratliff and Flinn 1968, 144). Pictures of the covers can be found here: http://mysite.verizon.net/aznirb/mtr/oop-lotr.html [210812].

surname Kløvedal (Danish for Rivendell) to support their identity as a 'tribe' (Pedersen 1999; Giese and Grünbaum 1988). According to film maker and former community member Mogens Kløvedal, the name Rivendell stood for the unprejudiced spirit of Maos Lyst and its character of a safe haven where one could re-gather one's strength (Pedersen 1999, 10).

In the Netherlands, the most influential counter-cultural commune was named De Hobbitstee after Hobbitton, the home village of Bilbo and Frodo. Founded in 1969 by individuals who had been active in the Provo movement, De Hobbitstee was an eco-oriented, rural hippie commune engaged in spirituality, environmentalism, and social activism (Meijering, van Hoven, and Huigen 2007, 359).[214] In the beginning everybody worked together in the candle factory, on the biological farm, and with the influential New Age magazine *De Drentse waterman: Kommunikatieblad voor alternatieve levenswijzen* (*The Drente Aquarius: Bulletin for alternative lifestyles*) which was published between 1973 and 1981 (Meijering, van Hoven, and Huigen 2007, 361).[215] De Hobbitstee exists to this day though none of the original inhabitants are left, drugs are now banned, and many other things have changed (Meijering, van Hoven, and Huigen 2007). The members still refer to each other as hobbits, and the homepage of De Hobbitstee connects the community's ideology to Tolkien's works in which 'mystery tries to stand with both feet on the ground'[216].

Jeroen de Kloet and Giselinde Kuipers consider De Hobbitstee a good example of how "Tolkien's works were incorporated into the [...] New Age subculture" (2007, 303). While this is right, one should be careful not to over-estimate the reach of Tolkien's influence. For example, we have no evidence of Tolkien-inspired rituals or anything of that sort taking place in De Hobbitstee. It is, of course, possible that Tolkien-inspired spiritual practices or LSD-trips to Middle-earth took place in the commune during the first years of its existence, but it is revealing that the first issue of *De Drentse Waterman* mentions Tolkien only once – in an article about the founding of the commune four years earlier – while including several articles on yoga, astrology, and immanent divinity (De Drentse Waterman 1973). In other words, while the inhabitants of De Hobbitstee were evidently spiritually active *and* interested in *LR*, they did not seem to directly *integrate* elements from *LR* in their spiritual practice. They certainly did not attempt to create an *LR*-based religious movement. Perhaps the spirituality of the initial Hobbitstee residents was inspired and sustained by *LR* and would thus qualify as fiction-inspired religion. The only thing we know for sure, however, is that the commune members of De Hobbitstee,

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[214] The Provo movement was a Dutch anarchistic counter-cultural movement active between 1965 and 1967, mostly in Amsterdam. It was known for its ludic and non-violent political happenings.

[215] *De Drentse waterman* was an influential magazine in the Dutch alternative milieu with a circulation of 6,500 in 1979 (Moerland and van Otterloo 1996, 693).

[216] In Dutch: "waarin mysterie met beide benen op de grond probeert te staan". http://www.leefgemeenschapdehobbitstee.nl/ [200610].

like most hippies, were attracted mainly by Tolkien's portrayal of the Hobbits and their culture. They seemingly had no intention to engage in *LR*-based religious practices, but they did wish to emulate (a strategic selection of) Hobbit culture. If *LR* never really influenced the spiritual *practice* of the commune members, it is hardly surprising that a current member told me that *LR* plays no role in the life of the inhabitants of De Hobbitstee today (230610).

8.2.3. Tolkien and Environmentalism

Besides the hippie and commune movements, Tolkien also inspired the environmentalist movement. Writing on the Green Movement in Britain during the 1960s and 1970s, Meredith Veldman has emphasised that "Tolkien, through his fantasy, provided like-minded protesters with the means to articulate their protest" (1994, 110). Patrick Curry adds that,

> one of the founders of Greenpeace, David Taggard, was reading *The Lord of the Rings* on a seminal action on behalf of the environment, sailing into an exclusion zone to protest against nuclear testing in 1972. A few years later, an advocate of a road bypass through Dartmoor attacked opponents to the scheme as "Middle-earth hobbits" (Curry 2006, 165).

Even though Tolkien's impact on the environmentalist movement is less direct now than in the 1970s, his legacy can still be felt through the continued presence of (eco-oriented) fantasy literature (Selling 2005, 299) and fairy terminology and belief (Letcher 2001) among contemporary eco-activists. The Earth Liberation Front, for instance, is abbreviated "ELF" and its members identify metaphorically as Elves (Taylor 2002, 35-36). To take another example, Buck Young from the Earth First! movement explains that he uses characters such as Aragorn as role models in his environmentalist writings (Taylor 2002, 46-47). According to Bron Taylor, Young is not alone. On the contrary, "several other Earth First! activists have told [Taylor] that the Tolkien novels have had a strong influence on their spiritual and activist paths" (Taylor 2002, 47). One Earth First! meeting was even called Entmoot (Taylor 2002, 47-48).[217]

8.3. The Neo-Pagan Movement and *The Lord of the Rings*

In the late 1960s, some counter-cultural religious groups in the United States began to adopt the self-designation 'Neo-Pagans' in order to express a sense of spiritual comradeship with pre-Christian and indigenous peoples. They thus crystallised the counter-cultural search for a more authentic lifestyle into an explicitly primitivist identity. Furthermore, since American Neo-Paganism emerged within the counter-cultural milieu during

[217] At the Entmoot in *LR*, the Ents of Fangorn decide to go to war against Saruman to avenge the damage that his industry has inflicted on their forest.

the Tolkien craze, Neo-Pagans naturally drew on Tolkien, naming themselves and their sanctuaries after characters and locations in *LR* just as the hippies. In addition to this, however, Neo-Pagans drew also on the particularly *religious* affordances of *LR*. Concretely, they asked themselves the question whether Tolkien's work in some indirect way testified to the reality of elves, magic, and otherworlds. The hippies who had visited Middle-earth on LSD-trips had already taken a first step towards treating *LR* as a doorway to a higher, spiritual reality, but it was only with the Neo-Pagans that *LR* came to inspire and sustain a religious worldview.

Both in the 1960s and today, most Neo-Pagans read *LR* in what I call the *binocular mode* (cf. ch. 5). On the one hand, they treat *LR* as fiction, taking the events of the story and also the characters and the cosmology of the narrative universe to be made up by Tolkien. On the other hand, they assert that spiritual beings and otherworlds *quite similar* to those depicted in *LR* in fact *do* exist, and that *LR* makes it easier to appreciate this 'real' supernatural. Many Neo-Pagans also report that reading *LR* triggered something within them that led them onto a spiritual journey culminating in a sense of home-coming upon discovering and adopting Paganism. Hence, especially for the first generation, Neo-Paganism can be described as a fiction-inspired religion. Initially, Neo-Paganism was inspired by *LR* and other fiction. Only later, the movement gained a more solid and non-fictional foundation in pre-Christian mythology, indigenous wisdom, and western esotericism.

In the rest of this section, I offer an historical sketch of the Neo-Pagan movement, discuss the Pagan use of *LR*, and finish with a brief reflection on Tolkien's continued influence on contemporary Paganism through the modern fantasy genre which he founded. After that I conclude chapter 8 with a comparison of the use of *LR* among hippies and Pagans and revisit the question of *LR*'s overall religious potential. The historical overview of the Pagan movement, to which I turn first, is not only intended as a backdrop for the rest of this particular section, but also comprises necessary background information for chapters 10 through 16. This is so because most Tolkien religionists are also Pagans and because the emergence of new types of Tolkien spirituality therefore reflects developments within the Pagan movement in general. The Elven movement and related Elven-centred groups (chs. 10-12) are indebted to Neo-Pagan ideas about elves; Middle-earth Paganism (ch. 14) is basically a form of eclectic and solitaire Wicca; and Legendarium Reconstructionism (ch. 16) is inspired partly by Heathen Reconstructionism. Readers who feel that they do not need an introduction to contemporary Paganism can go directly to section 8.3.2.

8.3.1. The Neo-Pagan Movement

Neo-Paganism refers to a broad religious movement which comprises self-identified eclectic Pagans (or Pagans-in-general) as well as the members of a number of relatively independent Pagan traditions that either identify with a particular pre-Christian,

European religion (these include Wicca and other forms of witchcraft, Goddess spirituality, Druidry, Heathenry, Ethnic Reconstructionism) or with indigenous religion (e.g. animist Paganism and Neo-Shamanism) (Pizza and Lewis 2009, 1; Pearson 2006; Harvey 2007).[218] According to Murphy Pizza and James R. Lewis, the editors of the *Handbook of Contemporary Paganism*, the "pagan values" of "acceptance of diversity, immanent divinity, and reverence for life on Earth" hold the many traditions together as a single movement (2009, 3), and though this trinity of Pagan values is somewhat idealised (cf. Davidsen 2012b, 187-188) it gives a good idea of the ideological thrust of the movement. In general, the term Neo-Paganism is used by insiders and outsiders alike to refer to religious groups that share at least some of the following four characteristics: (a) they draw their inspiration primarily from pre-Christian and indigenous sources, (b) they self-identify as Pagan, (c) their ritual practice is based on or influenced by Wicca, and (d) they subscribe to the Pagan values mentioned above.

Since this is not the place to discuss the Neo-Pagan movement in great detail, I shall restrict myself in the following to a sketch of the history of modern Paganism that is especially suited to the needs of the present work.[219] This means that I will focus especially on strongly nature-oriented Pagans and less on the feminist wing of the movement. The overview will also reflect the fact most Tolkien religionists are Americans. I propose to divide the history of modern Paganism, from the founding of Wicca till the present, into six rough phases:

1945-1959. Founding and development of Wicca in England.
1960-1970. Rise of American (non-Wiccan) Neo-Paganism and introduction of the very term (neo-)Paganism. Migration of Wicca to America.
1971-1978. Wicca/Paganism convergence and the emergence of Paganism as 'nature religion'.
1979-1989. Rise of feminist Paganism.
1990-2000. Pagan member explosion, especially due to the Internet.
2001-2013. Continued Neo-Pagan growth and consolidation.

Wicca was founded in the late 1940s by the eccentric occultist and retired English civil servant Gerald Gardner, but the historical details around Wicca's beginnings remain un-

[218] The borders between these different types of Paganism are not cut in stone, and many Pagans identify with more traditions simultaneously (Berger 2012, 13). For a full list of the self-identifications reported in the so-called Pagan Census of 1993-95, see Berger (2009, 167).

[219] For a brief overview of the varieties of Neo-Paganism in North America, see Berger (2005). Consult Harvey (2007) for an extensive overview (from the inside) of contemporary Paganism in Britain. For more information on Paganism in the English-speaking world in general, see Pizza and Lewis (2009), Hume (1997), and Magliocco (2004). For a global overview of Paganism that pays attention to local Reconstructionist traditions, see Strmiska (2005). For a critical overview of Pagan Studies, see Davidsen (2012b).

clear and disputed.[220] Gardner himself claimed to have been initiated into the so-called New Forest Coven which supposedly still practised the "Old Religion" of the witches. It is possible that Gardner did not make up this story, but had indeed been initiated into an occult group postulating to continue an unbroken line of witchcraft. In any case, this religious historiography was evidently inspired by Margaret Murray's speculations about a pre-Christian witch-cult in Europe (1921; 1931).

The ideas which Gardner (1954; 1959) adapted from Murray include that (a) the elves and fairies of folktale refer to human peoples who had been driven out to live in forests and mountains by later invaders, that (b) these peoples had practised a duotheistic religion, worshipping a Goddess and her consort, the Horned God, in covens of thirteen, and that (c) the so-called witches who were persecuted in the Middle Ages had really been adherents of this Old Religion. As Ronald Hutton has demonstrated, there is no historical evidence for a continuous, initiatory, and esoteric witch-cult to back up Murray and Gardner's claims (2000, 114). Furthermore Henrik Bogdan (2009) has shown that most of the Wiccan rituals which Gardner claimed to have learned in the New Forest Coven were recent loans from Crowleyan magic. It is well-known that the circle-casting ritual which forms the basis of Wiccan practice and has later been taken over by most other Neo-Pagans is based on the Lesser Banishing Ritual of the Pentagram, a preparatory ritual devised by the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn.[221]

During the 1950s, Wicca gained a following in Britain, and in the 1960s initiated Wiccans began to found new covens abroad, especially in America where they soon found themselves amidst an emerging movement of American Pagans (Pike 2004a, ch. 4; Clifton 2009, esp. 113-114). Particularly pivotal was the year 1967, when the two influential groups, Feraferia and the Church of All Worlds (CAW), were incorporated (Pike 2004a, 87).[222] Of these, especially CAW would play a significant role in the (American) Pagan movement by promoting openness to the use of fiction, by popularising the very term Neo-Paganism, and by describing Neo-Paganism as essentially a na-

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[220] See especially the exchange between Kelly (1991), Simpson (1994), Frew (1998), and Hutton (2000).

[221] For a short overview of modern Paganism with a focus on Wicca, see Pearson (2000). The standard work on the history of Wicca is Hutton's *The Triumph of the Moon* (1999) which also includes much information on the historical roots of Wicca in English Romanticism, anthropological theory, folklore, occult societies, and ceremonial magic. Typical for British scholars, Pearson and Hutton see Wicca as the 'genealogical knot' of Paganism in which all major religious roots unite and from which all other Pagan groups have developed or from which they have at least drawn a substantial amount of inspiration. This makes good sense in the British and American contexts where Wiccan rituals and beliefs have strongly influenced other Pagan traditions. Outside the Anglophone world, however, many forms of ethnic Reconstructionist Paganism exist that have developed quite independently of Wicca (cf. Gründer 2008; Strmiska 2005).

[222] CAW had been founded already in 1962, and also Feraferia, a Goddess-worshipping group inspired mainly by Robert Graves' *The White Goddess* (Ellwood 1971), had a long prehistory. Other important groups included the Reformed Druids of North America (founded 1964), the New Reformed Order of the Golden Dawn (1967), the Psychedelic Venus Church (1969), the Viking Brotherhood (1969), and the Odinist Fellowship (1969) (Clifton 2006, 8-9).

ture religion. While CAW was also inspired to some extent by Tolkien's works, the organisation drew most explicitly on Robert Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land* (1961). They practised polyamory like Heinlein's characters and adopted a water-sharing ritual from the novel as well as the term 'Church of All Worlds' to refer to the entire organisation and the term 'nest' to refer to a local group.

According to Margot Adler, who in 1979 wrote the first book surveying American Neo-Paganism, Kerry Thornley was the first to rediscover the term "Pagan", which he in 1966 attributed to Kerista, a forerunner of Discordianism (Adler 1986, 294; cf. Cusack 2010, 37).[223] Possibly inspired by Thornley, Tim "Oberon" Zell, one of the founders of CAW, subsequently identified his church and himself as "Pagan" in 1967 (Adler 1986, 293). In the early 1970s Zell popularised the variant "Neo-Paganism" with his text "Neo-Paganism: An Old Religion for a New Age" (cf. Clifton 2006, 77-78; Adler 1986, 10).

For Zell, being "Pagan" meant to identify with "natural, indigenous folk religions" (Zell 1970; cit. in Clifton 2006, 77). Though Zell's definition has been contested (Clifton 2006, 75-83), it has been of paramount importance for the fact that Paganism came to be matter-of-factly viewed as a nature religion and became almost inevitably associated with both environmentalism and primitivism. Zell's definition still echoes in the work of Pagan scholars. Michael York, for instance, sees Paganism as "*the* nature religion" (2009, 287; original emphasis) and argues that Paganism is the "root religion", i.e. the natural and most pure form of religion (2009, 285; also York 2004).[224]

The two immediate roots of the Pagan movement, English Wicca and American self-identified Neo-Pagan nature religion, greatly influenced each other in the 1970s, almost up to the point of convergence. The Wiccan impact on Paganism outside classic, initiatory Wicca was largely a result of the publication in 1971 of Lady Sheba's *Book of Shadows* (1971). In Gardnerian Wicca, each initiate was supposed to handcopy the secret rituals, but Sheba's publication made it possible for non-initiated individuals to form independent covens. It also made it possible for Wiccans to practice alone, and for non-Wiccan Pagans to adopt what they liked from the Wiccan ritual repertoire.[225] As a result, during the 1970s, some of the originally non-Wiccan American groups, including CAW, became heavily influenced by Wicca. By 1980, American Paganism had become dominated by Wiccan organisations (Adler 1986, 282).

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[223] References to Adler (1986) are to the second edition.

[224] It is obviously a problem that such primitivist ideas are widely accepted in the academic study of Paganism. For a critique, see Geertz (2009) and Davidsen (2012b, 192-194).

[225] The publication caused an outrage in the Wiccan community, but the dissemination of the rituals could not be stopped. In 1984, Janet and Stewart Farrar, in co-operation with Gardner's close associate Doreen Valiente, therefore decided to publish Gardner's original *Book of Shadows* (Farrar and Farrar 1985; cf. Valiente 1986, viii-ix). Several versions of the *Book of Shadows* are now easily available on the Internet (Cowan 2005).

At the same time, however, American Wicca adopted a number of key traits from the wider Pagan milieu. Most importantly, Wiccans adopted the idea that Wicca was a form of Neo-Paganism and therefore a nature religion. The identification of Wicca as a nature religion was easily made because Wicca already venerated the body (including sexuality and the feminine) and organised its rituals according to solar and lunar cycles.[226] Furthermore, the identification of Paganism with 'nature religion in general' was particularly suitable for the American context where the Old Religion had not been practised and where the Wiccan narrative of continuing it was therefore less appealing (Clifton 2006, 49).

Later in the 1970s, a large part of American Paganism was influenced by second wave feminism, and figures such as Zsuzsanna "Z" Budapest, Starhawk, and Riane Eisler pioneered various forms of feminist witchcraft and Goddess spirituality.[227] Chas Clifton considers nature religion Paganism and feminist Paganism to be the two main wings of American Paganism (2006, xii),[228] and demonstrates that both parts of the movement were exported back to Britain and the rest of Europe.[229] Especially in Britain, nature-oriented forms of Paganism are strong (cf. Harvey 2007, ch. 8-10; 2009), and include an activist wing of so-called Eco-Paganism (Letcher 2001; 2004).

While the emergence of nature-oriented and feminist forms of Paganism can be attributed to an influence of the social change movements of the 1960s and 1970s, Helen Berger points out that American Neo-Paganism also differed from classical Wicca in another respect. American Paganism was more individualised. According to Berger, this was not only because the publication of the *Book of Shadows* made solitaire Wicca possible, but also due to the greater individualism in America and to the lower population density of the country (2005, 36-39, 54). In any case, since the 1970s, ever increasing individualisation has been one of two main sociological traits worth noting about the development of the Pagan movement. The other is explosive growth. Indeed, according to two surveys conducted by the City University of New York, the number of Wiccans rose in America from 8,000 in 1990 to 134,000 in 2001 (Lewis 2007b, 15-16). Similar growth rates have been reported in America for other Neo-Pagan groups, and for all Pagan groups across the Anglophone world (Lewis 2007b). As James R. Lewis points out,

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[226] Clifton (2006, ch. 2; 2009) distinguishes between three aspects of the Pagan notion of nature religion, namely *cosmic nature religion* (i.e. fascination with the nature of the cosmos rather than with for instance soteriology), *embodied nature religion* (i.e. Paganism as fertility religion), and *gaian nature religion* (i.e. venerating the earth as a goddess). Wicca included the two first aspects and could name itself a nature religion without adopting the gaian character of American Paganism.

[227] See Cusack (2009b) for an introduction to feminist witchcraft/Goddess spirituality with further references.

[228] Clifton also acknowledges a smaller and less studied third branch of *ethnic roots Paganisms*, including Heathenry and other forms of Pagan Reconstructionism.

[229] Nature-oriented forms of Neo-Paganism developed independently in Europe, as illustrated by the rise of eco-spiritual Heathenry in Germany in the 1970s (Gründer 2008).

however, one must acknowledge that the official estimates of Paganism's numerical strength in 1990 are almost certainly severe underestimates caused by the reluctance of Pagans to report their religious affiliation in surveys (2012, 131, 133). Possibly, a more realistic growth rate of American Paganism through the 1990s is 400% rather than 1500%. In any case, surveys from the beginning of the 21st century suggested that there were about 500,000 Pagans worldwide, most in the United States and other English-speaking countries (Berger 2009; Lewis 2007b). The newest estimates from the 2010s put the total number around 1 million (Lewis 2012a).

Three main causes for the remarkable growth in membership and the increased individualisation of Neo-Paganism can be identified. First, since the late 1980s, books began to be written particularly for the solitaire witch (e.g. Cunningham 1988; 1993; Beth 1990; Green 1991). By the year 2000, Scott Cunningham's *Wicca: A Guide for the Solitary Practitioner* had sold 400,000 copies according to the publisher (Clifton 2006, 12), making it apparent that there was a huge demand for this sort of books, also among people who did not identify as Wiccans or witches.

Second, the media took an interest in witchcraft in the second half of the 1990s and massively featured resourceful female teen witches as protagonists in movies like *The Craft* (1996) and TV series such as *Sabrina the Teenage Witch* (1996-2003), *Charmed* (1998-2006), and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003). Young people who took an interest in witchcraft by watching these shows were catered for by a new genre of 'how to' books for teen witches, such as Silver RavenWolf's *To Ride a Silver Broomstick* (1993). As a result, tens of thousands young people, most of them female, became Pagans in the 1990s and early 2000s. A large portion of these joiners left Paganism again after a few years. Therefore, surveys report only slow growth and in some cases even a decrease in the number of Pagans (and especially Wiccans) between 2001 and 2006 despite continued Pagan recruitment in other age cohorts than teens (Lewis 2012a). Many teen witches stayed within the movement, however, a fact which is visible in Pagan demographics. In the Pagan Census Revisited (PCR), an American survey conducted in 2009-10, more than three quarters of the young Pagans (i.e. those born in 1976 or later) were females. By comparison, only 64.8% of all American Pagans surveyed in the Pagan Census (PC) of 1993-1995 were female (Berger 2012, 5).[230]

Third and perhaps most importantly, the mass Internet of the 1990s made it much easier for people to find information about Paganism and to join informal groups and networks of likeminded people in which they could nurture their Pagan self without having to commit to an initiation programme or even to disclose their identity (Cowan 2005; see also NightMare 2001; Berger and Ezzy 2004; Griffin 2004). It is also possible that the positive media attention and the Internet not only resulted in new converts, but also

[230] On the phenomenon of teenage witchcraft in general, see Berger and Ezzy (2007; 2009) and Johnston and Aloi (2007). The results of the Pagan Census are discussed in Berger, Leach, and Shaffer (2003) and in Berger (2009).

led people who already felt Pagan to gradually 'come out of the broom closet' and identify more openly as Pagans. In any event the Internet seems to have intensified the individualisation of Neo-Paganism. Whereas 50.9% of the respondents to the PC self-identified as solitaire practitioners, the percentage had gone up to 78.2% in the PCR, with a massive 86.0% of the young belonging to this group (Berger 2012, 9).[231] The increased individualisation of Neo-paganism was further expressed in the fact that 54.2% self-identified as eclectic Pagans in the PCR, while the makers of the PC questionnaire had not even considered it necessary to include this category fifteen years earlier. In the same period the number of self-identified Wiccans went down from 63.8% to 38.3% (Berger 2012, 11, 13).[232]

8.3.2. Metaphorical Binoculars: Neo-Pagan Readings of Tolkien

Paganism scholars agree that Neo-Pagans in general get much of their inspiration from speculative fiction.[233] In the section above we encountered two examples of this *en passant*, namely CAW's adoption of elements from Heinlein's fiction and the large waves of young converts to Wicca who had learned about the religion and come to identify as witches from watching TV-shows (and not because of parents, teachers, or other conventional socialisers).

Among the many works of fiction and fantasy that are important for Pagans, *LR* is regularly singled out as particularly influential. Many scholars have stressed *LR*'s impact on the modern Pagan movement in its formative phase (e.g. York 2009, 306; Pike 2004b, 107-108), but no-one has done so more forcefully than Graham Harvey. For Harvey, Tolkien's influence on contemporary Paganism is "inestimable" (2004, 326; also 2000; 2006; 2007, 176-180). Harvey observes that when asking Pagans which sources have most significantly influenced their Pagan worldview, "Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* and other Fantasy writings" are mentioned more frequently than non-fictional works (2007, 176). This is partly because *LR* and other fiction for many has served as a first step on the path to a more mature Paganism based also on rituals, spiritual experiences of nature, and the study of mythology. Harvey emphasises, however, that even for committed Pagans the "primary literature […] is neither theology, textbooks nor "how to do it" manuals but fiction" (2007, 179).[234]

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[231] These number are somewhat offset, however, by the fact that only 32.5% stated that they never or nearly never meet with other Pagans for religious/spiritual/ritual purposes and that only 23.3% said that they never or nearly never socialise with other Pagans (Berger 2012, 10-11). In other words, the majority of the self-identified solitaires *do* practise and socialise with other Pagans, at least occasionally.

[232] In both the PC and the PCR, respondents were allowed to choose more than one self-identification.

[233] See for example Luhrmann (1989, 87-92), Adler (1986, 285), Clifton (2006, 4), Davy (2007, ch. 6), Harvey (2000; 2006), Ezzy and Berger (2007), and Berger and Ezzy (2009).

[234] Clifton believes that Pagans in the 1960s and 1970s read fiction because the young movement did not yet have enough real role models (2006, 4). The undiminished importance of fiction within the Neo-Pagan

Elaborating on Tolkien's influence on Neo-Paganism, Harvey states that

> [i]t is arguable that J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* provided metaphorical binoculars through which the realm of Faerie became visible again [...] Tolkien gave back the words for those other-than-human persons glimpsed at twilight in the Greenwood, declared Faerie to be vital and necessary – and a whole generation grew up in an enchanted, richly inhabited world (2000).

LR did more than encourage people to believe in Faerie and elves again, however. It also influenced the images which contemporary Pagans have of the otherworld and its inhabitants and it created an interest in the mythologies on which Tolkien himself had drawn. Harvey writes,

> The Victorians almost persuaded us that [fairies] are diminutive and cute. Tolkien permitted a grander, more noble vision of proud and powerful if elusive inhabitants of the twilight and fringes of the world, but his elves are not at home in human-centred Middle Earth [*sic*], and there is always a poignant sense of homesickness and loss about them. […] These are not, in the end, the elves of earlier tradition, native to their forests and fringe lands. They are not the tricksters and kidnappers of Irish folklore […] or the hidden arrow firing human foes of Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon tradition. Tolkien opened the way to a revalidation of belief in faerie (whether as literature or as dwellers in the land), but he also sent people back to the traditions of Ireland, Norway, Britain and elsewhere to find more ancestral understandings (2007, 166-167).

Reflecting the influence of *LR* on modern Paganism, many Pagan sites are named after localities in *LR*, especially after the Elven dwellings. Quite comparable to De Hobbitstee, one such example is the Pagan sanctuary Lothlorien, named after Galadriel's forest kingdom. The Elf Lore Family (E.L.F.) acquired Lothlorien in 1983 as a "woodland meeting ground, survival education center, and green haven for elvin folk" and regularly hosts rituals and festivals at the site that attract all sorts of Pagans.[235] The E.L.F.'s inspiration from Tolkien is expressed in the continued, metaphorical self-identification as elves (or elvin folk), but the group does not use *LR* as a basis for their religious practices. Stew, a member of the governing council of E.L.F., told me,

> We were pretty much inspired by Tolkien's works as guideposts but not to the degree that we wilfully act out the Tolkien mythologies. Plus we don't want to be disrespectful and we don't want to get involved in any kind of copyright infringement. We use elfin folklore in general and we think that

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movement which Harvey and others have documented suggests, however, that this cannot be the only explanation.

[235] http://www.elvinhome.org/index.php [030310]. See also Adler (1986, 512) and Pike (2004a, 155).

> Tolkien's writings about elves are among the best. To us, wood elves are forest caretakers and that is largely what we do (030310).[236]

The E.L.F. constitutes a good illustration of the *LR*-inspired Pagans described by Harvey. Like Harvey's Pagans, the E.L.F. members read *LR* as fiction, but as meaningful and inspiring fiction that reveals certain non-historical, but spiritual truths about the actual world. As Harvey explains, for Pagans in general *LR* provided metaphorical binoculars that made elves and Faery become visible again. For the E.L.F., the animated nature, the Ents, and the sacred forest realm of Lothlórien revealed the sacredness of our Earth. In both cases, fictional elves and otherworlds have been taken to constitute indirect references to the existence of real spiritual entities in the actual world. Inspired by Harvey's notion of "metaphorical binoculars", I refer to the reading mode described here as the *binocular reading* (cf. ch. 5) because it makes visible, as it were, allegedly 'real' otherworlds, elves, and so on, while insisting that *LR* itself is fiction.

8.3.3. *The Lord of the Rings* and Pagan Fantasy

We have seen that *LR* has been a direct source of inspiration for modern Pagans, especially for the first generation Pagans in the 1960s and 1970s. Even so, the Christian themes in *LR* and the fact that Tolkien was a Catholic inhibited a full-scale adoption of *LR* by the Pagan movement (Harvey 2007, 177). Furthermore, while Pagans of a nature-oriented bent loved *LR* for its description of Tom Bombadil and Lothlórien, feminist Pagans could find little of value in Tolkien's patriarchal world.

While *LR* is no longer as important for contemporary Paganism as it used to be, and while Tolkien is not loved by all branches of the Pagan movement, scholar of Paganism point out that Tolkien continues to have an indirect influence on the entire movement. That is because Tolkien fathered the very fantasy genre from which sprung a subgenre of explicitly Pagan fantasy in the 1980s (Davy 2007, 120; Partridge 2004, 140). Pagans are avid readers of fantasy, and especially of Pagan fantasy, and even though this genre expresses a world-view that would have Tolkien turn in his grave, it can still be said to be indebted to *LR*.

Since the 1980s, works of Pagan fantasy have emerged that cater to particular Pagan groups. In some cases the debt to *LR* is both visible and acknowledged. This is the case, for example, in semi-historical fiction for Heathens – a group that naturally feels connected to *LR* because Tolkien used the very term Middle-earth (Harvey 2007, 54). Acknowledging his use of *LR*, Brian Bates lists it in the bibliographical appendix to his novel *The Way of Wyrd* (1983). Stephan Grundy, who is probably the most successful Heathen author, dedicated his debut novel *Rhinegold* (1995) to Tolkien (cf. von

[236] Another example of a Neo-Pagan group that has adopted Tolkien names without, as far as I know, integrating Tolkien material into their rituals is the Dutch Wiccan coven Imladris (Si: Rivendell) which is led by Arwen Evenstar and Canrith (Ramstedt 2007a, 5).

Schnurbein 1998; 2007). Many other fantasy novels are important for particular branches of Paganism, but are not explicitly linked to *LR*. Freda Warrington's *Elfland* (2009), for instance, is popular among self-identified Elves, and Harvey observes that Terry Pratchett's *Discworld* series, especially the subseries focusing on the witches Granny Weatherwax, Nanny Ogg, and Magrat Garlick (e.g. 1988) together with Robert Holdstock's *Mythago Wood* series (e.g. 1984) are popular among (British) eco-oriented Pagans (Harvey 2000; 2006; 2007, 50-51, 180). Silver RavenWolf, the best-selling author of how-to manuals for teenage witches, has also written fiction, including *Witches' Night Out* (2000).[237]

The most influential piece of Pagan fantasy after *LR* is probably Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Mists of Avalon* (1983) and therefore it deserves to be briefly mentioned here. *Mists* retells the Arthur romances from a feminist Pagan perspective and has hence appealed especially to Goddess groups (Pike 2004a, 122, 125-127; Harvey 2007, 72-73, 178; von Schnurbein 1998), but also to women engaged in non-Pagan feminist spirituality (Leonard 1990). In her acknowledgements section, Bradley states that her novel has been inspired by Frazer's *Golden Bough* (1922), Murray's *Witch Cult of Western Europe* (1921), Gardner's books on Wicca (1939; 1949; 1954; 1959), and Dion Fortune's *Avalon of the Heart* (1934). Furthermore, she thanks a number of Pagan groups and individuals, including Otter [Tim] and Morning Glory Zell (of CAW) and the prominent druid Isaac Bonewits for inspiration for the book's Pagan rituals. This is noteworthy. I will argue that apart from the fact that *Mists* is a very well-written novel, the book's strong repertoire of religious affordances explains why it has been such a potent source of inspiration for Pagans. *Mists* includes descriptions of rituals which the reader can emulate – something that *LR* lacks – and Bradley thematises the text's veracity by emphasising her debt to Frazer, Murray, Gardner, and Fortune, authors who are considered authoritative within the cultic milieu. *Mists* might be fiction on the surface, but the book presents itself as a narrativised initiation into the primordial and true religion of the Goddess.

A general picture emerges about the relationship between Paganism, *LR*, and fiction in general. We can sum it up in three points. First, it is evident that fiction has played a paramount role in the dissemination of Pagan ideas, values, and identities from the very beginning of the movement up to the present day. Not only do Pagans say so them-

[237] The interplay between fiction and Paganism actually preceded the success of the *LR* paperbacks and the adoption of *LR* by the Neo-Pagan movement in the late 1960s. As mentioned in chapter 2, Gardner published his Wiccan ideas in fictional form as *A Goddess Arrives* (1939) and *High Magick's Aid* (1949) before publishing his discursive works. And as Hutton points out, British authors such as Mary Renault, Henry Treece, and especially Rosemary Sutcliffe (1954), distributed Frazer, Graves, and Murray's ideas about the Old Religion to a mass readership, especially consisting of children and adolescents, already in the 1950s and 1960s (Hutton 1999, 285). Hutton even suggests that the feeling of "coming home" which many Pagan converts have reported has to do with the fact that they recognised ideas which they had already encountered and internalised from fiction in their childhood (1999, 285). Similarly, Margaret St. Clair's novel *Sign of the Labrys* (1963) did much to introduce Wicca in America (Clifton 2006, 8, 16-24).

selves, it can also be demonstrated that Paganism's two major growth impulses were caused in part by fiction. Tolkien's *LR* provided a major boost in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and this was mirrored by the growth caused by the teen witch TV shows in the 1990s.[238] Second, different branches of the Pagan movement find different sorts of fiction most inspiring. Since *LR* expresses a great love of nature and is concerned with Middle-earth, it unsurprisingly continues to be most popular among nature-oriented Pagans and Heathens. Third, we have seen that among Neo-Pagans in general, *LR* promoted a belief in the existence of otherworlds, magic, and spiritual beings and/or facilitated a metaphorical identification with the Elves. Groups that moved beyond this merely fiction-inspired and binocular stance in the 1960s or 1970s were very rare – or at least the evidence for such groups is. Let me here, before reflecting on why that is so, describe the only example of a pre-*S* group that I know of which might be said to have constituted an *LR*-based religious movement and which certainly considered *LR* to reflect actual history.

8.4. The Mojave Desert Group

The group in question was active in the Mojave Desert in 1973. Robert Ellwood, professor emeritus of world religions at the University of Southern California, tells this anecdote about it:

> About this time [in 1973], back in southern California, we [Ellwood and his wife who were themselves active in the *Los Angeles Mythopoeic Society*] heard about a group centered around a mystical woman living in the Mojave Desert who was convinced that *The Lord of the Rings* saga was actual history, and Tolkien knew it, though for reasons the author deemed compelling he veiled the chronicle in fictional form. She had regular conversations with Elves, Dwarves, and Hobbits, and moreover was convinced that the actual site of Gondor was what is now the Mojave Desert. She believed that Aragorn's castle was buried out there, and by psychic means had determined the location of the ruins. She was continually announcing archeological excavations to be conducted by her group, then postponing the date for one reason or another (Ellwood 2002, 133).

In a personal email Ellwood later added:

> In my meeting with her [the leader, Myrtle Reece], I recall she lived with her husband (he was not involved and there were no children) in a modest home on the outskirts of Joshua Tree. She said Bilbo had first come to her in her kitchen as a small child crying for a treat, but gradually told her more of the return of the Nine Walkers [the fellowship] in our time and the location of Middle-earth sites in our much-changed world. I did attend a meeting of some 8 or 10 followers, including one well-educated couple who came all the

[238] Furthermore, the immense growth of feminist Paganism in 1980s was probably fuelled as much by *Mists* as by works such as Starhawk's *The Spiral Dance* (1979).

> way from San Diego, though whether they all attended as true believers or just out of fascination with the leader's unusual personality I do not know. She also was sometimes suspicious of me, especially in later correspondence, but felt it was important to have Celtic blood truly to understand these Tolkienesque things, and was pleased with me being part Scottish (310110).

Unfortunately, we know little about the concrete beliefs and practices of the group. One of Ellwood's students wrote a paper about the group, but the handwritten piece was not archived and is long lost.

8.5. Religion Inspired by *The Lord of the Rings*: A Summary

The main aim of this chapter has been to map the use of *LR* among counter-cultural and religious groups in the late 1960s and early 1970s. We have seen that both hippies and Neo-Pagans drew on *LR* for inspiration in various ways, but that groups which took *LR* as their primary, authoritative religious text were extremely rare. These findings largely fit the hypotheses formulated at the end of chapter 7.

Since *LR* has only relatively weak religious affordances, I expected, first, that the text would unusable as the central, authoritative text for a well-defined new religious movement, though it might well be able to inspire and sustain religious ideas. With the possible exception of the Mojave group, which we really know very little about, this has indeed been the case. *LR* has been important for the Neo-Pagan movement, but has not been adopted as a central or sacred text. Pagans have read *LR* in the binocular mode (and not on the mytho-historical or mytho-cosmological mode), and they have used the book as a stepping stone on the way to explore more serious sources. *LR* opened up a world of Pagan spirituality for many readers, but *LR* was not itself that world. Second, I hypothesised that *LR*-inspired religion would involve ritual communication with Elves because the Valar and the One are so rarely mentioned. This hypothesis is difficult to test, for it is difficult to measure the influence of one particular work (*in casu LR*) in a fiction-inspired religion (*in casu* the Neo-Pagan movement). It is clear that we have no evidence of Valar rituals in the 1960s and 1970s, and it is also clear that many *LR*-inspired Pagans believe in Elves and communicate with them. It is difficult to say, however, whether such fairy spirituality is inspired by *LR*. It is saver to suggest that reading *LR* can contribute to the plausibility maintenance of a belief in Elves. Third, I suspected that *if* a real religious movement would emerge based on *LR* that movement would be based on a mytho-historical reading of *LR*. Also about this hypothesis it is difficult to say anything conclusive. It holds up for the Mojave group, but it is possible that other small *LR*-based groups existed at the same time that were completely different and of which no evidence has survived.

Even if the mediocre religious potential of *LR* is the main reason for the lack of religious groups in the 1960s and early 1970s using *LR* as their main authoritative text,

another reason must be mentioned as well. Tolkien was still alive. As long as Tolkien lived, his person, his Catholicism, and his conservative values acted as severe obstacles for the development of a strictly *LR*-based religion. This situation changed after Tolkien's death in 1973 and after the publication of his letters in 1981. Tolkien's death made the construction of hagiographies possible, and the letters revealed that Tolkien had occult fascinations which had previously been unknown to the public. These developments made it possible to enlist Tolkien as an essentially Pagan and occult religious role model (or even spirit guide). Taken together with the publication in 1977 of *S*, which added much to the religious affordances of Tolkien's literary mythology, it now became much easier to construct a spirituality in which Tolkien's works were both absolutely central and attributed a high degree of reference authority. The rest of part II will be concerned with such groups, many of which identify as Pagan, that go beyond the binocular use of Tolkien and either ascribe reality to some of the beings and places (and sometimes even the events) in *LR* or consider real spiritual powers to express themselves symbolically in the text. First, it is necessary to catalogue the religious affordances of *S*.

Chapter 9. The Religious Affordances of *The Silmarillion*

The many allusions to mythology and history in *H* and *LR* and the complexity of the material presented in the appendices to *LR* made clear that Tolkien had only revealed a small portion of an elaborate body of myth and legend. Indeed, already in the 1910s and 1920s, Tolkien had invented his Elven languages, Quenya and Sindarin, and written the first versions of a set of narratives forming the mythic background for his Middle-earth saga. He referred to these stories as his Legendarium. After finishing *LR*, he returned to the Legendarium with the hope of publishing it, but it was left unfinished at his death in 1973. It would have stayed in the drawer if not Tolkien's son Christopher had felt that Tolkien deserved better. Earning the gratitude of his father's fans, Christopher took it upon himself to edit his Tolkien's drafts and published a collection of the latest versions of the most important tales in 1977 as *The Silmarillion* (*S*).[239] The archaic style and huge gallery of characters made *S* a much tougher read than *LR*, but that did not restrain it from being #1 on The New York Times Best Seller List for 23 weeks during the winter 1977-1978.[240]

Against Tolkien's intentions and to Christopher's later regret (*LT I* 1, 6), *S* was published entirely without frame narrative. There is no compiler voice, and the text (which is only about a fourth of *LR* in length) is presented as the utterative narration of an all-knowing narrator. Also in contrast to *LR*, whose narrator is human and contemporaneous with the reader, *S* is told from a clearly Elven point of view at a time shortly after the events of *LR*. It recounts the entire history of Tolkien's imagined world in five parts. The first part, the *Ainulindalë* or *The Music of the Ainur*, tells of the creation of the world (cosmogony), and the second part, the *Valaquenta* or *Account of the Valar and Maiar according to the lore of the Eldar*, provides information about the Valar (theology). The bulk of the text, the *Quenta Silmarillion* or *The History of the Silmarils*, is concerned mostly with the Elves. It recounts the awakening of the Elves,[241] and tells of their migrations and their wars, especially the wars caused by the three Silmarils, the jewels after which the book is named. The *Quenta Silmarillion* also tells of the awakening of Men who gradually grow

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[239] It has been claimed that Christopher Tolkien did not only edit his father's papers, but also authored parts of *S*. In a meticulous study, comparing Tolkien's drafts with the published version of *S*, Douglas Charles Kane (2006) has demonstrated, however, that Christopher's authorial contributions were limited to the odd deletion of a word or the addition of a few sentences to link text parts together.

[240] *S* topped the list from 2 October 1977 to 26 February 1978. The weekly lists can be found at http://www.hawes.com/1977/1977.htm and http://www.hawes.com/1978/1978.htm [040913].

[241] Both Elves and Men are created by Ilúvatar in the beginning, but only awakened at a later stage.

in prominence. The wars with which the *Quenta Silmarillion* is concerned are wars between the forces of good and evil, indeed wars of cosmic dimensions which result in the reshaping of the world and the gradual withdrawal of the divine powers from mundane affairs. After one such war, a human nation is awarded the island continent of Númenor which is raised from the sea (*S* 311). The fourth part of *S*, the *Akallabêth* or *The Downfall of Númenor*, tells of the rise and eventual destruction of Númenor in much greater detail than the appendices in *LR*. Finally, a short piece entitled *Of the Ring of Power and the Third Age* tells of the forging of the Ring of Power by Sauron and recounts the three wars between Sauron and the forces of good (the third and final war is the one relayed in *LR*). *S* also includes a number of genealogical overviews and maps. The index provides gives English translations of names and key terms in Quenya and Sindarin.

Compared to *H* and *LR*, the religious affordances added by *S* primarily consist of new information about cosmology, theology, afterlife, and the nature of good and evil (narrative religion) and about Elves and humans and unions between them resulting in a mixed bloodline (fantastic elements). Roughly following the structure of *S* itself, I will discuss these two complexes in turn.

9.1. Narrative Religion in *The Silmarillion*

9.1.1. Cosmogony: *The Music of the Ainur*

The *Ainulindalë* recounts the creation of the world according to the lore of the Elves. In the beginning, before the creation of the world, only the supreme creator god exists who in *LR* is referred to as the One. In *S* he is called Eru (Qu: the One, or He who is alone) or Ilúvatar (Qu: All-father). Eru first creates an order of spiritual beings, the Ainur (Qu: Holy Ones; *S* 3), and the Ainur assist Eru in the creation of the world by singing it into existence. The cosmogony proceeds in three steps. First, Eru lets the Ainur sing about the world-to-be (*S* 4-5). Second, Eru shows the Ainur a Vision of what they have sung (*S* 6-7). Finally, Eru in his sovereignty gives Being to the Vision (*S* 9) by sending his "Flame Imperishable" (*S* 9) or "Secret Flame" (*S* 15) into the Void.

The created universe is referred to as Eä (Qu: Let it be), the word by which Eru brings it into existence. Outside Eä are the Timeless Halls, the abode of Eru, and the empty Void. Eä consists of *menel* (Qu: heavens/sky) and the earth or Arda (Qu: The Realm). Arda is flat (*S* 111) and comprised of two landmasses, Middle-earth and Aman (Qu: The Blessed Realm). Some of the Ainur desire to enter Eä as incarnated beings. Upon doing so, they are first disappointed that Arda is not yet like the vision they have seen, but subsequently they accept Eru's charge to shape Arda as demiurges and so to realise the vision (*S* 9-10).

9.1.2. Theology: The Valar and the Maiar

The fourteen most important incarnated Ainur are referred to as the Valar (Qu: Powers). Together they make up a pantheon of 'function gods', each being associated with particular professions and elements. There are seven Valar Lords and seven Queens or Valier[242]. The seven Valar Lords are Manwë (king of Arda; wind), Ulmo (water), Aulë (earth; smith; creator of the Dwarves), Oromë (hunter), Námo/Mandos (doomsman; keeper of the Houses of the Dead), Irmo/Lórien[243] (Mandos' brother; master of visions and dreams), and Tulkas (war). The fallen Melkor/Morgoth is no longer counted among the Valar. The seven Valier are Varda (queen; Manwë's spouse; called Elbereth in *LR*), Yavanna (fertility; Aulë's spouse), Nienna (sister of Mandos and Irmo), Estë (healer; Irmo's spouse), Vairë (weaver; fate; Mandos' spouse), Vána (Oromë's spouse), and Nessa (Tulkas' spouse) (*S* 15-21).[244] Contrary to *LR*, where the cult focused on Elbereth/Varda, i.e. on one of the female Valier, the male Valar dominate in *S*. Even though the Valar and Valier are equal in number, the Valar generally have the more interesting functions, and some of the Valier are presented as little more than the 'spouse of'. Later in *S*, it is mainly the male Valar (esp. Manwë, Tulkas, Aulë, Oromë, and who Ulmo) who act and intervene in the affairs of the world.

The eight most powerful Valar, Manwë, Varda, Ulmo, Yavanna, Aulë, Mandos, Nienna, and Oromë, are referred to collectively as the Aratar (*S* 21). More than the rest, Oromë and Ulmo interact with Elves and Men. It is Oromë who finds and befriends the Elves. The Elves refer to themselves as the Quendi (Qu: Those who speak with voices), but Oromë names them Eldar (Qu: People of the Stars; *S* 45-46, 50). Later, when the Valar have left Middle-earth, the sea-dwelling Ulmo carries messages between Middle-earth and Valinor (*S* 287, 293, 296).

As the Valar enter the world, a number of lesser spirits accompany them (*S* 11, 21). The most powerful of these are the Maiar (*S* 21-23), of whom six are named: Ilmarë, Ossë, Eönwe, Uinen, Melian, and Olórin. Olórin is Gandalf (cf. *LR* 670), so we can infer that also the other Istari in *LR* (Saruman and Radagast) must be Maiar (cf. also *S* 359-360).[245]

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[242] Female Valar are called Valier (Valië in the singular). None of the terms Valië, Valier, Maia, Maiar, and Ainur are used anywhere in *LR*; they are first introduced with *S*.

[243] Námo and Irmo, together the Fëanturi, are often named Mandos and Lórien after their dwellings (*S* 19). I follow the standard practice of *S* and refer to them respectively as Mandos (after the dwelling) and Irmo (the real name).

[244] The names of the Valar and the Valier are rendered in Quenya. Elbereth is Varda's name in Sindarin.

[245] More information about the Istari is given in *UT* (502-520). Here they are explicitly identified as Maiar (*UT* 510).

9.1.3. Cosmology: The Wars between Good and Evil and the Reshaping of the World

Melkor, the mightiest of the Valar, envies Ilúvatar from the beginning and wants power for himself. Already when participating in the Great Music, Melkor intends to co-create and intervenes with a theme of his own, but Ilúvatar does not allow Melkor's designs to come into being (*S* 4-5). Having entered Eä, Melkor desires to dethrone Manwë and rule Arda in his stead (*S* 7). He rebels against the rest of the Valar, becoming Morgoth (Si: The Dark Enemy of the World; *S* 83), and takes a number of Maiar with him in his Fall (*S* 12, 23). These dark Maiar include the Balrogs (cf. the Balrog in Moria, *LR* 329-330) and Sauron, a former Maia of Aulë (*S* 23, 43).

Four wars (and a fifth led by Sauron) between good and evil take place and all do they affect the shape of the world. Considering the events that initiate them, it is clear that these are wars between Light and Darkness. The first war is initiated by Melkor's destruction of the original sources of light in Arda, the two lamps Illuin and Ormal that had been crafted by Aulë (*S* 27). As a result of this war, the Valar withdraw from Middle-earth to Aman, where Yavanna sings two trees of light into being, Telperion and Laurelin (*S* 31). At this point, the Elves awake in Cuiviénen in Middle-earth and are found by Oromë (*S* 45-46). Melkor turns some of the elves into orcs (*S* 47; cf. *LR* 486), evil creatures who cannot stand the light of day. This foul act and Melkor's growing power cause a second war that results in the defeat and imprisonment of Melkor. The Valar summon the Elves to Aman, but some refuse to leave Middle-earth or fail to finish the journey (*S* 49). This leads to the sundering of the Elves (*S* 50-53, 371). From now on the name Eldar is reserved for those Elves who left for the Blessed Realm, while those who stayed behind in Middle-earth are called the Avari (Qu: The Unwilling).[246]

Melkor is released from prison (*S* 60), but treacherously strikes again, destroying the two trees with the help of Ungoliant, a giant spider and ancestor of Shelob (*S* 79). Melkor sets himself up as king of Middle-earth. Rather than fighting, the Valar retreat further and hide Valinor from the rest of the world (*S* 114). The two trees cannot be brought to life again, but give a flower and a fruit respectively, which the Valar insert into two vessels that become the sun and the moon. The sun (*anar*) carries the fruit of Laurelin and is drawn by Arien; the moon (*isil*) carries the flower of Telperion and is drawn by Tilion (*S* 110). Melkor tries to destroy the moon, but is unsuccessful (*S* 112). In Middle-earth, the Elves, occasionally in alliances with dwarves and humans who now enter the scene, resist Melkor's might in the Wars of Beleriand, but gradually Melkor's power grows. The power of the Elves declines and it is increasingly up to the human na-

[246] Of the three Elven tribes, the Vanyar, the Noldor, and some of the Teleri make it to Aman and become known collectively as the Calaquendi (Qu: Elves of the Light). Later in the narrative some of them return to Middle-earth. Those of the Teleri who left for Aman, but did not reach it become the Sindar (Qu: Grey-elves) and the Nandor. These two groups, together with the Avari, are called the Moriquendi (Qu: Elves of the Darkness). They are not evil, but have not seen the light of the two trees in Aman.

tions to oppose Melkor and his armies of orcs. The Valar do not intervene, not even when Turgon of Gondolin (*S* 187) and the Vala Ulmo (*S* 293) plead them to do so, nor when the Elven realms of Doriath, Nargothrond, and Gondolin fall. Only when Eärendil the Mariner succeeds in sailing to Valinor, do the Valar act. The War of Wrath follows, and Melkor is defeated once and for all and chained in the Void (*S* 303, 306). This is the last military intervention of the Valar in Middle-earth. The Valar summon the Elves to Aman once more and most depart (*S* 306, 310). The humans who helped the Elves in the war, the Edain, are rewarded with the land of Númenor which the Maia Ossë raises in the great sea between Aman and Middle-earth (*S* 311). The end of the War of Wrath marks the transition from the first to the second age.

Melkor's most powerful servant, Sauron, escapes and establishes a stronghold in Middle-earth where he forges the Ring of Power (*S* 320, 344). Throughout the second age, wars rage between Sauron and the Númenóreans. The majority of the Númenóreans grow estranged from the Valar, neglect their offerings to Eru, and outlaw the Elvish tongues (*S* 318-320). When the Númenórean king Ar-Pharazôn defeats Sauron and brings him back captive, this only causes increased corruption. Sauron becomes the king's advisor and persuades him to make war upon the Valar, breaking the ban of the Valar which forbids humans to sail west from Númenor (*S* 329). The Númenóreans land in Aman, the Elves flee, and the Valar ask Ilúvatar to aid them. Ilúvatar interferes and sinks the Númenórean fleet and Númenor itself (S 334, 347). Aman and Tol Eressëa[247] are "taken away and removed beyond the reach of Men for ever" (*S* 334). The cosmological change is even more far-reaching, for the earth (Arda), which was flat, is made round (*S* 338). A straight but hidden road to Valinor still exists, which Elven ships can take from Middle-earth (*S* 338).

A few faithful Númenóreans escape the destruction, but so does Sauron's spirit (*S* 335-336). Sauron is soon able to wage another war in Middle-earth, but is defeated by an alliance of men and Elves (*S* 353). This event marks the end of the second age. Sauron's final war, whose resolution marks the end of the third age of Middle-earth, is the one told of in *LR*. At the end of *S*, the last Elves leave Middle-earth (*S* 366).

9.1.4. On the Nature and Power of Evil

There is a tension in *S* between two conceptions of the nature of evil. In the literature, these conceptions are often referred to as the Augustinian and the Manichaean view of evil. According to the Augustinian view, evil is understood simply as the absence of good, while the Manichaean vision sees evil as something in itself, as the positively *anti-*

[247] In *LR* the relation between Aman, Valinor, and Eldamar remains unclear. In *S* it is specified that the Undying Lands in the West are comprised of the continent Aman and the island Tol Eressëa just east of it (*S* 58). Valinor, the abode of the Valar, is located on Aman; Eldamar, the Elven realm in the West, is located partly on Tol Eressëa and on a part of Aman (*S* 61).

good. Those who are evil in the Augustinian way are 'good on the bottom' and can be turned back to the light. Manichaean malevolence is a part of one's very being.

The evil of the various races is either Manichaean or Augustinian in character. Melkor himself is absolutely evil as are the Orcs, Trolls, and Maiar who serve him. The metaphysical evil of these beings is emphasised by their intolerance to light. They were not always evil in the Manichaean sense, however. Melkor and the other Maiar were created good (for all of Eru's creation was good), but in their Fall (which was chosen out of free will), they changed their very being and became demons (*S* 43). Similarly, the Orcs were originally elves, but Melkor turned them into demons.[248] Other creatures are evil only occasionally and only in the Augustinian way. When humans, dwarves, or elves act in the service of evil, it is always because they have been deceived or influenced by true evil. Therefore, after the battle of Helm's Deep in *LR*, the wild men of Dunland who had been deceived by Saruman are allowed to go home without punishment and their fallen are properly buried. By contrast, the dead orcs are referred to as "carcasses" and left to rot in piles (*LR* 454).[249]

Besides the tension between two visions of the *nature* of evil, we also see glimpses of a tension between a Manichaean and an Augustinian vision of the *power* of evil. The question here is whether an absolutely evil being commands power *equal* to (Manichaean) or *inferior* to (Augustinian) the absolutely good being. The Augustinian view dominates. Eru's sovereign act of creation and his ability to ignore Melkor's attempt to co-create shows clearly that Melkor is inferior to Eru. This reinforces the Augustinian hints in *LR* where Gandalf often refers to a divine power guiding the events of the world (cf. section 7.2.1). There are glimpses, however, of a Manichaean vision of the power of evil in *S*. The "Darkness" that spreads after Melkor's destruction of the two trees is said to be "more than loss of light"; it was "a thing with being of its own" (*S* 80). What is more, the darkness is not of Melkor's making; he has "called upon some aid that came from beyond Arda" (*S* 84). This suggests the existence of an evil entity or power outside Eä, mightier than Melkor and perhaps equal to Eru.[250]

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[248] According to Tolkien, the Old English word orc literally means demon.

[249] Given this general view of the Orcs, Faramir's profession that he "would not snare even an orc with falsehood" (*LR* 664) reveals a truly exceptional and superior moral.

[250] Shippey (2003) and Rosebury (2003) are among the many Tolkien scholars who have written on ethics, the metaphysics of evil, and free will in Tolkien's literary mythology. Shippey holds that the evil in Tolkien's Legendarium must ultimately be understood in Manichaean terms, Rosebury contends that it is Augustinian. See also the essays in Bassham and Bronson (2003), especially the contribution by Hibbs (2003). I shall not go further into the debate here since references to Melkor or other evil beings are very rare in the spiritual Tolkien milieu.

9.1.5. Rituals

Even though *S* focuses on the Elves, we hear very little about Elven rituals or religion. The only reference to Elven religion falls *en-passant* when we hear that Morgoth attacks the city of Gondolin during the Gates of Summer festival (*S* 291). Given that we know from *LR* that the Elves in Middle-earth in the Third Age frequently invoked Elbereth and observed a weekly Valar-day of ritual (cf. section 7.2.4), the absence of reference to Elven rituals in *S* is puzzling. Like with *LR*, Tolkien may have consciously avoided explicit rituals as not to produce a pagan pseudo-religion, but a text-internal reason can also be inferred: The Elves in *S* have seen the Valar and many have lived with them. Therefore, the Elves of *S* do not see the Valar as divine beings to be worshipped. Valar-rituals make more sense for the Sindar in *LR*, for these Elves have not lived in Aman and long for the Valar whom they have not seen for thousands of years since their last intervention in Middle-earth.

The relation between humans and Valar is different. Though the Valar appear to humans in the War of Wrath (*S* 302) and when the Valar appoint Elros first king of Númenor (*S* 312), the short lifespan of humans makes the preservation of knowledge of the Valar tenuous. Contrary to the Elves, most humans have never seen the Valar, but have to *believe* in them. As a consequence, most humans wrongly think that the Valar are gods (*S* 167). The Númenóreans, who from the Elves know the truth, worship Eru Ilúvatar rather than the Valar (*S* 312). From this we may infer that also the Elves at the time of *S* worshipped Eru rather than the Valar.

Even though the Númenóreans are the purest of the races of Men, they can become corrupted. While Sauron is in Númenor, he turns the Númenóreans away from Eru and has them worship Melkor with human sacrifice (*S* 325-327). Later he has them direct the cult at himself as a god (*S* 332).

9.1.6. Eschatology and Afterlife

S says little about eschatology, but the notion, present in *LR*, that this world has an end and that a better world will be created after this one, is repeated (*S* 4). More information is given about the different post-mortal dooms of humans and Elves. The spirits of both humans and Elves are collected in the Halls of Mandos after the death of the body (*S* 95, 117, 120, 220). The final fate of the Elves is uncertain, but they seem unable to leave Eä. Human spirits, on the contrary, leave the Halls of Mandos to go out of the created world to be with Ilúvatar in the Timeless Halls (*S* 220, 316). Therefore, human mortality is a gift and not a curse, as an envoy from the Valar explains to the Númenóreans (*S* 316).

There are a few instances of resurrection within the world. After the human Beren is slain and lingers in the Halls of Mandos, his Elven wife Lúthien journeys there and is allowed to bring him back to life at the price of her own immortality (*S* 220). This story seems to contradict the notion that human mortality is a gift, for here it is Elven immortality which is deemed the attractive post-mortal doom which can be bargained with. On

the whole, *S* does not single out the human or Elven afterlife as most desirable, but simply describes the two as different. While the Elves are immortal in Aman, they cannot stay in Middle-earth. Repeating a theme from *LR*, it is emphasised in *S* that Elves who are not slain and do not travel to Aman on their own account, will fade and become like a shadow (*S* 95).

9.2. Fantastic Elements in *The Silmarillion*

Like *H* and *LR*, *S* includes magic, otherworlds, non-human races, and special bloodlines. Especially Lúthien is a great enchantress (*S* 202, 206, 212, 213), but also the dragon Glaurung casts spells (*S* 255). The most colourful magical object is Gurthang, a cursed and talking sword (*S* 271). Another magical motif is that the oath taken by Fëanor's sons to recapture the Silmarils from Melkor is metaphysically binding (*S* 88-89). Concerning otherworlds, we hear much more about Valinor and Eldamar, and in Middle-earth the Elven realm of Doriath is much like Galadriel's Lothlórien in *LR* (*S* 106, 281). Given the Elven point of view of *S*, all of this seems less extra-ordinary than in *LR*. The *LR* motif complex of intuitions and dreams as sources of knowledge plays no role in *S*, with the exception of Melian's foresight (*S* 101).

9.2.1. Beings, Races, and Bloodlines

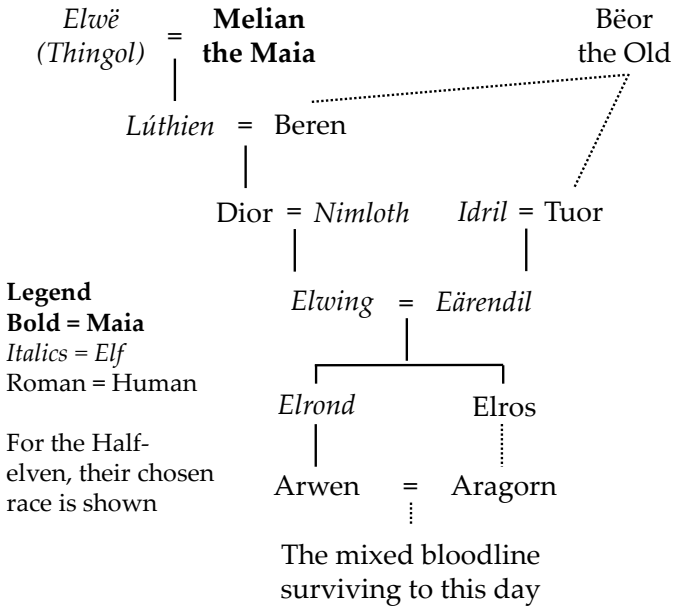
We get some more information about the nature of various races. It is specified about the Dwarves that they were created by the Vala Aulë without Ilúvatar's permission (*S* 37), but that Ilúvatar subsequently sanctified them with his Being and gave them free will (*S* 38). This is Ilúvatar's only major intervention in the created world apart from the destruction of Númenor. Still, the Dwarves are not counted among the children of Ilúvatar, a title reserved for Elves and humans. As already mentioned, we hear about the Orcs that they were elves once, but that they were corrupted and turned evil by Melkor (*S* 47). The Elves are somewhat disenchanted compared to *LR*. We learn that Elves are not always wise and good, but that they can also be greedy, be seduced by evil, and even go to war against each other.

More elaborate information is given about the various higher and lesser races of Men and about the mixed Maiar-Elven-human bloodline. Humans (called Atani or Hildor by the Elves) are created by Ilúvatar in the beginning, but only awakened later, simultaneously with the creation of the sun (*S* 115). After this they spread across Middle-earth. Some come under the influence of Melkor and refuse to believe what the Elves tell them about the Valar (*S* 169, 309). Others befriend the Elves and learn from them. These are the Edain or Elf-friends (*S* 164, 309, 313). The Edain are granted Númenor as a gift as well as a longer life span than other humans. They are also immune to sickness and have the ability to die at will when old and weary. They begin to lose these privileges when

they fall under Sauron's influence (*S* 328), but we know from *LR* that Aragorn, a Dúnedain and descendant of the Númenóreans, has retained both a long lifespan and the ability to die at will.

Aragorn, of course, is no average Dúnedain, but of royal blood. For not only are the Edain/Númenóreans/Dúnedain special as a collective, their royal line is more special still for it includes both Elven and Maian blood. *LR* includes allusions to this special bloodline, but in *S* things get clearer. The so-called Line of Lúthien is shown in figure 9.1.

Figure 9.1. The Line of Lúthien



One royal Elven house includes Maian blood due to the union of Melian the Maia and the Elf lord Elwë (*S* 54-55). Elwë and Melian rule the Sindar and get a daughter, Lúthien (*S* 99). Lúthien, in turn, marries the human Beren and bears a son, Dior (*S* 222). Dior has Maian, Elven, and human blood (*S* 284), but being born after Lúthien has given up her own immortality, Dior is born with a human doom. The union of Lúthien and Beren is only the first of a number of unions between humans and Elves. Dior marries the Elf Nimloth and together they get Elwing (*S* 283). Elwing marries Eärendil (*S* 295), himself the offspring of a union between the Elf princess Idril and the human Tuor (*S* 289). Elwing and Eärendil get the sons Elros and Elrond whom we know from *LR* (*S* 295). Elwing, Eärendil, Elros, and Elrond are known as the Half-elven and are given the choice between an Elven and a human doom. Elwing, Eärendil, and Elrond choose the Elven doom (*S* 118); Elros, and Elrond's children, including Arwen, choose mortality. Through Elros and Elrond and their descendants, "the blood of the Firstborn and a strain of the spirits divine that were before Arda" have come among Men (*S* 306).

9.3. Note on Veracity

Unlike *LR*, *S* does not include a frame narrative explicitly anchoring the narrative world in the actual world. Nevertheless, there is something in the text's structure that lends it to a non-fictional reading. There are some striking intertextual connections, however, between *S* and those mythologies that Tolkien drew on. Consider, for instance, that Tolkien's Númenor is called Atalantë in Quenya (*S* 337) – and hence near-equated with Atlantis; and that Avallónë, the name of the port city on the island of Tol Eressëa (*S* 338), clearly owes its name to the Arthurian Avalon. This intertextuality promotes a reading of *S* as referring, directly or indirectly, to supernatural states of affairs in the actual world. At least this is the case for readers who already believe that (some of) Tolkien's source mythologies contain a core of historical truth, and that goes for most Tolkien religionists. Consider, for example, all those individuals who believe in the historical core of the Atlantis myth and/or the Noah Flood myth and/or the tale of the lost Celtic continent of Lyonesse. For this group, Tolkien's account of the destruction of Númenor affords three more or less referential readings. The Númenor passages can be read either (a) in the binocular mode as a fictional reference to other sources giving a reliable, historical account, (b) as a mytho-historical description which is equally accurate as its Theosophical, Biblical, and Celtic counterparts, or (c) as the true (or relatively more true) account or proto-story behind the other myths.

9.4. The Combined Religious Affordances of *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Silmarillion*

For a reader with both *LR* and *S* at his disposal, *LR* continues to supply two kinds of religious affordances: fantastic elements (magic, otherworlds, visions etc.) and a frame narrative that thematises the text's historical veracity. *S* adds two things in particular. First, *S* gives the reader much more information on the narrative religion of Tolkien's world. Though we still lack ritual descriptions that can serve as models for rituals in the actual world, we get details about the creation and constitution of the world (cosmogony and cosmology) and about the names, functions, and abodes of the Valar (theology). Significantly, the theological information is not limited to the Valar; we also hear about Eru, the supreme, one God who in striking likeness with the Biblical God creates the world *ex nihilo* with a word. Second, *S* offers more and different information about the Elves. Indeed, as Tolkien wrote in a letter to his publisher, Milton Waldman, "[t]he legendary *Silmarillion* is peculiar, and differs from all similar things that I know in not being anthropocentric. Its centre is not Men but 'Elves'. […] These are the *First-born* […]; and the *Followers* Men" (*S* xv). The narrative is told from an Elven perspective, the main protagonists are Elves, and the Elves are described as ordinary people who can err and be as proud, resentful, and greedy as any human. The construction of a mixed Elven-

human bloodline further diminishes the distance between the two races. Together, the disenchantment and humanisation of the Elves makes it much easier for the reader to identify with them.

From these observations of the religious affordances of *LR* and *S* flow four hypotheses about how post-*S* Tolkien religion might differ from Tolkien religion based only on *LR*. First, we can assume that the availability of a pantheon will lead to the development of specifically Valar-directed rituals. Possibly, Tolkien religionists after *S*, especially those of a Pagan bent, will consider the Valar comparable to the pantheons of pre-Christian mythologies and treat Tolkien's literary mythology as a (near) equal to those mythologies. If the Valar, rather than the Elves, indeed become the focus of ritual attention, this may be expected to go along, second, with a change in how Tolkien's narratives are read. Whereas the Neo-Pagans read *LR* in the binocular mode as a text that indirectly helped them appreciate the real elves or fairies (as a *class* of spiritual beings), a focus on the Valar can be expected to go together with an affirmative reading of Tolkien's narratives that considers the Valar to be real, individual beings and also consider other aspects of Tolkien's world to be real. This could lead either to a mytho-cosmological reading of *LR* and *S* that takes the Valar to be real but brackets the more tenuous question of historicity, or to a mytho-historical reading facilitated by the combined religious affordances of the *LR* frame story and the explicit intertextuality of *S*. While the Valar can be expected to facilitate a more developed Neo-Pagan form of Tolkien religion, one might also hypothesise, as a third point, the rise of a Christian wing of Tolkien religion. It might be that the decidedly Christian flavour of *S*, expressed for instance in Eru as creator god, in the subordination of the Valar to Eru, and in the primarily Augustinian view of evil, could result in more individuals with a Christian background becoming active in Tolkien spirituality. Finally, we can hypothesise that the perspective change from humans/Hobbits to Elves in *S* will not only effect which supernatural beings are engaged with in ritual (Valar/Eru instead of Elves), but also have consequences for people's self-identification. Where the Pagans in the previous chapter considered the Elves to be supernatural others or identified with them only in their aspect of forest caretakers, Tolkien religionists who draw upon *S* might identify spiritually with the Elves. They may either treat the Elves as religious role models or inscribe themselves into the Line of Lúthien and consider the Elves to be their spiritually significant ancestors. In the four following chapters we shall see whether Tolkien religion after *S* indeed went in the directions I have hypothesised here.

Chapter 10. The Tribunal of the Sidhe: A Case Study of Religious Blending

In this and the following three chapters, I discuss a number of religious groups that came into being in the 1970s through 1990s and drew their inspiration from both *LR* and *S*. I refer to these groups, which took form before the emergence of the Internet and the movie adaptations of *LR*, as the first wave of Tolkien spirituality. That is not to say, however, that these groups belong to the past. On the contrary, the first wave of Tolkien spirituality includes a number of solid groups that have now been active for three or four decades, are as vigorous as ever, and have successfully socialised the second generation.

In chapters 10 through 13, the history of the first wave groups will be treated from their formation until the present day. Since the groups developed independently of each other and still operate quite autonomously, I will not attempt a chronological treatment of first wave Tolkien spirituality *en bloc*, but rather analyse one group at a time. This allows for a thematic organisation of the material. In what follows, chapters 10 through 12 make up a set of chapters dealing with religious groups that identify to some extent with Tolkien's Elves, the Quendi. In chapter 13 I treat two examples of how Tolkien's mythology has been integrated in ritual practices from the Western Magic tradition. The three Elven chapters concern the Tribunal of the Sidhe, the Elven movement, and esoteric historians who link Tolkien's mythology to conspiracy theories about a suppressed Elven/Grail bloodline.

The Tribunal of the Sidhe was founded in 1984 and is probably the largest Tolkien-integrating religious movement. The members of the Tribunal synthesise elements from Tolkien's mythology with Wicca, Celtic mythology, and revelations of their own. They believe to be Changelings, i.e. fairy beings whose spirits have been incarnated in a human body. Their use of Tolkien's works is legitimised by the claim that Tolkien was a Changeling himself and chose to be incarnated to tell the history of the Changelings in mythic form. The Tribunal of the Sidhe is part of a broader 'fairy spirituality milieu', a sub-milieu of the cultic milieu focused on investigating fairies, interacting with fairies, and identifying with fairies (or with equivalent fey creatures such as elves and Sidhe). The fairy spirituality milieu includes solitaires, various organisations, such as the Tribunal of the Sidhe and the Faeid Fellowship (founded 2000)[251], and a loose network of self-identified Elves.[252]

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[251] http://www.technogypsie.com/faeid/fellowship.html [050812].

[252] The now defunct Fairy Investigation Society, cf. footnotes 108 and 267, also belonged to the fairy spirituality milieu.

Chapter 11 focuses on the network of "awakened Elves" which emerged in the early 1970s around the Elf Queen's Daughters' (and later the Silver Elves') magical Elven letters. Especially since the rise of the Internet in the 1990s, this network has constituted a self-conscious community with such online hubs as the Elfinkind Digest (1990-) and the Yahoo! Group Elven Realities (1999-). These awakened Elves share the identification as a fey creature with the Tribunal of the Sidhe, but the Tribunal and the Elven community have developed quite independently of each other and shall therefore be treated separately. To limit redundancy, chapter 10 and 11 focus on different theoretical issues. The present chapter treats the Tribunal of the Sidhe as an example of fiction-integrating religious blending. It charts the religious traditions (and their theories of fairy folk) which the Tribunal uses and synthesises, and analyses how the identity as Changelings has been constructed in a process of conceptual religious blending. The chapter on the Elven movement, by contrast, focuses on plausibility construction and plausibility maintenance. In the Elven chapter, I look at the practices and social structures which support the 'conversion' to Elvenhood and I analyse how an identity as Elf, once acquired, can subsequently be rationalised and justified. I furthermore assess the strength of the Elven movement's plausibility structures.

The third Elven chapter, chapter 12, is concerned with references to Tolkien in esoteric historiography. Some authors of what I term 'conspiracy genealogy' assume that Tolkien possessed secret knowledge about special bloodlines which he hinted at in his books. They are all eager to point out correspondences between Tolkien's mythology and their own constructed genealogies and etymologies, and consider such correspondences to legitimise and back up their own claims. One of them even claims to be a royal descendant of the Dragon/Elven/Grail bloodline himself.

The three Elven chapters all concern individuals who claim to belong to a non-human species or to a non-ordinary, human bloodline. These individuals furthermore suggest that Tolkien possessed knowledge about this racial phenomenon and its spiritual importance, and that his Quendi were intended as veiled, but conscious references to it. In other words, the fascination with Tolkien's Elves as special and powerful beings (already afforded by *LR*) and the invitation to identify *with them* (introduced with *S*) are here translated into an identification *as Elves* and the development of a complex of beliefs around this identity.

10.1. The Tribunal of the Sidhe as Tolkien-integrating Religion

The Tribunal of the Sidhe was founded in 1984 by three Irishmen and three Americans studying magic together in Sacramento, California. Later the Tribunal spread over the world, especially over the American West Coast. Today, the group has well over a hundred members, many of them second-generation, making it the largest Tolkien-integrating religious organisation. The description of the Tribunal of the Sidhe in this chapter is

based mainly on an interview and subsequent email correspondence with Lady Danu, one of the founding members of the Tribunal and now the leader of the Circle of the Coyote (together with her husband, Lord Coyote). I also draw on the homepage of Lady Danu's group, the Circle of the Coyote, and an information pamphlet about the Tribunal (Rose 2009) which Ivy Rose had written on the occasion of a Pagan pride day. Rose is a member of Danu's circle.[253]

The Tribunal understands itself as a Pagan organisation (Danu 290909) and most of the group's concerns, beliefs, and practices conform to a Pagan standard model: The Tribunal considers itself "environmentalist" (Danu 290909), and is basically a Wiccan group. Members "honor the ways of the Goddess and God" (Rose 2009) and observe the Wiccan Wheel of the Year with celebration of equinoxes, solstices, and the four Celtic cross-quarter days. Like in most such groups, the Wiccan ritual baseline is combined with various other forms of magic (e.g. Tarot, astral travelling) and mythologies (*in casu* Celtic, Norse, and Tolkienesque).

Two characteristics make the Tribunal of the Sidhe stand out among other Pagan groups: (1) the belief that the members are "Changelings" who "hail from a place on the astral plane [they] call "Home"" (Rose 2009), and (2) the use of Tolkien's narratives as a mythology on a par with other mythologies. Members of the Tribunal believe that their astral home is populated by various forms of spiritual beings, including the Elvyn and the Sidhe, and refer to these beings collectively as the "kin folk". The most powerful of the kin folk are the Elvyn who created (or participated in the creation of) the lesser races. It is further believed that Changelings (i.e. incarnated kin folk) have co-inhabited the earth throughout all of history and that myths and folklore about elves, fairies, and other such beings reflect this historical fact. They thus approach myth in general in the mytho-historical mode. They believe that the historical core of myths has been overlaid with a layer of mythic hyperbole, but their view is not euhemeristic in the reductive sense of offering naturalistic explanations for the supernatural aspects of myth. They do not explain the myths about *álfar* and *sídhe* as mythologised references to human peoples, as Margaret Murray and Gerald Gardner did (cf. section 8.3.1). Instead, they explain the mythic *álfar* and *sídhe* as a more or less correct representation of the real and historical existence of Changelings. While the Tribunal reads Celtic and other mythology as mytho-history, they are more ambivalent in their view on Tolkien's literary mythology (cf. section 10.2.2 below).

The members of the Tribunal identify as Changelings, but of course they *look* human and certainly do not physically resemble pixies, dwarfs, and elves of fable. That can be explained, however. According to the Tribunal, the non-human appearance of kin folk in folktales is simply due to the fact that kin folk in earlier times *chose* to be incarnated in non-human forms. Only after the "great strife" with the humans, did the kin folk "adapt" their form to be more human (Danu 290909). The members of the Tribunal of the

[253] The homepage of the Circle of the Coyote can be visited here: http://thechangeling.ning.com [180712].

Sidhe hence claim to be kin folk who have chosen to be (re)incarnated *in human form*. Obviously, the Changelings are bound to their physical bodies and unable to 'outcarnate' and return home permanently at will, but the Changelings believe to be able to visit their Home temporarily by way of astral projection. They also believe that their Changeling spirit or soul returns to its astral Home after physical death.

This spiritual identification with the kin folk does not rule out a parallel belief in Changeling descent: When changeling parents procreate, their offspring will also be Changelings. Whether by physical descent, reincarnation, or a combination of the two, the members of the Tribunal believe that they are the descendants of a particular tribe of historical changelings, namely the Tuatha Dé Dannan (The People of the Goddess Danu) of Irish legend. Rose can therefore finish the pamphlet by pointing out that all circles of the Tribunal, however different they may otherwise be, share the "belief in the Shining ones as our foremothers and forefathers" (2009).[254]

Like the Pagans discussed in chapter 8, members of the Tribunal of the Sidhe are fascinated with the fantastic elements (otherworlds, magic, Elves, etc.) in *LR* (cf. section 7.1) and most have read *LR* or seen the movies before joining. The Tolkien material which is actually integrated in the teachings and rituals of the Tribunal, however, comes from *S*. Drawing on the cosmogony and theology of *S* (cf. section 9.1), members identify their Home on the astral plane with the Blessed Realm and consider the kin folk of that place and hence themselves as well to be (the equivalents of) Valar, Maiar, and Quendi. Lady Danu also told me that besides the God and the Goddess, her circle honours the gods of both the Norse, Celtic, and Tolkienesque pantheons in ritual. For instance, the members have performed rituals in honour of the Valië Yavanna (Danu 290909).

As has become apparent, the Tribunal of Sidhe engages in religious blending. On the level of tradition, the Tribunal draws on mythology and folklore about the *sídhe* and other fey beings, on Wicca, and on Tolkien's narratives to construct a unique constellation of beliefs and practices. Since the Tribunal's syncretism is thorough and stable, it can be qualified as religious synthesising, in contrast to religious mixing, i.e. ambiguous and temporary syncretism (cf. section 4.1.2 above). On the conceptual level, the Tribunal draws on earlier notions of fey creatures and their interaction with humans to create the notions of kin folk and Changelings. The traditional and conceptual levels are connected. On the one hand, the notions of kin folk and Changelings are constructed out of bits and pieces from earlier traditions. For instance, the notion of kin folk is introduced as a handy hypernym that allows members to refer to *sídhe*, elves, and other fey creatures collectively. On the other hand, the notions of kin folk and Changelings govern the Tribunal's interpretation of the mythological traditions that it draws upon. For example, the *álfar* in Germanic mythology were not originally believed to spirits from an Otherworld who had incarnated in human bodies. Perceiving the *álfar* through the interpretive

[254] The Tribunal of the Sidhe uses the terms Sidhe, Shining Ones, and Tuatha Dé Dannan more or less interchangeably.

lens of their own Changeling concept, however, the Tribunal holds the old myths about the *álfar* to reflect that Changelings like themselves existed in prehistory.

Neo-Pagans are often described as "eclectic" (e.g. Pike 2004a, 26), indicating that while their religious blending is creative and imaginative, it is also rather unsystematic. I believe that religious blending is never completely random, but that regulating patterns can always be discerned. While I cannot speak for Paganism in general, I hope at least to make plausible in this chapter that the religious blending of the Tribunal of the Sidhe is not random, but patterned.

The rest of this chapter falls in three sections. The first two of these are concerned with religious blending. In section 10.2, I analyse the Tribunal as a religious synthesis, charting those traditions from which the Tribunal has adapted beliefs and practices. Section 10.3 zooms in on the conceptual level of religious blending and analyses the construction of the Tribunal's identity notions of kin folk and Changelings. A short final section treats the social organisation of the Tribunal of the Sidhe and the group's place within the spiritual Tolkien milieu in general.

10.2. Religious Blending on the Tradition Level: The Tribunal of the Sidhe as Religious Synthesis

The Tribunal of the Sidhe synthesises elements from four religious traditions: (1) the Irish mythological tradition about the *sídhe* and the Tuatha Dé Dannan, received through the writings of Robert Graves; (2) an early twentieth century tradition of spiritist and theosophical 'research' on the reality of fairies, including in particular the work of Walter Yeeling Evans-Wentz; (3) Tolkien's literary mythology, especially the parts about non-human beings and their otherworldly abodes; and (4) Wicca.[255] Directly or indirectly, Celtic mythology and folklore play a role in all these traditions.[256] This is particularly true for the first two traditions, the Tuatha Dé Dannan tradition and the fairy research tradition, which seem to have formed the original basis of the group's beliefs. This Celtic emphasis of the Tribunal can be explained by the fact that it originated as a study group,

[255] Possibly, C.J. Cherryh's duology *The Dreamstone* and *The Tree of Swords and Jewels* (1983a; 1983b) played a role as well. In any case Cherryh's novels, which constitute the first successful pieces of fantasy focusing particularly on the *sídhe*, were published just one year before the Tribunal was founded.

[256] The beliefs and practices of the Tribunal and especially the members' identification with the Tuatha can be seen as an example of religious Celticism, i.e. the religious fascination of and/or identification with the Celts. Religious Celticism is expressed variously in the formation of Druid orders (Lewis 2009); in attempts to reconstruct the religion of the Celts (NicDhàna 2007); in historical readings of legends formed around the grail romances, such as the story of Joseph of Arimathea's visit to Glastonbury (cf. Wood 2000); or in the adoption of the pseudo-Celtic Wiccan Wheel of the Year and the equally pseudo-Celtic lunar calendar developed by Graves. The Tribunal observes this lunar calendar, the so-called Celtic Tree Calendar. On religious Celticism in general, especially as it is tied to the key location of Glastonbury, see Bowman (1994; 1996; 2007; 2009), Prince and Riches (2000), and Ivakhiv (2001).

the Circle of Phooka,[257] which was led by the Irishman Sean P. Murphy and half of whose six members were Irish. The two other traditions, Tolkien's literary mythology and Wicca, seem to have been added at a later stage by Murphy's American students after Murphy had returned to Ireland. At least these traditions gained importance after his departure. In what follows I shall introduce the two 'Celtic' traditions before moving on to the Tribunal's integration of Tolkien's mythology. Since my emphasis here is on the various traditions' contribution to the Tribunal's ideas about kin folk and Changelings, this section includes no separate sub-section about Wicca.

Before moving on, let me mention that the information given in this section on the Tribunal's source traditions is not only essential for an analysis of religious blending in the Tribunal of the Sidhe. The information given here also provides necessary background for the chapters on the Elven movement (ch. 11) and on esoteric historiography involving Tolkien's mythology (ch. 12). Both Elves and esoteric historians draw on Robert Graves' ideas about the Tuatha Dé Dannan, and like the Tribunal, the awakened Elves are also inspired by Evans-Wentz' notion that fairies are really astral spirits. Furthermore, Tolkien's himself is likely to have been inspired by some of the works discussed in this section.

10.2.1. Robert Graves' Tuatha Dé Dannan and Theosophy's Astral Fairies

The *sídhe* or the *áes síde* are a group of Irish mythological beings. Their name means the "the people of the hollow hills", i.e. the people of the Otherworld (Borsje 2009, 54).[258] The *sídhe* appear both in early medieval literature and in living folklore. After the English colonisation of Ireland these beings came to be referred to as "fairies". The Tuatha Dé Dannan, the "children/people/subjects of Danu", also feature in both the early literature and in later folklore, and the sources agree that the Tuatha are in some way related to the *sídhe*.

The early literary sources contain two different traditions about the Tuatha Dé Dannan and their relation to the *sídhe*. In the first of these, the Tuatha Dé Dannan appear as a kind of pantheon of majestic *sídhe* inhabiting a magical Otherworld. In this tradition, the Tuatha can visit the world of humans from their otherworldly home, and humans can access the Otherworld through certain hidden entrances, for instance in mounds. In the so-called invasions tradition, however, the Tuatha are no gods, but a tribe of humans in possession of magical powers. This tradition goes back to the *Lebor Gabála Érenn* (*The Book of the Taking of Ireland*, often referred to as *The Book of Invasions*) which was compiled in the 11th century as a great synthesis of mythology, legend, folklore, history, and Biblical material. *The Book of the Taking of Ireland* traces Irish history back to Biblical times and claims that the Tuatha Dé Dannan, after having learned magic on the northernmost

[257] A phooka (or púca) is a creature of Irish folklore comparable to a goblin.

[258] *Síd* means hollow hill or mound, but can be used as shorthand for the beings inhabiting those mounds.

islands of the world, were the fifth people to conquer Ireland. The Milesians, from whom the contemporary Irish are claimed to descend, took the land from the Tuatha Dé Dannan and forced them into the underground Otherworld, thus transforming them into *sídhe* – people of the hollow hills.[259]

The idea that the Tuatha Dé Dannan were an historical people who actually possessed magical powers and indeed conquered Ireland entered the teachings of the Tribunal of the Sidhe (and the cultic milieu in general) through Robert Graves' *The White Goddess* (1948/1997).[260] In this work, Graves developed three ideas that have greatly influenced the Tribunal and Paganism in general. First, he claimed that a matriarchal culture worshipping a supreme Goddess had dominated pre-historic Europe and Middle East, and that this Goddess was a "Triple Goddess" with the three aspects of maid, mother, and crone.[261] Second, Graves believed that all myths and legends were originally factual accounts that had subsequently been distorted, by omissions, additions, and metaphorical projections etc. As witnessed by the subtitle of his book, *A Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth*, Graves furthermore believed himself able to reconstruct this historical core. He therefore intended his book to be read as "an authentic work of history" (Hutton 1999, 42). Drawing on myth and intuition, Graves sought to demonstrate that matriarchy was the original and natural way of organising society. He stated, for instance, that the "Tuatha dé Danaan were a confederacy of tribes in which the kingship went by matrilineal succession", and he characterised the *Book of the Taking of Ireland* as "archaeologically plausible" (1997, 45). Inspired by Margaret Murray, Graves considered the *sídhe*, who "are now popularly regarded as fairies", to be "in fact Picts" (1997, 202). He thus agreed with Murray (and Gardner) that an old religion had existed, that it had survived at the outskirts of European civilisation, and that the beings of folklore were euhemeristic references to these people and their religion.[262] Where Murray and Gardner claimed that the old religion had been duotheistic, however, Graves insisted that it had been directed at a single goddess. He believed in the actual existence of this goddess and hence in the essential truth of the old religion. If Graves' first two main ideas were his belief in original matriarchy and his euhemeristic view on myth, the

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[259] On the *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, see Carey (1993; 2009) and Scowcroft (1987). Since the only written sources about the *sídhe* and the Tuatha Dé Dannan stem from Christian times, it is impossible to say for sure how the Tuatha were conceptualised in pagan times (Borsje 2009, 54). A heated debate rages between "nativists" (earlier the dominant position) and "anti-nativists" (e.g. McCone 1990) over the question whether the early Irish literature has preserved a home-grown, pagan tradition or whether it reflects a synthesis of imported (Biblical, Classical, and non-Irish Celtic) material (cf. Carey 1992; Hutton 1991, 150-152).

[260] The first edition was published in 1948, but it was the publication of an American paperback in 1966 which earned Graves a broad readership in the cultic milieu and in the emerging Neo-Pagan movement.

[261] These ideas were not new, but synthesised motifs from Jakob Bachofen, Eduard Gerhard, and Jane Ellen Harrison (Cusack 2009b, 337-339; Hutton 1998, 93, 99; 1999, 37, 41).

[262] According to Lindop, Graves corresponded with Murray while writing *The White Goddess* (Lindop 1997, ix). Graves and Gardner refer approvingly to each other's work.

third concerns his method. It is striking that Graves in *The White Goddess* always refers to the myths themselves and never to scholarly editions of texts or commentaries. This is because he believed myths to be "True poetry" inspired by the Goddess in her aspect of the Muse. By definition, the myths themselves were thus truer than any academic interpretation of them. Graves furthermore believed himself to be an inspired poet and therefore considered his intuited 'reconstruction' of the myths' historical core to be superior to what other scholars could achieve with their blunted patriarchal rationality (cf. Lindop 1997, ix-x; Hutton 1999, 41).

The Tribunal of the Sidhe approves of Graves' reliance on intuition and inspiration and shares his belief that myths include an historical core, but the group combines these notions with standard Murray-Gardner duotheism. The Tribunal's most important loan from Graves is the insistence on the historicity of the Tuatha Dé Dannan. It construes the Tuatha differently from Graves, however, in two ways. First, the Tribunal reinterprets the consequence of the defeat of the Tuatha at the hands of the Milesians. According to the Tribunal, the Tuatha were not driven out of the physical world as a result of "the great strife", but merely adapted their physical appearance so that they came to look like humans. In doing so, they preserved their special ancestry and some of their magical abilities, including the ability to travel home astrally. The second reinterpretation regards the connection of the Tuatha to the Otherworld. Turning the idea that the Tuatha were physical beings who were forced into the Otherworld upside down, the Tribunal believes that the Tuatha *originated* from the Otherworld (i.e. the astral plane) and only subsequently incarnated on the physical plane.

The second tradition which the Tribunal of the Sidhe draws upon developed at the intersection of the parapsychological and Celticist milieus in the early 20th century. A key figure in this tradition was the French astronomer and spiritist Camille Flammarion who not only believed in life on Mars and in communications with the dead, but also claimed to have proven the existence of fairies. In *Mysterious Psychic Forces* (1909) Flammarion suggested that non-human spirits ("gnomes, spirits, and hobgoblins") were real, or that they at least constituted phenomena that we have no "scientific absolute right to reject" (1909, 35). After having presented the mediumistic research of himself and others, he writes in his conclusion:

> Two inescapable hypotheses present themselves. Either it is we who produce these phenomena [e.g. apparitions] or it is spirits. But mark this well: these spirits are not necessarily the souls of the dead; for other kinds of spiritual beings may exist, and space may be full of them without our ever knowing anything about it, except under unusual circumstances. Do we not find in the different ancient literatures, demons, angels, gnomes, goblins, sprites, spectres, elementals, etc? Perhaps these legends are not without some foundation in fact (Flammarion 1909, 431).

Flammarion's ideas influenced the anthropologist, Celticist, and theosophist Walter Yeeling Evans-Wentz.[263] In his book *The Fairy-Faith in Celtic Countries* (1911), Evans-Wentz presented material on the living folklore of the *sídhe* that he had collected in the Celtic countries, especially in Ireland. Evans-Wentz considered this fairy-faith to be based on fact and advocated the scientific study of fairies. Evans-Wentz' interpretation of the *sídhe* was not only indebted to Flammarion, but also drew heavily on Alfred Trübner Nutt, an English publisher, amateur Celticist, and former president of the Folklore Society. Nutt had introduced the idea of a "Celtic doctrine of Re-birth", namely the "belief, probably widespread, among the ancient Irish that divine personages, national heroes who are members of the Tuatha De Danann or Sidhe race, and great men, can be reincarnated, that is to say, can descend to this plane of existence and be as mortals more than once" (Evans-Wentz 1911, 368).[264] Evans-Wentz adopted this idea from Nutt, but went one step further and defended the truth of the Celtic doctrine of Rebirth on theosophical grounds.

Evans-Wentz assumes the reader of *Fairy-Faith* to believe in the existence of a theosophical "astral plane" overlaying the physical plane. This is apparent, for example, when he explains apparitions as the appearance of an "astral double" of the physical body, and when he describes spirit communications as contact with dead spirits who linger on the astral plane. Evans-Wentz presumes, however, that his reader does not yet believe in fairies and attempts to persuade him by recasting fairies in supposedly well-

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[263] Evans-Wentz introduces Flammarion as one of the pioneers of psychic research in his introduction to *The Fairy-Faith* (1911, xxxv). He also quotes Flammarion's concluding passage (which I have also quoted in the main text), some of it with emphasis (Evans-Wentz 1911, 481). To this quote Evans-Wentz adds in brackets that the first hypothesis, i.e. the hypothesis that experiences of spirits constitute a purely human product, "is not reasonable" (1911, 481).

[264] Nutt's contributions to folkloristics and Celtic studies were taken seriously in his own time. Besides the theory of an original Celtic doctrine of Re-birth, he also formulated the thesis that a grail myth existed among the Celts prior to the romances. In his book *The Holy Grail with Especial Reference to its Celtic Origin* (1888), Nutt attempted to reconstruct the original grail tradition, suggesting for instance that the grail, sword, dish, and lance featuring in the romances were echoes of the four treasures which the Tuatha Dé Dannan had brought with them from the northernmost islands, namely Dagda's cauldron, Náuda's sword of light, the Fál stone, and Lug's spear (cf. Wood 1998, 18). Other scholars, especially R.S. Loomis, continued to champion Nutt's ideas until the 1960s. Also Evans-Wentz was taken seriously as a scholar in his own time, and his *Fairy-Faith* was published on Oxford University Press.

The work of Nutt and Evans-Wentz was known to Tolkien and still possessed academic authority when Tolkien began writing his literary mythology in the late 1910s. It is therefore likely that Tolkien's fictional Quendi were inspired by Nutt and Evans-Wentz. In any case, the Quendi in some texts hold a belief in reincarnation that is very similar to Nutt's Celtic doctrine of Re-birth (cf. section 15.2.4 below). Furthermore, while Tolkien's Elves are different from humans, they are not purely spiritual beings, but incarnate beings that are able to procreate with humans. In this respect they resemble the Tuatha Dé Dannan who are also humans, but special humans who can wield magic and reincarnate what normal humans cannot. Finally, the theme in Tolkien's literary mythology that the Elves used to live among humans, but that this unity cannot be retained, is inspired by the tradition from the *Book of Invasions*.

known terms. Evans-Wentz basically argues that fairies or *sídhe* are a form of astral entities, and that their Otherworld is the astral plane (1911, 29, 167). Since Evans-Wentz' work is not only interesting as background for the Tribunal of the Sidhe but for the Elven movement as well, let me quote his conclusion at some length. Says Evans-Wentz,

> (1) Fairyland exists as a supernormal state of consciousness into which men and women may enter temporarily in dreams, trances, or in various ecstatic conditions; or for an indefinite period at death. (2) Fairies exist, because in all essentials they appear to be the same as the intelligent forces now recognized by psychical researchers, be they thus collective units of consciousness like what William James has called 'soul-stuff', or more individual units, like veridical apparitions. (3) Our examination of living children said to have been changed by fairies shows […] (a) that many changelings are so called merely because of some bodily deformity or because of some abnormal mental or pathological characteristics capable of an ordinary rational explanation, (b) but that other changelings who exhibit a change of personality, such as is recognized by psychologists, are in many cases best explained on the Demon-Possession Theory, which is a well-established scientific hypothesis (1911, 490-491).

In this context, Evans-Wentz' final comments on "changelings" are particularly interesting. It is beyond question that the Tribunal is indebted to Evans-Wentz who here introduced the notion that fairy souls can find their way into human bodies. The Tribunal, however, goes beyond Evans-Wentz when they equate the changelings, whom Evans-Wentz values negatively, with the positively valued reincarnated Tuatha Dé Dannan.

In the works of Graves, Nutt, and Evans-Wentz we find the four main building-blocks needed to construct the Tribunal's Changeling beliefs: the Tuatha Dé Dannan were humans with magical abilities (Graves); the old Irish believed that the Tuatha Dé Dannan could reincarnate (Nutt); the legends about the Tuatha Dé Dannan and the *sídhe* in general reflect the real existence of various spiritual beings living on the astral plane (Evans-Wentz); and Changelings are humans who have happened to become possessed by an astral spirit (Evans-Wentz). It is possible, however, that members of the Tribunal have also been inspired by Dion Fortune's more well-known work *Psychic Self-Defence* (1974) which was first published in 1930 and which promotes ideas very similar to Evans-Wentz'.[265] Fortune was a theosophist like Evans-Wentz and hence interested in reincarnation and the existence of various spirits and lines of evolution. In *Psychic Self-Defence*, she touches upon the topic of changelings. According to Fortune, the "psychic vortex" created by a human sexual union normally draws forth a human soul "from the

[265] Many of my informants explicitly referred to Evans-Wentz while none brought up Fortune's work. That can easily be explained by the fact that Evans-Wentz is concerned with fairies and changelings in particular, while Fortune's treatment of the topic of changelings is embedded within a general treatise on psychic self-defence. Nevertheless, Fortune's more well-known work may have been more instrumental than Evans-Wentz' in spreading the idea within the cultic milieu in general that humans can sometimes come to possess a non-human soul.

astral plane" that "is ripe for incarnation". But sometimes it goes wrong and the vortex may

> be deflected, as it were, out of the normal line of human evolution, so that it opens and extends into the sphere of evolution of another type of life. Under such circumstances it is theoretically possible for a being of parallel evolution to be drawn into incarnation in a human body (Fortune 1974, 79-80).[266]

Fortune differentiates between the unfortunate calling forth of a non-human soul (in which case the individual will not feel at home among humans) (1974, 80-81) and the more dangerous incarnation of a positively evil elemental spirit. She referred to incarnated elemental spirits as "changelings" and accused two acquaintances of this condition (Fortune 1974, 145-146). The Tribunal of the Sidhe agrees with Fortune that Changelings are non-human souls in human bodies, but twists the meaning of the term Changelings in two ways. In the Tribunal, the accusation of *others* for being dangerous changelings is substituted by a *positive* self-identification *as* Changeling. Furthermore, the term Changeling is used to refer to the incarnations of merely non-human (fey) spirits rather than to evil elemental spirits.[267]

10.2.2. The Integration of Tolkien's Literary Mythology

After Murphy and the two other Irish members of the Circle of Phooka returned to Ireland in 1985, the American members founded three new circles. Lady Danu (Linda Hayes) and Rodger Adams founded the Circle of the Queens in Sacramento, James Vincenzio led the Circle of the Quendi in Los Angeles, and Andrew Pembrokeshire started the Circle of the Rainbow Sidhe in Seattle. A second formative phase now followed in which Murphy's originally Celtic emphasis was reduced and his teachings on Changelings were elaborated in various ways. As the members say themselves, in this phase the three circles further co-operated in the "recreation" of the tradition of the Tuatha. According to Rose, the Quendi wrote and "refounded" the history of the Tribunal, the Queens "wrote of the teachings of Home", and the Rainbow Sidhe "wrote the

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[266] I am indebted to Joseph Laycock (2012a, 70) for pointing out this passage.

[267] Evans-Wentz and Fortune were not the only ones to promote a theosophical understanding of fairies. Another important figure was Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, who is best known as the creator of Sherlock Holmes, but who was also a Theosophist and, as it happens, a believer in the existence of fairies. In response to a public debate about a set of photographs that apparently show two young girls from Cottingley playing with fairies, Doyle published *The Coming of the Fairies* (1922) in which he asserted the veracity of the photographs and defended fairy belief in general. On the background of the "Cottingley Fairies" photographs, see Lynch (2006). Furthermore, an organisation named the Fairy Investigation Society was active in Britain from 1927 to around 1990 and counted Walt Disney among its members in its heydays in the 1950s (Young 2013). Long-time secretary of the society, Marjorie Johnson, put together a collection of fairy encounters, most of which were penned down in the 1950s. The collection was only published in the year 2000 (Johnson 2000).

languages and stories of the many races that are from our Home" (2009). Three interrelated developments seem to have taken place in this process: Graves was pushed somewhat to the background and equivalent Wiccan ideas came more to the front; the focus on the Tuatha Dé Dannan lessened in favour of a broader identification with also other kinds of kin folk, especially elves; and Tolkien lore was increasingly integrated into the beliefs of the Tribunal.

The integration of Tolkien material was championed by two of the three original American members, Lady Danu and James Vincenzio. Danu describes Vincenzio as a "Tolkien enthusiast", and the "refounding" of the Tribunal's history carried out by his Circle of the Quendi included a harmonisation of the existing Changeling lore with *S*.[268] According to Danu, the members of the Tribunal believe to be "Elvyn or Faerie", the Elvyn corresponding to the Valar[269] and the Faeries to the Quendi (290909). The Elvyn are the "firstborn" and are said to have "had a hand" in the creation of the Faeries, something which corresponds more or less to the relation between the Valar and the Quendi in Tolkien's literary mythology. It is a matter of debate in the Tribunal, however, whether the Elvyn created the lesser kin folk or whether these simply belong to subsequent and less powerful generations. In any case, the distinction between the Elvyn and Faeries is not cut in stone. In our communication, Danu also used "the Elvyn" to refer to kin folk in general and sometimes equated the Elvyn with the Elves, while at other times considering the Valar to be a pantheon set apart from the lesser kin folk.[270]

The Tribunal of the Sidhe has developed rationalisations and justifications for their integration of Tolkien's fiction into their religious practice and beliefs. A central notion is that Tolkien is the Tribunal's historian. Indeed, Danu told me that "after many months of talking and reading [in or around 1985] it dawned on us that Tolkien was our historian, but that he had to change some things to make the story less controversial. [… He told the] *history* of our people through his form of *myth*" (290909; emphasis added). Clearly, Danu here ascribes more reference authority to Tolkien's literary mythology than the

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[268] One might speculate that the Circle of the Quendi puts a stronger emphasis on Tolkien's lore than other circles of the Tribunal. I therefore tried to get in touch with Vincenzio through Lady Danu, but unfortunately the Circle of the Quendi wished to remain closed.

[269] And perhaps to the Maiar as well.

[270] It might be that the terminology of the Tribunal is just shaky, but there is another imaginable explanation. Given that the Tribunal of the Sidhe was founded in 1985, it is possible that the group not also read *S*, but also studied Tolkien's *Lost Tales* (*LT I*; *LT II*), the first two volumes of *HoMe* that had been published in 1983 and 1984. Coincidence or not, the Tribunal's terminology is more similar to that of *The Lost Tales*, Tolkien's first version of his mythology, than to the final version of the Legendarium published as *S*. For example, the Elves are sometimes referring to as "fairies" in the early texts (e.g. *LT I* 19), an equation also made by Danu. Also like Danu, Tolkien used the term Valar both in a narrow sense referring to the pantheon and (at least on one occasion; *LT I* 65) in an expanded sense that included numerous lesser spirits, including sylphs and pixies, which had entered Eä together with the greater Valar (*LT I* 66). Many of these lesser spirits are furthermore nature spirits associated with Yavanna who plays a significant role in the Tribunal's rituals.

Neo-Pagans treated above (in section 8.3.2). However, Danu also pointed out to me that the Tribunal's reading of Tolkien differs from that of Tië eldaliéva (cf. ch. 16) in that "we do not take Tolkien's works *verbatim*" (Danu 290909).[271]

In practice, the Tribunal approaches Tolkien's literary mythology in a mytho-cosmological mode. That is to say, the group uses a strategy of selective reference ascription that attributes greater referentiality to the supernatural inventory of Tolkien's narrative world than to its history. Let us took, in turn, at the referentiality ascribed to the Valar, the Quendi, and the narrative world's history. The Tribunal members consider the Valar and lesser spirits of Tolkien's world to refer quite literally to the existence of such beings in the actual world. This literal affirmation of the Valar underlies the rituals directed to Yavanna and other members of the Tolkienesque pantheon. The Tribunal also considers Tolkien's Quendi to refer to real beings in the actual world, but this reference is not literal. It rather has the character of 'inverted euhemerism', in so far as Tolkien's relatively human-like Quendi are taken to refer to the relatively less human-like and essentially spiritual astral kin folk. This interpretive move underpins the assertions of those members who claim to be Changeling Quendi. Even though Danu describes Tolkien's as the group's historian, the Tribunal actually does not integrate any of the events in Tolkien's literary mythology into their own religious historiography. It is rather from Graves's account of the Tuatha de Dannan that the Tribunal has the belief that the kin folk used to live with humans until the great strife. Tolkien's narrative shares two motifs with Graves, namely that the Elves/*sídhe* used to rule the world and that the Elves constitute a superior race, but Tolkien lacks the motif a war between humans and Elves. When Danu says that Tolkien is the group's historian that should not be taken to mean that the Tribunal members believe that there is any overlap between the string of events in Tolkien's narrative world and the string of events of the actual world. The point is instead that Tolkien's literary mythology is an imagined story about real supernatural beings: the Valar and the Quendi as examples of the kin folk.

The Tribunal of the Sidhe further legitimises its use of Tolkien's mythology by granting Tolkien himself supernatural power, wisdom, and purpose. Says Danu,

> With magickal research we found that [...] JRR Tolkien was a Bard of the Kin Folk [...]. Tolkien was/is a changeling himself. [...] He is known to the people [=the Tuatha; the Changelings] as Tymmedyn Green, a Lord of the elemental North (290909).

I propose to refer to this move as a *source-product reversal*.[272] Rather than admitting that they themselves drew on Tolkien (source) to develop their beliefs in Changelings (pro-

[271] As we shall see in chapter 16, the main difference between Tië eldaliéva and the Tribunal of the Sidhe is actually not that Tolkien is read *verbatim* by the former and not by the latter, but rather that Tolkien's mythology is used more exclusively by Tië eldaliéva while the Tribunal synthesises it with and subordinates it to other material.

duct), they claim that Tolkien was himself a Changeling (product > source) who chose to incarnate and write the Changelings' history (source > product). Actually, not only Tolkien is cast in this hagiographic way. Members of the Tribunal believe that Graves "had kinship with us", and Danu speculates that "Marion [Zimmer Bradley] and her brother Paul could be changelings though they have not been open about it yet" (Danu 290909).

Let me sum up the discussion so far. The beliefs and practices of the Tribunal of the Sidhe combine elements from several traditions: Wicca (duotheology; ritual formats and ritual calendar); Graves (the historicity of the Tuatha Dé Dannan); a spiritist and theosophical tradition with Flammarion, Evans-Wentz, and Fortune (the reality of astral fairies and changelings); and Tolkien's literary mythology (Quendi and Valar). The result is a new tradition of 'Changeling religion'. The Tribunal's Changeling religion is a religious synthesis, for it has emerged, through the creative and selective combination and reinterpretation of elements from various source traditions, as a new, independent, and stable tradition of its own. As we have, elements from Tolkien's literary mythology have been integrated on all levels: into the ritual practice of the group (Valar rituals), into the identity of the members (especially those who identify particularly as Quendi), and into the legitimisation strategy of the group (Tolkien as bard of the kin folk). For this reason, the religion of the Tribunal of the Sidhe can further be categorised as Tolkien-integrating (or broader: fiction-integrating) religion.

10.3. Religious Blending on the Concept Level: Domestication and Compression in the Tribunal of the Sidhe

The Tribunal's synthesis of ideas from Graves, Evans-Wentz, Tolkien, and others into a Changeling mythology of their own revolves around the two key notions of 'kin folk' and 'Changelings'. It is therefore worth looking closer at these two notions and the conceptual blending processes through which they have been constructed. In the first of the two sub-sections that follow, I look at how the Tribunal of the Sidhe has constructed the new category of 'kin folk' as a hypernym for all kinds of fey creatures and how this entails a change in the conceptualisation of the individual kinds of fey creatures, such as the *sídhe*. In the second sub-section, I analyse how the members have developed their identity as Changelings in two steps, first by 'compressing' the earlier notion that one can communicate with fairies into the conviction that some humans are Changelings

[272] The source-product reversal is a very common rhetoric move. The term is inspired by Michael Barkun's notion of fact-fiction reversal. Barkun uses this term to denote an interpretive move among conspiracy theorists in which "the commonsense distinction between fact and fiction melts away […] [and] the two exchange places, […] [so that it is claimed that] what the world at large regards as fact is actually fiction, and […] that what seems to be fiction is really fact" (2003, 29). Note that Barkun here uses the term fiction in a broader and more colloquial sense than I do.

possessing fairy souls, and second by claiming that they are themselves in fact Changelings.

10.3.1. *Sídhe*, Satyrs, and Elves as 'Kin Folk': Domestication through Categorisation

The Tribunal of the Sidhe believes that the stories about *sídhe*, *álfar*, satyrs, and so on from various mythologies refer to real spiritual beings. Members of the Tribunal furthermore identify with many different types of fey creatures: the group has *sídhe* members, satyr members, and so on (Rose 2009). This is possible, because the 'true nature' of the various mythological beings (and of the Quendi and Valar as well) is understood through the Tribunal's own notion of 'kin folk'. In other words, the mythological races and (allegedly) historical peoples whom Tribunal members believe in and identify with become subject to a form of *domesticating categorisation*.

This domesticating categorisation combines the two main processes of religious conceptual blending that I discerned in chapter 4, namely concept construction and resemantisation. Most obviously, 'kin folk' is a newly constructed category, indeed an over-category encompassing elves, *sídhe*, phookas, and so forth. Furthermore, while the Tribunal continues to reckon with the existence of various fey beings, these beings undergo a process of resemantisation in two says. First, the classification of the individual few species as kin folk forces them to lose many of their distinctive features. For instance, in Greek mythology, satyrs are goat-like male companions of Pan. In the Tribunal, satyrs are also and primarily a form of kin folk, i.e. spirits who hail from the astral plane and who can choose to reincarnate in human or non-human form on the physical plane. Second, the categorisation as kin folk causes the loss of the exclusivity which the various fey creatures enjoy within their own traditions. For instance, in Tolkien's literary mythology the Valar, Maiar, and Quendi are the only benign, super-human beings, but as members of the kin folk category their exclusivity is diluted by the co-presence of satyrs, fairies, *sídhe*, gnomes, and so on. This also means that the differences and the hierarchy between different super-human races which exist within the Tribunal's individual source traditions – such as that between the Valar and the Quendi in Tolkien's literary mythology – becomes blurred and reduced. In Tolkien's literary mythology, there is a categorical difference between the divine Valar and created Quendi. In our communication, Danu sometimes maintained this distinction, counting the Valar but not the Quendi among the Elvyn, i.e. among the 'divine' kin folk with creative powers to whom rituals are directed. At other times, however, this distinction seemed less important to her, and she told me that some members of the Tribunal identify with the Elvyn, thus indicating that they are not categorically different from other kin folk after all.[273]

[273] The process of domesticating categorisation is similar to the process of synonymisation discussed in chapter 4 above. Both processes involve the compression of several notions into one, and hence cause a re-

If the Valar/Elvyn at least sometimes are taken to constitute a special kind of divine kin folk, the *sídhe* and the Tuatha Dé Dannan take up a special position as well. They do so in a different way. Both designations, 'Sidhe' and 'Tuatha Dé Dannan', can either be used to refer to a special type of kin folk or to refer *meronymically* to the kin folk in general. We have an example of the meronymical use in the very name of the group, Tribunal of the Sidhe, where 'the Sidhe' stand for all kin folk. Lady Danu did not experience the various types of kin folk and the various designations for them to be confusing or problematic. Perhaps this is partly because the exact nature of the kin folk is ultimately not what matters most to the members of the Tribunal. More important is their own identification as Changelings and as members of the kin folk in general.

10.3.2. The Category of Changelings: Constructing an Identity through Compression

Like the notion of kin folk, the notion of Changelings emerges as a result of religious conceptual blending of elements from existing fairy lore. In the latter case, the process of religious blending is different, however, and can best be described in terms of *compression*. Indeed, members of the Tribunal construct their Changeling identity by compressing theories *about fairies* (which I use here as a shorthand for all kinds of fey beings) into an identity *as Changelings* (i.e. as Fairies in a human body).[274] They compress the notion (from Flammarion and Evans-Wentz) that one can communicate with spiritual fairies into the postulate of being themselves Fairy souls in human bodies. And/or they compress the idea (from Murray, Gardner, and Graves) of being the cultural heirs to the human 'fairy' tribes, especially the Tuatha Dé Dannan, into a claim of physical descent from these aborigines.

This compression of fairy communion into Fairy identity, which the Tribunal of the Sidhe shares with the Elven movement, is the result of a gradual, semiotic process within the 'fairy spirituality' segment of the cultic milieu, a process which has stretched over most of the twentieth century. While the self-identification as Fairy is the most extreme claim one can make within fairy spirituality, a number of less far-reaching claims have been made previously, each of which has increased the plausibility of a subsequent and slightly bolder claim. I have sorted the principal fairy spirituality claims below according

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semantisation of the compressed notions. Furthermore, like domesticating categorisation also synonymisation can lead to the construction of a new religious concept. That is for example the case when Jediists claim that chi, prana, Vril, and so forth all refer to the same *real* power, namely the Force. There is also a crucial difference between synonymisation and domesticating categorisation. Where synonymisation entails the complete *equation* of two or more concepts, domesticating categorisation merely fits the source notions into a new over-category. *In casu*, elves, *sídhe*, and phookas are classified as members of the same category, kin folk, but they are not identified with each other.

[274] I capitalise the word Fairy when referring to an individuals who identify themselves as fairies.

to increased compression (and boldness). People involved in fairy spirituality have variously claimed,

(1) to be able to see or sense fairies
(2) to be able to communicate with fairies
(3) to have a privileged relationship with fairies (e.g. to have a fairy teacher, protector, or spirit guide)
(4) to have been possessed (either unwillingly or as a medium) by a fairy
(5) to have been taken to Faery by the fairies
(6) to be able to travel to Faery at will
(7) to share in some way the Fairy nature, essence, or spirit
(8) to have a Fairy soul or Fairy soul-part co-existing with one's own
(9) to be oneself a Fairy in a spiritual sense (i.e. being a Fairy soul in a human body)
(10) to be oneself a Fairy/Elf in a physical/genetic sense

Flammarion, Evans-Wentz, and others claimed in the early twentieth century to be able to communicate with fairies; and many modern Pagans maintain that they are able to see or sense or work with fairies or that they have a fey creature as their personal spirit guide (claims 1-4). At least since the 1960s, members of Feraferia (cf. Ellwood 1971, 135-136) and likeminded Pagans and Neo-Shamans have gone one step further by claiming to be able to travel to Faery/Otherworld and meet the fairies in their own world (claims 5-6). From the 1970s onwards, people have claimed to be themselves Fairies or Elves, such as we have seen it in this chapter and shall see it again in the next (claims 7-10). It is a striking feature of fairy spirituality that new beliefs have been added without giving up the old ones. For example, self-identified Elves continue to see fairies in their garden.[275] In other words, modern fairy spirituality appears as a cumulative tradition which has slowly realised an endogenous drive towards Fairy identification.[276]

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[275] The angel movement constitutes a similar case. So-called Earth Angels who claim to be incarnated angels continue to invoke their personal guardian angel and the cosmic archangels when practicing angel healing. Also here, the same mythological being simultaneously occupies the position as special self and supernatural helper/other. The Earth Angel movement is large an audience cult centred on Doreen Virtue's books (2002; 2005; 2006; 2007). Virtue's homepage can be visited at http://www.angeltherapy.com/ [210812].

[276] Over the course of her own life, Lady Danu had drifted from fairy belief to Fairy identification in the same way as the fairy spiritual milieu. Already as a child, Danu could "hear and see the people, Fey folk" (290909). First she "was not sure who they were", but it clicked when her great grandparents spoke of "the garden friends" and when she at the age of eight began to borrow her own books on mythological beings at the library (Danu 290909). When she was introduced to the notion of Changelings later in life, that idea seemed plausible because she already believed firmly in fairies. Other self-identified Elves I have talked to, reported similar experiences of imaginary childhood friends which they either then or later interpreted as fairies. Perhaps that is not so surprising, for Sarah Pike has noted that recollections of childhood interaction with an imaginary world, including spirits, fairies, and other beings drawn from folk tradition, are very common among Pagans in general. In Pike's words, many adult Pagans used to be "magical children" (2001, 157).

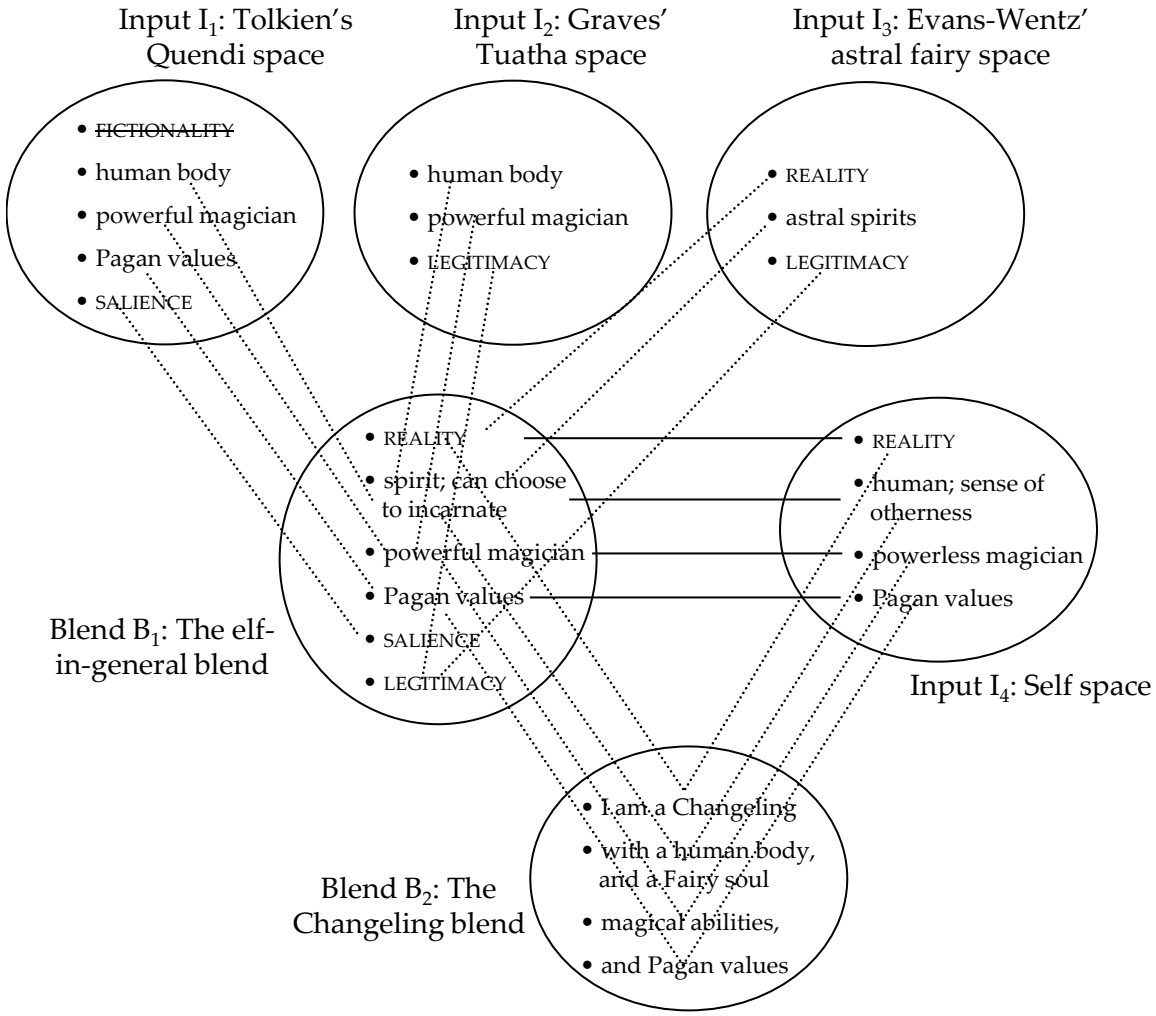
Exogenous factors have also contributed to the emergence of self-identified Elves and Fairies, however. The most important factor has been the humanisation of non-humans in fantasy fiction, a process which was initiated by Tolkien. Indeed, *LR* swept away earlier images of cute Victorian fairies, malicious mound-dwellers, and Santa's little helpers and recast the elf as a wise, powerful, nearly immortal, beautiful, and environmentally aware magician *with a human appearance*. In other words, Tolkien made the elf an attractive role model for contemporary Pagans and magicians. As such, *LR* and *S* greatly facilitated the emergence of the self-identification as Elf (and Changeling), even when this identification got much of its meaning and most of its legitimacy from its integration with more prestigious traditions of fairy spirituality. Indeed, in the Tribunal of the Sidhe, Tolkien's literary mythology seems to supply the imaginary *salience* on which the Changeling identity is founded, while the traditions from Graves and Evans-Wentz supply the lion's share of this identity's *legitimacy*.

It is illuminating the draw on conceptual blending theory (cf. section 4.2.2) to illustrate how the Changeling identity is semantically composed. A graphic illustration of the Changeling Identity Blend is given in figure 10.1.

The Changeling identity emerges as a result of two semantic operations. First, an image of the 'elf-in-general' is constructed through the selective projection of elements from Tolkien's Quendi, Graves' Tuatha, and Evans-Wentz' fairies into a new, semantic space. From Tolkien's Quendi are taken their character (powerful magician, Pagan values), ontology (human body), and imaginary salience – but not their fictionality. These features are combined with the alleged reality of the Tuatha Dé Dannan and the astral fairies and with the legitimacy and prestige enjoyed by Graves and Evans-Wentz in the cultic milieu. All this is projected into a new blended space. It is this blended image of the elf/*sídhe*/Tuatha-in-general which members of the Tribunal (and the Elven movement) identify with, rather than Tolkien's Quendi or Graves' Tuatha specifically. In a second move, features that are considered to be shared between the self and the elf-in-general (e.g. Pagan values, magical practice, and the sense of being psychologically or socially in some way different from most humans) can be projected into a second blended space of the Changeling self.[277] These shared features are connected via the Vital Relations of Analogy and Similarity, but are compressed into Identity (I am a Changeling) in the blend.

[277] Due to the semiotic focus of this thesis I do not discuss the psychology of those involved in Tolkien religion. It must be noted here, however, that those of my informants who feel to be Changelings or Elves typically report that they as children and young adults had unusual experiences and did not fit in well socially. For these individuals, the adoption of a none-human identity provides explanation and empowerment: Rather than being odd, they are in fact very special. I will touch upon this theme briefly again in section 11.3.3 on conversion to Elvishness and in section 14.3.3 on the Tolkien-affirming Elven group, Indigo Elves.

Figure 10.1. The Changeling Identity Blend



The Changelings furthermore legitimise their identity and this legitimisation has the character of source-product reversal. Rather than admitting that they have constructed the identity as Changelings (product) by drawing on Graves, Evans-Wentz, Tolkien, and pre-Christian mythologies (sources) as sketched above, they claim that the Changelings existed originally (product > source) and that the pre-Christian fairy folklore and the writings of Graves, Evans-Wentz, and Tolkien all constitute historiographical or literary interpretations of this real phenomenon (source > product). This source-product reversal intends to create a semiotic effect of veracity by postulating a 'true story behind the legend'.

10.4. The Social Organisation of the Tribunal of the Sidhe and the Group's Place within the Spiritual Tolkien Milieu

A few years after the formation of the Tribunal, Lady Danu and six other Changelings formed the Circle of the Sidhe, the first "open circle" that reached out to the public with

"open Sabbats" and a formalised "learning and recognition" system (Rose 2009). Other circles continued to hive off, and according to Danu the Tribunal now consists of more than 20 circles worldwide.[278] These circles differ in size and openness. Lady Danu's current circle, the Circle of the Coyote, was founded in 1999 and is both the largest and the most open, hosting eight open Sabbats each year. While most circles have between 3 and 20 members, the Circle of the Coyote had 25 active members when I talked to Lady Danu in 2009. It presently has 115 registered users on its homepage (per 180712, not counting myself).

The data that I have collected about the Tribunal of the Sidhe reveal little detail about the nature of the organisation. I do not know, for instance, how the circles relate to each other, how great the membership turnover is, or how power is negotiated and distributed within the movement. But I do know that the circles are organised as (offline) communities rather than as mere networks, that members meet regularly for both social and ritual purposes, and that they share an explicit identity as Changelings. The plausibility of this identity is maintained through collective activities and a body of Changeling mythology about the astral Home, the great strife, and Tolkien as the kin folk's bard. Members share these beliefs and new members are systematically instructed in them. The growth of the Tribunal shows that this is an effective cocktail. Especially important is the fact that some of the movement growth can be accounted for by the socialisation of the second generation. Lady Danu pointed out that James Vincenzio's son, James Vincenzio, Jr., leads a circle that is made up mostly of children of first-generation Changelings.

Since the Tribunal of the Sidhe was founded as an offline group, outreach has taken place mostly in the local areas of the circles. Online outreach is quite new and the Tribunal is therefore poorly integrated with the Internet-based Tolkien milieu. More strikingly, the Tribunal and the Elven movement seem to have developed in parallel and with little mutual contact despite the obvious similarities between the two and despite the fact that the Elven movement and the Tribunal emerged from the same milieu of American West Coast Pagans and magicians.[279] I am not sure why that is so, but it might have to do with differences in organisation, the Tribunal having adopted a Wiccan-style organisation with coven-like circles and a study programme for new members, while the Elven movement is a looser network of solitaires. In any case, it is to the use of Tolkien's literary mythology in the Elven movement that we turn in the following chapter. Before

[278] Many of these circles have their own 'group' with members, information, and discussions on the homepage of Danu's Circle of the Coyote. See http://thechangeling.ning.com [180712].

[279] It was not until 2008 that Danu's group was found by Calantirniel of Tië eldaliéva and a link became established between the Tribunal of the Sidhe and the online Tolkien milieu. A further indication of the isolation of the Tribunal from the Tolkien milieu and the Elven movement is the fact that Orion Sandstorm (2012) does not refer to it in his 'Otherkin Timeline' which, by contrast, covers the early years of the Elven movement quite comprehensively.

doing so, let me illustrate the diversity of the Pagan appropriation of *S* with a brief discussing of two individuals who developed Tolkien-integrating Pagan paths in the 1980s and who still stick to them.

10.5. Some Other Tolkien-integrating Pagan Paths

Morcelu Atreides is a particularly interesting Tolkien-inspired Pagan.[280] Raised a Mormon, Morcelu encountered *S* in 1986 when he was 14 years old, and helped along by a high school sweetheart who had been raised with Tolkien's works "as a belief", he embraced Tolkien's Legendarium as the foundational text for his own spirituality. Like the members of the Tribunal of the Sidhe, Morcelu works rituals with Varda and the other Valar and uses meditational techniques to connect with them. Morcelu made it clear to me, however, that he does not see the Valar as gods, but as "teachers and guiders". Differing from the Tribunal, however, Morcelu considers Eru to be the only real deity in Tolkien's mythology. Being a "Polyfold Dualtheistic practitioner", however, he has felt impelled to equip Eru with a spouse. There is no mention of such a spouse in Tolkien's writings, but Morcelu reasons that you "can't have a father without a mother". Morcelu's literal affirmation of the spiritual beings in Tolkien's literary mythology is mirrored by a mytho-historical reading of Tolkien's narratives as ancient history. Morcelu believes that the events of *S*, *H*, and *LR* "unfolded before Pangaea was broken apart" and reasons that all traces of Middle-earth were swept away by "the flood that is recorded in Genesis" at the end of the Fourth Age, i.e. the age which begins after the destruction of the Ring in *LR*.[281] Drawing on the appendices in *LR*, Morcelu has furthermore constructed his own ritual calendar. Parallel to his spiritual engagement with the Legendarium, Morcelu has been active in the Tolkien language community and taught himself Quenya.

Morcelu is not only interesting because he has developed a synthetic Pagan-Tolkien tradition like that of the Tribunal of the Sidhe, but also because he is teaching the tradition to others. He has taught a handful of people, but only two have completed his instruction program, partly because only those who successfully establish contact with the Valar can proceed beyond a certain step.[282] Morcelu told me that of all his students, his own daughter (who was 15 years old in 2010) is most skilled in communicating with the Valar.

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[280] This paragraph builds on email contact with Morcelu in the spring of 2010.

[281] Morcelu here departs from the standard mytho-historical reading of Tolkien which equates the Flood in Genesis and the 'historical' event behind the Atlantis myth with the destruction of Númenor (during the Second Age of Arda).

[282] Morcelu has no homepage. He told me that he does not actively proselytise for his faith, but simply teaches those individuals who find him. He also told me that he had become particularly cautious after an incident where he and two fellow Pagans were beaten up by Christians who mistook them for Satan-worshippers.

Another Tolkien-integrating Pagan path is Tony "Brian Dragon" Spurlock's so-called Draconian Pictish Elven Witchcraft. Spurlock's tradition is an off-shoot of Victor and Cora Anderson's Feri tradition and integrates elements from Robert E. Howard's *Conan the Barbarian* series and from Tolkien's literary mythology.[283] Both Morcelu and Spurlock profess to feel a connection with the Elves, both the elves of folklore and the Quendi of Tolkien's Legendarium, and at least Morcelu believes that Elves are being reincarnated into human bodies in this world at present. As far as I know, neither of the two believes to be Elves themselves, neither genetically so nor soul-wise.

[283] See http://www.pictdom.org/HidnKing.htm [041013].

Chapter 11. The Elven Movement: A Case Study of Construction and Maintenance of Plausibility

This chapter is concerned with the Elven movement, a loose network of individuals who self-identify as Elves.[284] It is relevant to include this movement in a book on Tolkien-based religion, because the identity of the 'awakened Elves' is inspired by Tolkien's Quendi. Furthermore, some of the self-identified Elves not only have a Tolkien-inspired Elven identity, but also integrate other elements from Tolkien's literary mythology into their spiritual practice, for example by invoking Eru and the Valar in ritual.

The chapter falls into three sections, the first two of which are dedicated to an historical overview of the Elven movement from its inception in the early 1970s until the present day. The first section covers the history of the Elven community from its formation as an audience cult around the Elf Queen's Daughters' magical Elven letters until the emergence of the Internet. I pay special attention to the Silver Elves, who took over the intellectual leadership of the movement from the Elf Queen's Daughters in the late 1970s and developed an Elven spiritual path, drawing on both *LR* and *S*. In the second section, I trace the history of the Elven movement from the launch of the Elfinkind Digest in 1990 up to the movement's current constitution as a largely online-based community of self-identified Elves. In this section I also show how the Elven movement is embedded within larger social formations in the post-traditional religious field. Throughout its history, the Elven movement has constituted a fringe group within the broader Neo-Pagan movement, but in the 21st century most self-identified Elves have come to see themselves primarily as part of the Otherkin movement, a movement which comprises self-identified Dragons, Angels, and so on besides awakened Elves.

An analysis of the role of Tolkien's literary mythology for the Elven movement is embedded within the historical sections. I demonstrate that the Elven movement was initially inspired by the attractive image of the Elf provided by *LR*, even to the degree that prominent self-identified Elves suggest today that if Tolkien's narratives had not been published, there had probably never been an Elven movement. I also analyse how the Elven community reacted to later additions to Tolkien's mythological corpus. As we shall see, the Elves embraced *S* (published 1977) as this work provided additional information about the Quendi that helped consolidate the Elven identity and hence the Elven

[284] I refer to this network interchangeably as the Elven movement, the Elven community, and the awakened Elves.

movement. Peter Jackson's movie adaptations of *LR* (2001-2003) led to an increase in the number of self-identified Elves, but also to heated disagreements about Tolkien's place in the movement. Generally speaking, the self-identified Elves acknowledge Tolkien's enormous importance for the movement, but also struggle with the fact that that Tolkien's books are works of fiction. They will therefore typically stress that while Tolkien's fiction helped them realise their own Elven nature, they do not identify as Quendi, but as those 'real' *álfar* or fairies who inspired Tolkien's tales. They will say so even if their notion about what Elves/*álfar* are is evidently inspired by Tolkien.[285] We can thus say that there is a tendency within the Elven movement to *assimilate* ideas from Tolkien's literary mythology, i.e. to adopt ideas from Tolkien, but deny the fictional origins of these ideas.

The third section of this chapter is concerned with the construction and maintenance of plausibility in the Elven movement. I take up three issues regarding plausibility. First, I analyse the semiotic strategies of rationalisation, legitimisation, and relativisation which the Elves use to construct and maintain the plausibility of their core claim 'we are Elves'. The Elves rationalise their Elvishness by constructing elaborate explanations of how it is possible to be an Elf, and they legitimise it with reference to authoritative sources and to their own experiences. Additionally, they sometimes protect their claim to Elvishness by relativising it, stating that their Elven identity is a matter of 'what feels right' rather than of what can be objectively proved. Second, I look at 'conversion' to Elvishness. Drawing on Tanya Luhrmann (1989), I argue that the adoption of an Elven identity can best be considered a process of interpretive and epistemic drift. I identify four stages of the epistemic drift (fascination with Elves; identification with Elves; hunch of being an Elf; certainty of being an Elf) and identify the practices which propel the drift (e.g. role-playing and activity in online groups). Third, I evaluate the strength of the Elven movement's plausibility structures. I identify those social and cultural structures which help maintain plausibility in the Elven movement (fantasy fiction, the cultic milieu, online communities, movement intellectuals), and discuss the plausibility threat posed by sceptic outsiders and debunking former members.

11.1. Tolkienesque Beginnings: The Elf Queen's Daughters and the Silver Elves

LR introduced a new image of the Elf as a powerful, human-like magician. It is therefore not surprising that the first individuals who began identifying as Elves were practitioners of Western magic. These magicians had read Tolkien in the late 1960s and began to self-identify as Elves in the early 1970s. Or, as they say themselves, at that time they began to awaken and realise their true Elven nature. This section focuses on two early

[285] I have depicted the self-identified Elves' Quendi-inspired notion of the 'real' Elves in figure 4.3 in chapter 4 above.

Elven groups, the Elf Queen's Daughters and the Silver Elves. These groups were among the first self-identified Elves, and are furthermore interesting because they have in turn fulfilled the role of chief movement intellectuals in the Elven community.[286] Especially the Silver Elves, Michael J. and Martha C. Love, also known as Zardoa Silverstar and Silver Flame, are important because they are still active today, having spearheaded the negotiation of the Elven identity, spirituality, and mission for more than three decades.[287]

The beginning of the Elven movement can be traced back to an Ouija board session around 1972 in Carbondale, Illinois. In this session, a spirit allegedly instructed two magicians, Arwen and Elanor, to form a group to be called the Elf Queen's Daughters (SE 310813). Arwen and Elanor were not their given names, but magical names taken from *LR*.[288] After the séance, the two magicians began writing Elven Magic Letters, some of which were published in *Green Egg*, the official magazine of the Church of All Worlds

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[286] Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison use the term 'movement intellectuals' to refer to the informal leaders of social movements. As they put it, movement intellectuals "articulate the knowledge interests and cognitive identity" of their movements by example (1991, 98; cf. Laycock 2012b, 160). The Silver Elves have certainly functioned as role models, though they told me that they do not see themselves as intellectuals (310813).

[287] No account of the history of the Elven movement has yet been published. That said, Orion Sandstorm, who is himself a Dragon person, has taken an important first step to document the movement's history by drawing up the *Otherkin Timeline: The Recent History of Elfin, Fae, and Animal People* (2012). The timeline builds on a large number of published works and online sources, many of which have been authored by individuals who themselves identify as Elves or Therianthropes (i.e. people who consider themselves to be animals as well as humans). The historical overview of the Elven movement given in this chapter is indebted to Sandstorm. I also draw on material from the Silver Elves with whom I corresponded in December 2009 and March 2010, and who kindly sent me a copy of Zardoa Silverstar's master's thesis in depth psychology from Sonoma State University (submitted as Zardoa Love; Love 2005). Zardoa's thesis includes both historical information about the Elven movement and systematic reflections on Elven spirituality, including Tolkien's place in it. The Silver Elves furthermore read and commented on an earlier draft of this chapter for which I am most grateful. More detailed information about the formation and history of the Elven movement can undoubtedly be found in the publications by the Silver Elves in Pagan magazines (e.g. 1986), in their Elven letters (2001a; 2007; 2012a), and in their 23 additional self-published compilations and works (2001b; 2005; 2011; 2012b; 2012d; 2012e; 2012f; 2012g; 2012h; 2012i; 2012j; 2012k; 2012l; 2012m; 2013a; 2013b; 2013c; 2013d; 2013e; 2013f; 2013g). A comprehensive analysis of this extensive material falls outside the scope of this work, however. The Silver Elves can be visited at http://silverelves.angelfire.com/ [060812]. Recently, Emily Carding has published the book *Faery Craft* (2012) in which she discusses various forms of fairy spirituality from an insider's perspective. Her book includes an interview with the Silver Elves (Carding 2012, 253-257). The Silver Elves are also mentioned in Christine Wicker's *Not in Kansas Anymore* (2005, 67-68, 107, 234). Dennis Gaffin's recent *Running with the Fairies*, which gives an insider's perspective on contemporary fairy belief in Ireland, includes a discussion of "fairypeople", i.e. people who "know that that they have been reincarnated from the Fairy Realm" (2012, back cover). These fairypeople hold beliefs strikingly similar to the self-identified Elves', but Gaffin does not link up his discussion with the international Otherkin or Elven movements.

[288] Arwen (Si: Noble maiden) is the Elf princess who marries Aragorn and chooses a mortal doom (cf. section 7.2.3). Elanor (Si: Star-sun) is the name of a flower in Lothlórien and of Samwise Gamgee's eldest daughter.

and a leading Pagan magazine in America at the time. Arwen and Elanor established a "vortex" (local centre) in Aurora, Illinois called the Fox River Elves, and new "vortices" (local centres) were established throughout America.[289]

According to the Silver Elves, the Elf Queen's Daughters sang (and still sing) hymns to Elbereth Gilthoniel (151209). That is interesting, for the Valië Elbereth/Varda is the central Vala in the Elven narrative religion in *LR* (cf. section 7.2.4). The Elf Queen's Daughters thus did not only adopt an Elven identity from *LR*, but also took over the Elves' veneration for Elbereth, hence modelling a part of their own religious practice on narrative religion from *LR*. Despite all of this, Tolkien's literary mythology remained more an add-on to the spirituality of the Elf Queen's Daughters rather than its core. Fundamentally, the Elf Queen's Daughters were Wiccans (Love 2005, 32) with a strong Graves-inspired emphasis on the Goddess. They were also somewhat eccentric feminists, referring to all members as "sisters" regardless of their gender.[290] Furthermore, Arwen and Elanor were well versed in esoteric lore and specialists in divinatory practices like the Tarot, the I Ching, astrology, and the Ouija board (SE 191209). They deeply impressed the Silver Elves who describe them as the "most adept necromancers we've ever encountered" and as being able to "influence people by their mere presence and make you feel […] that the magic is real" (quoted in Sandstorm 2012, 10).

Zardoa Love became aware of the Elf Queen's Daughters in 1975 while working in a vegetarian restaurant in Carbondale (2005, 32). At this time Zardoa was already an initiate in the yoga systems of Transcendental Meditation, the Ananda Marga Society, and the Divine Light Mission, but he felt that he had not yet found his right spiritual path (McGowan 2011). One day, while browsing the occult bookstore down the hall from the vegetarian restaurant, he stumbled across some of the Elf Queen's Daughters' Elven Magic Letters. Though he felt a bit awkward about their feminism, he contacted the group and began receiving their letters (Love 2005, 32). A couple of months later, Zardoa visited the Fox River Elves in Aurora, and one evening he had a powerful awakening experience. In that moment "I knew", he writes, "that I was an elf and that I had been awaiting all my life for my kindred to come and find me" (Love 2005, 33; see also Carding, 2012, 255). Two members of the group gave Zardoa a secret soul (or "ba kah") name which had been channelled through the Ouija board, and he later received the Elven name Gildor (from *LR*) from Arwen and Elanor (SE 310813). The Silver Elves explained that the strong awakening experience was no requirement for membership of the Elf Queen's Daughters and that no formal initiation took place (310813). About nine months later, however, Zardoa himself decided to mark his awakening, and together with another newly awakened Elf he swore to pursue the Elven way both in this life and in later reincarnations "until all our kindred have been found and awakened" (Love

[289] Estimates of the number of vortices vary from six (the more likely number) to sixty (McGowan 2011; Sandstorm 2012, 11).

[290] They also promoted a gender neutral spelling of human as "humon" (cf. Sandstorm 2012, 16).

2005, 34). Zardoa founded his own vortex, The Elves of the Southern Woodlands, in Carbondale.

The Elf Queen's Daughters published several articles on Goddess spirituality and environmentalism in *Green Egg* in which they referred to themselves as "Elves" and "Elven Daughters". Though they never explained exactly what they meant by these self-identifications (Sandstorm 2012, 13-14), some clues are given in an article of theirs entitled "O'Mother" (EQD 1976; quoted in Sandstorm 2012, 16). The article includes numerous references to Varda and an illustration depicting her as the living Mother Earth. This identification of Varda with the personified Earth is foreign to Tolkien's mythology, and it is clear that the Elf Queen's Daughters here used Varda/Elbereth simply as a name for the Goddess or Gaia and did not consider Varda to be a discrete, spiritual being. The article furthermore suggests that all people who respect the Goddess are 'Elves' in a metaphorical sense. This implies that the "Elf Queen" to whom the group's name refers is no other than the Goddess/Gaia/Varda herself. We can conclude from this that the Elf Queen's Daughters sincerely believed in the existence of a feminine, divine power, but that their identification as Elves was of a more playful and metaphorical nature. When Margot Adler interviewed the Elf Queen's Daughters, they even told her about their Elven Letters that "[m]ost of it's nonsense. […] We don't take it too seriously" (Adler 1986, 319).[291] The Silver Elves also explained to me that a member of the Elf Queen's Daughters, Melryn, had "laughed affectionally" when Zardoa told her about his ritual pledge to pursue the Elven way. She clearly did not take that too literally or seriously either (SE 310813).

In any case, the rigour of the Elf Queen's Daughters was short-lived. The Aurora Elves moved to San Francisco in 1976, and around 1977 the letter writing stopped. Some of the members founded the trans-rock elven band Aeron in 1978 and published the album *Paltereon: The Far Memory of the Elves* in 1979 (SE 310813). The band's success was limited, however, and soon the Elf Queen's Daughters stopped presenting themselves publicly as Elves. From around 1979, some of the most important members began identifying instead as Tookes (after the Hobbit thains in *LR*, the Tooks; Love 2005, 36). Zardoa took his Elven identity and the pledge to awaken the Elves of the world more seriously. In 1979 or 1980 Zardoa and Silver Flame began to publish a new series of Magical Elven Love Letters. In the beginning they wrote as the Sylvan Elves, but since 1981 they have referred to themselves as the Silver Elves (Love 2005, 37-38).[292]

Both the Elf Queen's Daughters and the Silver Elves owed their Elven identity to Tolkien's writings. The Silver Elves even told me that "if Tolkien's works hadn't been published, it is likely that we would not have called ours'elves[293] Elves" (191209). It is

[291] Adler therefore discussed the Elf Queen's Daughters in her chapter on "Religions of paradox and play".

[292] The Silver Elves still write these letters and all of them are published, as Silver Elves (2001a; 2007; 2012a).

[293] The Silver Elves always apostrophise self as "s'elf".

interesting, however, to compare exactly how the two groups drew on Tolkien. Emerging before the publication of *S*, one could have expected the Elf Queen's Daughters to identify with Hobbits and humans and to perceive the Elves as supernatural others. If they had done so, they would have been like most other *LR*-inspired Pagans (cf. ch. 8). It is therefore remarkable that the Elf Queen's Daughters identified as Elves and considered Elbereth/Varda their deity. At first sight this religious use of *LR* looks quite different from the Neo-Pagans and hippies treated earlier. Upon closer scrutiny, however, it turns out that the Elf Queen's Daughters were not so different. As we have seen, the Elf Queen's Daughters considered Varda to be merely another name for the real Goddess and they confided to Adler that their use of Tolkien was ironic. What is more, after identifying as Elves for a few years some of the leaders gave up their Elven identity to become – indeed – Hobbits. After all, then, the Elf Queen's Daughters' use of Tolkien conformed pretty much to the standard pre-*S* pattern of reading Tolkien's literary mythology in the binocular mode.

The Silver Elves were different. Contrary to the Elf Queen's Daughters, who in the early 1970s had only been able to draw on *LR*, the Silver Elves adopted *S* when it was published in 1977 and hence drew on *LR* and *S* in combination. This seems to have consolidated their Elven identity (which they have retained till this day) and led them to incorporate parts of the narrative religion of *S* into their worldview and practice. We see this clearly in the first Magical Elven Love Letters, written in the early 1980s. These letters overflow with references to Tolkien's Elves and other topics from Tolkien's literary mythology which are creatively harmonised with theosophy, exo-theology, western Buddhism, and other traditions. The style is purposefully whimsical, but in the core, the letters tackle serious issues about spirituality, environmentalism, and the art of living.

Of the first twenty letters, thirteen include references to the narrative religion of Tolkien's literary mythology. These letters discuss Eru/Ilúvatar, Melkor, various Valar (Varda, Vána, Vairë, Mandos/Námo, and Manwë), identify (Mother) Earth with Arda (rather than with Varda), and speculate on the nature of the Elves. For instance, the Silver Elves write in one letter that

> Tolkien has it that when the worlds were first separated, the Elves were given a choice between returning beyond the veil to the safety of eternal life in Valinor or to remain in the world of Man – of manifestation – thus to suffer life after death after life after death in a seemingly endless round of incarnations. Each chose by their hearts [*sic*] desire, some returned to Valinor, others, loving Man – physical life – chose the long hard road of evolution's pathway (2001a, 36-37).

Tolkien did not really state this anywhere in his narratives. As we have seen in section 9.1.6, humans and Elves who have chosen a human doom do not reincarnate in Tolkien's narrative world, but live only once after which they go to the Halls of Mandos to wait until Ilúvatar calls them home. A belief in reincarnation, which the Silver Elves share with most individuals in the cultic milieu, is here *read into* Tolkien's text. What

matters here, however, is not that the Silver Elves paraphrase Tolkien incorrectly – which they have willingly admitted – but that they use his authority to legitimise their own belief, namely that they and other Elves have chosen to incarnate into this world to help and spiritually educate ordinary humans.[294] Tolkien's authority as a creative visionary and as a scholar of mythology allows his narratives to be used as a source of legitimisation, even though the Silver Elves clearly do not consider them to constitute a work of factual history.

Though the Elf Queen's Daughters and the Silver Elves differed somewhat in their use of Tolkien's narratives, both groups considered Tolkien's literary mythology to constitute a legitimate and central source of inspiration, albeit a non-referential one that must be read in the binocular mode. As the letter quote on the previous page illustrates, the Silver Elves ascribed much authority to Tolkien's texts, but at the same time they maintained that the general truth which these texts communicate, namely that an elder race exists and that humans and Elves used to live together in harmony, is presented within an entirely fictional frame. They told me that for them Tolkien's novels constitute "an inspiring, even sacred mythology, but were never taken as the literal truth" (SE 191209).

The explicit references to Tolkien's works grow rare in later letters. The Silver Elves told me that this was because they had not attempted to re-enact Tolkien's mythology, but had used his books "as emotive guidelines for creating [their] own Elven Culture" (191209). For example, they told me that it was Tolkien's invented languages that had inspired them to create their own 30,000 words language called Arvyndase (Silverspeech) (SE 151209).[295] The Silver Elves suggested to me that most other Elves share this approach of "starting out with Tolkien and creating from there" (120310). The connection with Tolkien is never lost, however, for as the Silver Elves pointed out, moving beyond Tolkien often involves drawing inspiration from authors and artists who have themselves been influenced by Tolkien's works (SE 151209).[296]

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[294] There is nothing peculiar about using an authoritative source to legitimise one's own beliefs. As Brian Malley has shown, this is "how the Bible works" (2004).

[295] A grammar and introduction to Arvyndase is available (Silver Elves 2012c). On their homepage, the Silver Elves offer an Elfin name in Arvyndase to any Elf or Otherkin who sends them an email with information about their awakening and kin self. Zardoa says that he has given out 5400 such Elfin names over the years.

[296] Some of the works which the Silver Elves told me have inspired themselves and other Elves include the music albums *Led Zeppelin IV* (1971) and Sally Oldfield's *Waterbearer* (1978); such novels as C.J. Cherryh's *The Dreamstone* (1983a) and *The Tree of Swords and Jewels* (1983b), Emma Bull's *The War for the Oaks* (1987), and Freda Warrington's *Elfland* (2009); and the esoteric historiographies by Laurence Gardner (2003) and Nicholas de Vere (2004) which will be discussed in chapter 12.

11.2. Growth and Consolidation: The Elven Community after 1990

The publication of *S* in 1977 did not immediately lead to a new wave of Elven awakenings. On first sight, this may seem surprising, for *S* provided much more information about the Elves than *LR* had done. There are good reasons, however, why *S* did not lead to massive conversions to Elvenhood. While *S* certainly focused on the Elves, it also presented them as less enchanting and attractive (cf. chapter 9). Furthermore, *S* was a much drier text than *LR*, and it was published at a moment when the Tolkien-hype of the late 1960s had long waned. In other words, *S* provided religious affordances with which an Elven identity could be consolidated, but it was not a text that could itself cause the emotional reaction needed for an awakening.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the Silver Elves continued to write their letters and in this way brought a few individuals to awakening.[297] Even so, the letters did not facilitate a major Elven awakening. As the Silver Elves say, it was only in the late 1990s, after they had "spent twenty some years sending out letters telling people it was alright to call thems'elves elves that the phenomenon really began to take hold, and people began to awaken and dare admit what they really felt about thems'elves" (120310).

Four factors led to the growth and consolidation of the Elven movement in the 1990s and 2000s, after *S* and the Silver Elves' letters had prepared the ground in the 1970s and 1980s. First, the advent of the Internet made it much easier for individuals sharing marginal interests (such as fairy spirituality) and identities (such as being an Elf) to find each other and build communities. Second, a broader Otherkin movement (of people identifying as various sorts of non-human beings) evolved out of the Elven movement and in turn provided the Elves with a set of ingenious rationalisations of the non-human identity and welcomed the Elves into their well-managed online communities. Third, role-playing games, such as White Wolf's *Changeling: The Dreaming* (Rein·Hagen 1995), gave players the opportunity to experiment with an identity as a fae being, and according to Lupa (2007, 50), playing such games facilitated the awakening of several Elves. Finally, Peter Jackson's movie adaptation of *LR* in the early 2000s led to a new wave of Tolkien-inspired Elven awakenings. In the sub-sections below I take a closer look at these four factors in turn.

11.2.1. The Internet and the Emergence of an Online Elven Community

The first step towards establishing an online Elven community was taken in 1990 by R'yankar Korra'ti, then a student at the University of Kentucky. R'yankar, who identified as an Elf himself, had been in contact with the Silver Elves and had run a small offline

[297] Lupa cites one elf, sade, who had awakened in response to an article (perhaps a letter) by the Silver Elves in *Circle Network News* around 1985 and who was still active in the Elven community twenty years later (Lupa 2007, 167).

group of Elves in the late 1980s (Sandstorm 2012, 25). In 1990, he launched the Elfinkind Digest, the first electronic mailing list for Elves (Sandstorm 2012, 25).[298] Though the Elfinkind Digest remained a small list with less than a hundred members, it is significant for a number of reasons. To begin with, it was the first Elven online site and it still exists today, its 23 years of existence bearing witness to the longevity and continuity of the Elven movement. Furthermore, already in 1990, the Elfinkind Digest spawned the first (small) offline gathering (Sandstorm 2012, 26), initiating a tradition of yearly regional gatherings throughout the United States. Finally, it was on this list that a broader Otherkin movement began to take form, emerging out of the established Elven community (cf. section 11.2.2 below).

Since 1990, several generations of social community and networking sites have appeared, including Yahoo! Groups (launched 1998), Facebook (launched 2004), and the blog-hosting site Tumblr (launched 2007). During the 2000s, it also becomes easier to set up sites based on discussion forums and to create private homepages. The online Elves were quick to take advantage of these new technologies as they appeared, though the older formats never went out of use completely. Accordingly, the history of the online Elven community can be split up in a number of phases corresponding to advances in the technology of the social Internet.

The first half of the 1990s was dominated by the Elfinkind Digest and similar simple electronic mailing lists, typically hosted on Usenet, the main newsgroup platform at the time. Most of these mailing lists were short-lived, though, and none of them was as important as the Elfinkind Digest. In the early 1990s, the online Elven community was very small, but that should come as no surprise, for only 0.8% of the American population had access to the Internet in 1990 and fewer still in the rest of the world.[299] While the Elves, many of whom were young students, were quick to use the new possibilities for networking supplied by the Internet, low Internet penetration effectively inhibited growth. It was only when the level of Internet connection increased significantly in the second half of the 1990s, that the Elven online community could be established in earnest.[300]

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, Elven community forming was furthermore facilitated by a new generation of community-building platforms, including Microsoft's MSN groups (launched 1995), Yahoo! Groups (launched 1998), and Google Groups (launched 2001). These platforms were more user-friendly than Usenet and introduced some simple file-sharing possibilities. The Elves especially established themselves on

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[298] http://www.murkworks.net/~elflist/ [290712]. The Elfinkind Digest can be joined from this page.

[299] See http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.NET.USER.P2 [130812].

[300] In 1996, Internet penetration in the United States reached 16.4% and in 2002 it passed 50%. See http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.NET.USER.P2 [130812]. The Internet penetration in Western Europe and the rest of the developed world roughly followed America, but since most self-identified Elves are American, I provide only American figures here.

Yahoo! Groups, a milestone being the founding of the group Elven Realities in 1999. Elven Realities is still one of the largest Elven hubs on the Internet with 730 members per 20 August 2012.[301]

During the 2000s, individual Elves also began to maintain their own homepages. Some examples include a site run by Rialian Ashtae, the founder and moderator of Elven Realities,[302] and the homepage of Arethinn (formerly Eshari) who is has organised the Otherkin gatherings known as MythiCalia and who moderates the *Otherkin* community on LiveJournal.[303] Other notable Elven Internet sites belong to Tara Erinn Pelton who claims to descend from the Tuatha Dé Dannan and to the Silver Elves.[304] The Elenari are a notable group of website-based Elves who claim to be Star Elves and whose homepage, the Elenari Nexus, has been online since 2000.[305] The importance of the Internet for the Elven movement cannot be overstated. More than the three other factors to be discussed below, the Internet propelled the Elven movement's growth and consolidation. Let me therefore take a closer look, first at the Internet's role for the growth of the Elven community, and second at its role for the consolidation of the community.

It is impossible to determine the *absolute* growth of the Elven movement since 1990. We do not know exactly how many individuals identified as Elves prior to the Internet, nor how many self-identified Elves can currently be found offline. It is difficult even to estimate the number of Elves online.[306] It is reasonable to conclude, however, that a

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[301] Several other Elven groups sprung up on Yahoo! Groups as well, but none of them came close to Elven Realities in importance. Like Elven Realities, most of these groups had a Pagan flavour to them. The Pagan groups include Elven Guild (founded 1999; defunct), elenari-and-friends (founded 1999; active until 2003; 58 members), ElfHelp (founded 1999; still active; 116 members), elfweare (founded 2002; active until 2006; 60 members), elvenmemories (founded 2002; still active; 80 members), The Elven High Council (founded 2002; active until 2008; 50 members), and Elven Glade (founded 2003; active until 2003; 24 members). Also two groups of Christian Elves have been active, christianelfcommunity (founded 2002, active until 2009; 91 members) and Elfinzone (2004; active until 2006; 67 members). Member figures for the Pagan Elven groups are per 070812; figures for Christian Elven groups per 140812. All groups are considered active until the number of posts/year dropped below 30. There may have been similar Elven communities using MSN Groups (though none comparable to Elven Realities in importance), but since MSN Groups went defunct on 21 February 2009, I have not been able to check this. In any case, no Elven groups of importance participated in the migration of active MSN groups to the new Multiply platform in 2009. I have found no Elven groups of note on Google Groups.

[302] http://www.rialian.com/ [130812].

[303] Arethinn's homepage can be found at http://www.eristic.net/ [100713]. It has been online since 2000.

[304] Pelton's homepage can be found at http://elvenworld.net/ [130812]. The homepage of the Silver Elves is located at http://silverelves.angelfire.com/ [060812].

[305] http://www.elenari.net/ [180712].

[306] There are at least three reasons for this. First, Elven online activity is dispersed over a large number of Internet locations, including private groups which are not easily found and whose membership figures cannot be checked. For this reason the actual number of online Elves might be larger than it seems as first sight. Second, many members, probably the majority, in the large and public groups like Elven Realities are passive members who once registered out of curiosity and never bothered to unregister. These passive

substantial *relative* growth has taken place. Prior to the Internet, there were only a few (and very small) Elven organisations. Today, the online Elven groups boast a total membership of more than a thousand. Even if not all of these members are serious, we certainly have a growth in the number of organised Elves from a handful in the 1980s to several hundred in the 2000s. A further indication of Internet-facilitated growth is the majority of new members of the online Elven communities have not developed an identity as Elves on their own, but have only done so upon being exposed to the idea that you can be an Elf yourself by stumbling upon online sites maintained by self-identified Elves. Stated differently, the Internet gave the Elven community a strong platform on which to present itself to potential converts, and it made it easy for interested individuals to explore the Elven community prior to making a serious commitment to membership and Elven identity.

Since most Elves are also Pagans, some of the growth of the Elven movement can be explained as a reflection of the remarkable growth of the Pagan community during the 1990s (cf. section 8.3.1). Viewing Elven growth as a reflection of Pagan growth does not diminish the importance of the Internet, however, for also the Pagan growth was largely caused by the Internet which facilitated community-building, information exchange, and identity endorsement for Pagans (Cowan 2005) in the same way as it did for the Elves.

The Internet also allowed the Elven movement to *consolidate*. It did so in two ways. First, the new online sites gave the Elven community spatial anchorage, even if only in virtual space. Second, the discussions taking place within the online communities were in fact negotiations which led to the formation of socially sanctioned codes for what members could legitimately claim about the Elves in general and about their own Elven nature (more on this in section 11.3.1 below). Rationalisations of what it meant to be an Elf, and strategies of justifying the claim to Elven identity were discussed in the Elven online groups and repeated, combined, and internalised by members. As part of this, online Elves negotiated how Tolkien's works could legitimately be used. Since the use of Tolkien only became a hot (and indeed schismatic) issue with the appearance of the movie adaptation of *LR*, I will postpone the discussing of Tolkien's place in the post-1990 Elven movement to sub-section 11.2.4 below on the Elven reaction to the movies.

After a peak around 2000, just one year after its creation, the activity in Elven Realities began to drop dramatically as shown in the table below.

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members make the number of Elves online look larger than it actually is. The third issue that makes it difficult to establish the precise number of online Elves is that many individuals are active in several groups at once under different aliases. This, also, makes the number of self-identified Elves online look larger than it actually is.

Table 11.1. Activity in Elven Realities													
Year	**1999**	**2000**	**2001**	**2002**	**2003**	**2004**	**2005**	**2006**	**2007**	**2008**	**2009**	**2010**	**2011**
Posts	4849	20916	13599	15407	4095	2019	1148	596	375	1353	1090	340	393
Posts/day	16.1	57.1	37.3	42.2	11.2	5.5	3.1	1.6	1.0	3.7	3.0	0.9	1.1

The decline of Elven Realities does not reflect a collapse of the online Elven community as such, but it does call for an explanation. To make sense of the rise and fall of Elven Realities, let me refer to an article by Alicia Iriberri and Gondy Leroy (2009) in which they develop a life-cycle approach to the study of the online communities.

Iriberri and Leroy distinguish between five life phases of online communities, namely inception, creation, growth, maturity, and death (2009, 13-14). Transitions between the life phases are precarious; each transition has its own threats, and all share death as a possible outcome (Iriberri and Leroy 2009, 17-25). Iriberri and Leroy describe the transition into the growth stage as follows:

> [W]hen enough members have joined, a culture and identity for the community begins to develop. Members start using a common vocabulary and, as the community grows, members select the role they will play in the community. Additionally, communication and participation etiquette rules surface. Some members lead discussions, some provide support, while many look for support and information. Some members become leaders while others become followers or lurkers, who read messages posted by other members but do not actively contribute to the community. Some volunteer information while others use this information (2009, 14).

For online communities to move safely to the growth stage, it helps to (a) reach a critical mass of members fast, (b) to successfully integrate new members into the community, (c) to secure a high quality of content, and (d) to organise offline events to reinforce the social ties established online (Iriberri and Leroy 2009, 21). Elven Realities was the only Elven group on Yahoo! Groups to reach the growth stage, especially because it was the only group to ever gain critical mass. Even so, Elven Realities scored only moderately well on the other success factors. While attempts were made to organise offline gatherings, these initiatives were infrequent and the gatherings were poorly attended. Also, while much high level content was volunteered, the group's discussions were hardly moderated.

Iriberri and Leroy explain that "[a]s the online community *matures*, the need for a more explicit and formal organization with regulations, rewards for contributions, subgroups, and discussion of more or less specific topics is evident" (2009, 14, also 22-23, 24). This need also arose in Elven Realities, but it was never catered to, and herein lies the main reason why Elven Realities did not reach the maturity stage. In a discussion on Elven Realities in February 2011, Rialian, the moderator of the group, himself reflected on the decline of Elven Realities and other email-based Elven newsgroups. Echoing Iri-

berri and Leroy, he ascribed the decline to weak moderation and lack of integration of new members. This was allowed to happen because "running the list is not central to our [the moderators'] identity, so we do not take the social aspects too personally". The decline of the newsgroups cannot only be attributed to lax moderators, however. Just as importantly, Yahoo! Groups did not facilitate the formation of subgroups and advanced content management such as organising discussions in sub-forums and moving posts between discussion threads. The weakness of the very platform was the reason why email-based newsgroups fared poorly in the 2000s compared to online communities using more advanced software.

During the 2000s, most Elven online activity moved away from Elven Realities to online communities using message board services, such as ProBoards (launched 2000), and to a new generation of social networking sites, including LiveJournal (launched 1999; community function added 2000), MySpace (launched 2003), Facebook (launched 2004), Ning (launched 2005), and Tumblr (launched 2007). Besides ProBoards-based groups, which best facilitated discussions, the social blog-hosting sites LiveJournal and Tumblr were most popular, probably because these sites provided the most balanced combination of individual profiles and blogs on the one hand, and community-building on the other. By contrast, MySpace and Facebook are too individual-oriented, while Ning and the old newsgroup platforms such as Yahoo! Groups are exclusively group-oriented.

Never again an exclusively Elven online community emerged to rival the status which Elven Realities in its best years had occupied within the Elven movement. That was not because the Elven movement had collapsed, however, but because it had largely fused with the emerging Otherkin movement in the early 2000s, becoming a stream within this broader movement.

11.2.2. The Otherkin Movement

The Otherkin movement and the Elven movement are deeply intertwined. During the 1990s, the Otherkin movement emerged (at least in part) out of the Elven movement. In the 2000s, the roles had become reversed, the Elven community now benefitting from its inclusion within a broader and better organised Otherkin community. Let me first touch upon the origin of the Otherkin movement before turning to the contemporary significance of this movement for the Elven community. To do so, we must return to the Elfinkind Digest.

The Elfinkind Digest was originally intended simply for Elves, but it also attracted individuals who self-identified as various other non-human beings (Sandstorm 2012, 25). To some extent this should not come as a surprise, for in the decades after *LR* individuals had not only identified as Elves, but also occasionally as other humanoid fey beings. The Silver Elves had lived with a Gnome and a Fairy (Sandstorm 2012, 22) and the Tribunal of the Sidhe includes *sídhe* and satyr members. It was new in 1990s, however, that individuals began to identify also as non-humanoid, mythological creatures. Most of

these individuals identified as Dragons, but there were also, for example, Angels and Gryphons. The Elves did not wish to expel the Gnomes and Dragons from the Elfinkind Digest, but their presence generated a need for a more inclusive, non-human identity label. Already in 1990, therefore, the words "Otherkind" and "Otherkin" were coined and there was even talk about renaming the list "The Otherkind Digest" (Sandstorm 2012, 25-26).[307] Though this never happened, non-Elves continued to be active on the Elfinkind Digest, and soon online newsgroups emerged, both for Otherkin in general and for various specific Otherkin groups besides Elves, including self-identified Dragons and Werewolves.

The Elves profited from the emergence of the Otherkin movement in two ways. Most straightforwardly, they benefitted from the founding of a number of very well-managed online communities. Six of these are worth mentioning, namely Otherkin.net (founded 2000), the "Otherkin" community on LiveJournal (founded 2001), and the four ProBoard-based sites, Embracing Mystery (founded 2001), Otherkin Alliance (founded 2005), Otherkin Phenomena (founded 2008), and Otherkin Community (founded 2009).[308] Thanks to a critical mass of discussion participants and to good management and privacy protection, these six groups have successfully made the transition into the maturity stage in Iriberri and Leroy's sense.

The Elves make up a considerable member contingent on the mature Otherkin sites. For instance, per 1 August 2013, the five largest groups of non-Elven users on

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[307] Today the term Otherkin is used in two senses, a narrow and a broad one. In the narrow sense Otherkin refers to self-identified humanoid fey/fae beings (such as Elves) together with self-identified mythological creatures (such as Dragons). Members of these two groups generally feel comfortable identifying as Otherkin in addition to identifying more specifically as a particular kind of non-human. In the broad sense of the term, the Otherkin include also self-identified Vampires and Therianthropes, though these groups tend to dismiss the Otherkin label and prefer to organise their own communities.

The Vampire Community constitutes the largest and most independent Otherkin community and can trace its history back to the 1980s when so-called Real Vampires began to distinguish themselves from mere lifestyle Vampires. On this movement, see Dresser (1989), Keyworth (2002), Partridge (2005, 230-238), Hume (2006), and Laycock (2009; 2012b). Therianthrope communities only began to form in the mid-1990s when the identity as Therianthrope/Therian was developed and allowed a more inclusive Therianthrope community to grow out of the Werewolf community. On Therianthrophy, see Lupa (2006) and Robertson (2010; 2012; 2013). On the Otherkin in the narrow sense, see Kirby (2009a; 2009b; 2012; 2013) and Laycock (2012a). No earlier academic publications have focused specifically on the Elven movement. The best overviews of the Otherkin movement are provided by insiders. Lupa's *Field Guide* (2007) is an excellent introduction to the Otherkin (in the broad sense), and Orion Sandstorm's *Directory* of offline and (especially) online sources (2011) and his *Otherkin Timeline* (2012) are invaluable resources (though Sandstorm does not include references to the Vampire community).

[308] See http://www.otherkin.net; http://community.livejournal.com/otherkin/profile; http://www.embracingmystery.org; http://www.otherkinalliance.org; http://otherkinphenomena.org; and http://www.otherkincommunity.net [100713]. Per 10 July 2013, the *Otherkin* group on LiveJournal had 423 members and stored a total of more than 30,000 posts. It is not the only Otherkin group on LiveJournal, but anno 2013 it is still the largest and most active.

Otherkin.net were Therians (N=144), including especially Grey Wolf Therians; Dragons (N=124), mostly of the Western type; Vampires (N=70), including both Psychic and Sanguinarian ones; Angelic beings (N=70), including archangels and fallen angels; and Demonic beings (N=47). By comparison, the site hosted 76 Elves. This figure is somewhat misleading, however, for while the Therian and Dragon categories include various subtypes, several kinds of Elves were granted their entirely own category. Besides the 76 Elves, some of whom were Dark Elves and Star Elves, Otherkin.net hosted an additional 51 Faeries, 21 Sidhe, 15 Tuatha Dé Dannan, and 2 Fae. More comparable with the Therian and Dragon totals is thus the figure of 165 Elves and Elf-like beings (not counting self-identified Nymphs, Goblins, and other demi-humans), making this group constitute the largest contingent of members.[309]

The Elves profited from the emergence of the Otherkin movement in a second way by taking over rationalisations and legitimisations developed by non-Elven Otherkin intellectuals. As we shall see in section 11.3.1 below, both Elves and Otherkin generally believe to be non-human souls in human bodies, and during the 2000s, movement intellectuals in the Otherkin movement developed explanations of how this condition could arise as the result of voluntary incarnation, so-called walk-ins, and so on (cf. section 11.3.1 below). While not intended to rationalise and legitimise Elvenhood in particular, these Otherkin rationalisations were immediately usable also for Elves. In this way, being a part of the Otherkin movement, increased and consolidated the arsenal of plausibility-maintaining strategies at the Elves' disposal.

To sum up thus far, we have seen that both the Internet and the Otherkin movement helped the self-identified Elves by facilitating community-formation and information exchange. In other words, the Internet and the Otherkin movement could help nurture an Elven identity that was already present. That does not explain why many individuals approached existing Elven and Otherkin groups with a well-developed infatuation with elves. Elven-centred role-playing games and Peter Jackson's movie adaptation of *LR* constitute two sources of such infatuations and must both be considered facilitating factors behind the growth of the Elven community in the 1990s and 2000s. In the two following sub-sections, I look in turn at Elven role-playing games and Jackson's *LR* movies.

11.2.3. *Changeling: The Dreaming* and Other Role-Playing Games

We have already seen that fantasy fiction, including Tolkien's literary mythology, can lead individuals to formulate the hunch that they are themselves Elves, but arguably role-playing games constitute an even more effective means for transforming fascination with elves into Elven self-identification. Role-playing games such *Dungeons & Dragons* (first edition 1974) offer people a chance to take on another role, for example as an Elf for

[309] See http://otherkin.net/community/directory/species.html [010813].

the duration of the game, and for some players these games were the first step towards adopting a permanent identity as Otherkin.

The most significant role-playing games for the Elven and Otherkin movements were the *World of Darkness* series published by the game company White Wolf in the 1990s. This series included *Vampire: The Masquerade* (Rein·Hagen 1991), *Werewolf: The Apocalypse* (Rein·Hagen 1992), and *Changeling: The Dreaming* (Rein·Hagen 1995).[310] White Wolf's games nurtured an Otherkin identity more potently than earlier role-playing games because they were the first games to take a non-human perspective. In earlier role-playing games such as *Dungeons & Dragons*, it had merely been an option to play a demi-human all players, but in most games in the *World of Darkness* series, all players were by definition non-humans. Each of these games focused on a different kind of non-humans. In *Changeling: The Dreaming*, for instance, the game which is most relevant for the Elven movement, players take on an identity as a fae being, i.e. an elf, gnome, phooka, gremlin, troll, or similar being. The game is set in a gothic punk world, and the idea is that the players are changelings, i.e. fae souls born into a human body.

The similarity of the game idea and the beliefs already held in the Elven movement – not to mention in the Tribunal of the Sidhe – is striking. It is therefore not surprising that some people drifted easily from playing the game to adopting the belief that Changelings/Otherkin are real. White Wolf's games furthermore appeared at the same time as the Otherkin movement went online, and online discussions of game experiences acted as a catalyst for the transformation of non-human roles into Otherkin identities (Lupa 2007, 50; Robertson 2010; 2013). Many people who were already fascinated with vampires, who already believed in fairies, or who started off with some similar infatuation played the games, and serious discussions about being Elves, Otherkin, Vampires, or Werewolves emerged from the gaming sessions. As Lupa explains,

> [t]he subject matter of the games led to the inevitable wonderings: "Well, what if this was real? What if there really were werewolves, and vampires, and faeries in our day and age?" Most players likely simply shrugged it off as a passing fancy. However, many Otherkin found that the flights of fancy could open up opportunities to discuss more serious approaches to the idea of nonhumans in a human world (2007, 50).

Some Elves even integrated the games into narratives of legitimisation, arguing that the games testified to the reality of fae beings incarnating into human bodies. Rich Dansky, one of the designers of *Changeling*, told the journalist Nick Mamatas that he had come across the electronic mailing list darkfae-l whose members wondered "how the folks at White Wolf had gotten so much of their existence right". The discussants had come to the "obvious conclusion that we'd gotten it right because we ourselves were in

[310] Other White Wolf games let players imagine themselves as wraiths (Hartshorn 1995), mummies (Hubbard et al. 2001), or demons (Lee, Stolze, and Tinworth 2002), but these monsters have proved too unhuman and unattractive for people to identify with on a noteworthy scale in the Otherkin community.

fact changelings" (Mamatas 2001).[311] White Wolf must have been well aware of the religious affordances of their games, for they consciously advertised among Pagans and occultists. For instance, a theme issue on Elves in *Green Egg* (summer 1995) included both a full-side colour ad for *Changeling* and a review of the game (Sandstorm 2012, 37).

Though difficult to quantify, it seems warranted to say that *Changeling: The Dreaming* indirectly contributed to the growth and consolidation of the Elven movement by providing an easy and gradual entry into the community. Furthermore, it may have contributed to the Otherkin cause by normalising identification with non-humans. If many people *play* at being non-humans, it becomes relatively less cognitively dissonant to *identify* as a non-human.

11.2.4. After the Movies: A New Wave of Tolkienesque Elves

Peter Jackson's movie adaptations of *LR* premiered in 2001, 2002, and 2003. In this section I look at the reception of these movies within the Elven community, but first it is necessary to assess the role which Tolkien's narratives had played in the Elven movement in the 1990s.

The fact is that Tolkien's literary mythology had not played the same significant role in the Elven movement in the 1990s as it had done for the Elf Queen's Daughters and the Silver Elves in the 1970s and early 1980s (cf. section 11.1 above). For the Elves who awakened during the 1980s and 1990s and who had not experienced how *LR* had been infused with subcultural capital by the hippies in the late 1960s, Tolkien's literary mythology was merely one possible source of inspiration among others. Even for the Silver Elves, the importance of Tolkien's narratives decreased over time. The vast majority of self-identified Elves since the 1980s have considered Tolkien's literary mythology to be a legitimate source of inspiration when approached in the binocular mode, but have considered it to be less relevant and authoritative than other texts, including both Celtic and Germanic mythology and works of specifically Elven fiction. Only a small minority within the Elven community integrate aspects of Tolkien's narrative religion into their beliefs and practices, for instance by praying to Ilúvatar or working with the Valar in ritual.

This was the situation when *The Fellowship of the Ring*, the first of three instalments of Peter Jackson's movie adaptation of *LR*, hit the cinemas in 2001. The religious affordances of the movies will be considered in chapter 14. Here it only concerns us that the movies gave Tolkien's Elves new life and visual form, and that the cinematic enchantment ignited a new fascination with Elves. Some of the new elf enthusiasts found and joined the online Elven community and claimed to be Elves themselves. The Elven movement thus profited from the movies by gaining new members, but the movies also

[311] Mamatas' article "Elven Like Me: Otherkin come out of the closet" (2001) was published in the American newsweekly *The Village Voice*. It was the first journalistic piece on the Otherkin movement.

led to a controversy about Tolkien's legitimacy, and ultimately to a sort of schism in the Elven movement. This was because the Elven community reacted with hostility to a new type of self-identified Elves who did not read Tolkien's literary mythology in the binocular mode as a parable about the 'real' Elves, but considered it to accurately reflect a spiritual reality.

As the following exchange from Otherkin.net illustrates, it caused irritation among some members when other awakened Elves made far-reaching claims about the 'real' elves while it was patent that their knowledge stemmed from the *LR* movies. In a review of *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Syleniel, a self-identified "reincarnate elf", said: "I was very pleased by the portrayal of the elves. They looked, walked, acted and even spoke like elves. *They were very reminiscent of what I remember*. In full elven form we can look that unearthly (especially as in Lothlórien). That's part of who we are" (emphasis added).[312] Other members were unhappy with Syleniel's source-product reversal, i.e. her claim that her past life memories and the *LR* movie corresponded because Jackson had 'gotten it right' and not because her 'memories' were shaped by the movies. Violin Goddess responded with an entry in the Otherkin wiki on 'Tolkienesque Elves'.[313] While diplomatically keeping open the possibility that memories such as Syleniel's might be genuine, Violin Goddess considered it more likely that they were based on the movies and that Syleniel and her sort were "wannabes". Violin Goddess acknowledged that Tolkien's Quendi resemble real elves somewhat, but that was because Tolkien "incorporated a fair amount of myth and legend into his stories". She hereby affirmed the dominant Elven standpoint that Tolkien's mythology can be used as a source of inspiration for self-identified Elves, but only as metaphorical binoculars with which one can come to see the 'real' elves.

The hostility towards explicitly movie-inspired Elves must be seen against the backdrop of a general discussion on fiction-basedness within the Otherkin movement. 'Conventional' Otherkin accept individuals who claim to possess non-human souls and individuals who claim to "soulbond" with other entities, whether these are factual, fictional, or self-imagine (Lupa 2007, 95; Kirby 2009a, 74-76; 2012, 134-135). Fiction- or mediakin, however, have been highly controversial because they go one step further and claim to be patently fictional beings (Lupa 2007, 202-206; Kirby 2009a, 59-64; 2012, 133). Especially the so-called Otakukin, who identify with Japanese anime and manga characters, are considered illegitimate, and critical Otherkin have emphasised extreme cases in which several Otakukin have claimed to be the very same manga character. Such cases are rare, however, and the real issue seems to be that the Otakukin's blatant use of fiction calls attention to the fact that the Otherkin movement in general is fiction-based, a fact most Otherkin go to great pains to conceal.

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[312] Syleniel (2001), "Lord of the Rings movie review", http://otherkin.net/articles//lotr-syl.html [091209]. Spelling corrected.

[313] Violin Goddess (n.y.), "Tolkienesque", http://otherkin.net/wiki/Mythology/Tolkienesque [091209].

Faced with the accusation of being wannabes, most movie-inspired Elves allowed themselves to be socialised into adopting more conventional Elven beliefs. They were taught to assert that they were real Elves, and that Tolkien's fictional Quendi did not refer to real elves in a straightforward way. They also learned that if they were to draw on Tolkien's works, the books and especially *S* enjoyed more prestige than the movies. In other words, they passed through a similar process of rationalisation ("starting out with Tolkien and creating from there") as the first generation of Elves had gone through three decades earlier. Even though the new recruits soon learned to downplay the role of Jackson's movies for their 'awakening', it is unquestionable that Jackson's movie adaptations of *LR* and the renewed interest in Tolkien's books (including *S*) which they spawned constitute an important factor behind the continued growth of the Elven community in the 2000s.

Not all movie-inspired Elves were socialised into the mainstream Elven movement. Some formed their own groups and developed along an explicitly Tolkien-based path. Their online communities include the Yahoo! Groups Elende (founded 2003) and Children of the Varda (founded 2003), and the Internet sites Indigo Elves (founded 2005), Faer en Edhel Echuiad (The Spirit of the Elf Awaken Again; active 2005-2006), and Tië eldaliéva (The Elven Path; founded 2005). Mirroring the Silver Elves' transition from *LR*-inspired to *S*-inspired Elves in the late 1970s, *S* also soon replaced the movies as the central Tolkien text for this new generation of Tolkien-based Elves. The Tolkienesque Elven groups ascribe more authority to *S* than the Elven community at large, subscribing to a literal-affirmative reading of *LR* and *S* and counting the Quendi and the Valar to be real beings. Depending on whether their reading takes a mytho-historical or a mytho-cosmological turn, the Tolkien-based Elves interpret Middle-earth either as our world in prehistory or as a place on another plane. Since these Elves combine their identification as Elves with other forms of Tolkien spirituality they will be discussed in chapters 14 and 16.

11.2.5. The Elven Movement as Tolkien-integrating Religion: Summary

With the historical overview of the Elven movement in place, it is now possible to summarise the use of Tolkien's literary mythology within the movement. It is useful to look in turn at Tolkien's impact on the very Elven identity of the self-identified Elves and on his influence their spiritual beliefs and practices.

The identity of the awakened Elves is indebted to Tolkien in two ways. First, the very term 'Elf' bears witness to Tolkien's influence. Before Tolkien, the French loanword 'fairy' was used by most writers, including Margaret Murray, Gerald Gardner, Robert Graves, and Walter Yeeling Evans-Wentz, to refer to the demi-humans of folklore. Tolkien gave the Anglo-Saxon term 'elf' a revival, and the self-identified Elves follow Tolkien here although they sometimes downplay their indebtedness to Tolkien by adopting

the archaic spelling Elfin.[314] Second, the self-identified Elves are inescapably influenced by Tolkien's new vision of the Elves as tall and majestic human-like magicians. This is so, no matter whether the self-identified Elves have this image directly from Tolkien or via later Tolkienesque fantasy. Also, they take over this image of the Elves no matter whether they classify Tolkien's works as fiction, myth, or history. In the imagination of the self-identified Elves, as in the contemporary imagination in general, it is Tolkien's magnificent and powerful Elves rather than Murray's gnomish and subdued fairies who define what an Elf is like. Attesting to this, Lupa writes in her *Field Guide to the Otherkin* that the kin selves of contemporary, self-identified Elves "tend to more closely resemble J.R.R. Tolkien's mythos than tales of "little people"" (2007, 160). As we shall see in the next section, the Elves take care, however, to embed this Tolkien-inspired image of the Elf within established and authoritative traditions of fairy lore. Indeed, they construct a new Quendi-inspired, but folklore-legitimised notion of the 'real elves' by blending Tolkien's attractive but fictional Quendi with the allegedly real but unattractive fairies/elves of folklore (as depicted in figure 4.3 in chapter 4 above).

If the Elven identity is always more or less influenced by Tolkien, it differs much to what extent self-identified Elves integrate other elements from Tolkien's literary mythology into their spirituality. Some Elves engage in Tolkien-based rituals directed at Ilúvatar or the Valar; most do not, though they consider such rituals to be legitimate. In general, the Elves do not share a set of distinctively Elven beliefs and rituals, but typically identify as Pagans and/or magicians as well as Elves, thus subscribing to a wide variety of esoteric ideas and practices which they share with non-Elven Pagans and magicians. In a nutshell, the identity of the self-identified Elves is Tolkien-integrating, but their practices and beliefs are for the most part not. Elves who occasionally *do* pray to Ilúvatar and/or engage in Valar-directed rituals are the exception to this rule.

It should furthermore be pointed out that the Elven identity (and hence the Elven movement as such) is more indebted to *LR* than to *S*. We have seen that the Elven movement emerged in the early 1970s, i.e. after *LR* but before *S*. We have also seen that the movie adaptation of *LR* led to an increase in members of the Elven community. By contrast, the Elven movement did not experience any noteworthy growth upon the publication of *S*. The religious affordances of *S* are relevant only for those Elves who, in addition to entertaining an identity as Elves, also engage in Tolkien-integrating rituals and beliefs. We have seen that the Silver Elves' early letters drew extensively on *S*, as do a minority of Tolkien-integrating Elves in Elven Realities. Also the specifically Tolkien-based Elven groups which were founded in the years right after the movies (cf. chs. 14 and 16) draw on *S*. In short, the Elven identity of awakened Elves is based primarily on

[314] English knows three adjectives derived from the noun Elf. Elfin (old) and Elvish (new) are the standard forms. Tolkien uses the term Elvish, but only in a substantivised form to refer to the languages Quenya and Sindarin. He introduced the new adjective 'Elven' as the adjective form of Elf – just as he modified other spellings, writing for instance 'dwarves' instead of 'dwarfs'.

LR, while the spirituality of those Elves who also engage in rituals directed at Eru and/or the Valar is based on *S*. The self-identified Elves who engage in Tolkien-integrating rituals are interesting because they constitute the overlap between, on the one hand, the community of self-identified Elves for whom Tolkien-integrating rituals are optional, and, on the other hand, the spiritual Tolkien milieu (cf. chs. 10, 14, and 16) which is defined by its Tolkien-integrating rituals, but in which only some religionists identify as Elves.

11.3. Construction and Maintenance of Plausibility in the Elven Movement

In the preceding two sections, I have sketched the history of the Elven movement and analysed its use of Tolkien's literary mythology. In this section, I take up the issue how plausibility is constructed and maintained within the Elven community. The section is comprised of four sub-sections, the two first of which explore the Elves' repertoire of semiotic strategies for plausibility construction. In the first sub-section, I chart the Elves' cultural, genetic, and spiritual rationalisations of their Elven nature; in the second sub-section on justification, I discuss their strategies of legitimisation and relativisation. In the third sub-section, I discuss 'conversion' to Elvishness, before finishing off by identifying the Elven movement's plausibility structures and plausibility threats.

11.3.1. Semiotic Strategies for Plausibility Construction I: Cultural, Genetic, and Spiritual Rationalisations

This section is concerned with how the awakened Elves rationalise their Elven identity. The point of departure is that all self-identified Elves share the core belief 'we are Elves'. I call it a core belief because it is this belief which keeps the Elven movement together; it is not necessarily the belief in which individual self-identified Elves are most confident.

The attractiveness and plausibility of the core belief 'we are Elves' hinges upon the formulation of second-order rationalisations that specify the Elves' nature and mission. The Elven community has developed rationalisations that cast the Elven identity in three different ontological modes, i.e. as being of a cultural, genetic, or spiritual nature. As a rule, self-identified Elves are not committed to just one of these rationalisations, but rather see them as a repertoire of accepted explanations that can be actualised in different contexts.

The most cautious rationalisation strategy takes Elvishness to be a purely cultural matter. According to this view, being an Elf means that one continues the cultural and religious tradition of those aboriginal human tribes, such as the Picts, who according to Margaret Murray, Gerald Gardner, and Robert Graves had mistakenly become depicted as fairies or elves in later folklore. This cultural identification as Elf is immediately open

to any contemporary Pagan who believes his or her own religion to be a continuation of the Old Religion practised by the pre-Christian 'fairy tribes'. As we saw in section 11.1, the Elf Queen's Daughters identified as Elves in this purely cultural sense when they considered themselves and everyone else who lives in respect of the Goddess to be Elves. Also the Silver Elves sometimes use the adjective elven/elfin to refer inclusively to all those who reinvigorate the Old Religion of the aboriginal Europeans, i.e. to all contemporary Pagans.

While it is possible for Pagans in general to flirt with a cultural identification as Elves, the self-identified Elves within the Elven movement usually go further and consider Elvishness to be either a matter of descent or incarnation, or both. Consider as a first illustration Margot Adler's description of the Silver Elves in *Drawing Down the Moon* (1986).[315] Adler described them as

> [a] small group that sends out elvish letters from time to time and spreads magic about the world, finding elves and faerie folk here and there. The letters are free for the asking, but first class post stamps are requested to cover costs. The Silver Elves feel themselves to be *the genetic and spiritual descendants* of all the gentle folks through the ages whose cultures have been obliterated, oppressed, and absorbed (1986, 522; emphasis added).

In what follows, I look in turn at what it means for the self-identified Elves to be the "genetic" respectively "spiritual" descendants of the gentle folk. In section 11.3.2 below, I return to the significance of the small world 'feel' in the phrase, 'The Silver Elves *feel* to be the genetic and spiritual descendants of all the gentle folks through the ages'.

To be an Elf in a genetic sense can mean two things in the Elven movement. Some self-identified Elves interpret the claim in a euhemeristic way. For them, being a genetic Elf means to descend from the 'fairy tribes' whose Old Religion they reinvigorate and whom they believe to have possessed great magical abilities. These Elves make a hard claim about their ancestry, but at the same time reduce the significance of their genetic Elvishness to the membership of a specific human race. The self-identified Elves who see themselves as descendants of the fairy tribes always combine this claim of ancestry with the cultural understanding of Elvishness discussed above. The euhemeristic-genetic rationalisation thus represents a half-way position between, on the hand one, an exclusively cultural rationalisation of Elvishness without any claim of descent, and, on the other hand, a more full-fledged genetic rationalisation of Elvishness in which the Elves are taken to more than human.

The claim that the contemporary Elves descend from super-human beings come in different forms. In some versions the Elven ancestors are equalled with the Tuatha Dé

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[315] *Drawing Down the Moon* was the first book to present an overview of American Paganism. It included an appendix with short descriptions of many different groups together with contact information. The first edition, which included a discussion of the Elf Queen's Daughters, was published in 1979; the Silver Elves were included in the appendix to the second edition.

Dannan; in others the Elven race is traced even further back. A particularly elaborate account of Elven ancestry was presented by Aeona Silversong in a series of articles in *Green Egg* in the mid-1990s (1995; 1996a; 1996b; 1996c), in which she claimed that the Elves had originally come from the stars about 250,000 years ago, raised Atlantis, and built the pyramids.[316] This all happened in the harmonious time before the "Faerie wars" between humans and elves which forced the elves to retreat to the Otherworld (Silversong 1996c).[317] Before retreating, however, some of the intergalactic elves must have interbred with humans, for Silversong considers herself to be an Elf due to her "ancient Milesian blood" (1995), i.e. by genetic descent.[318]

Many Elves consider Silversong's theory to be a legitimate piece of Elven historiography and certainly a more fascinating one than the feeble claim to mere cultural heritage. In the Elven movement, protological narratives like Silversong's are furthermore mirrored by eschatological visions. Most famously, Adrian Mulvaney Morningstar published the "Elven Nation Manifesto" in 1995 in which he called upon "all fellow non-humans" to work towards the enchantment of the physical world and the thinning of the Veil in order to allow "The True Fae" of the Otherworld to live among us once more. Many Elves (and Otherkin) believe that it is their mission to break down the Veil and reinstate the protological unity of Fae and humans.[319]

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[316] With these articles, Aeona Silversong attempted to revive the Elf Queen's Daughters. The first article was printed in the theme issue of *Green Egg* which also featured a review of *Changeling: The Dreaming*. The issue was dedicated to fairies and includes other articles by self-identified Fey (Sandstorm 2012, 37).

[317] This notion of star elves is clearly formulated in the light of the exo-theology of such figures as Charles Fort (1919) and Erich von Däniken (1968). Both championed the "ufological euhemeristic" theory that the "gods" of ancient religions where really aliens from outer space (Grünschloß 2007). The reinterpretation of the elves in exo-theological terms was facilitated by the fact that also Tolkien associated the Elves with the stars. Indeed, his Quendi are named the "Eldar" (Qu: People of the Stars) by the Valar. That is not, however, because Tolkien's Elves originate from the stars, but because they awaken at a moment when the stars are the only cosmic sources of light. The notion of the "Faerie Wars", which Lady Danu of the Tribunal of the Sidhe referred to as the "great strife", builds on the notion in the *Book of Invasions* that the Milesians took Ireland from the Tuatha Dé Dannan and forced them to retreat to the underground Otherworld (cf. section 10.2.1).

[318] Silversong's identification of the elves with the Milesians rather than with the Tuatha Dé Dannan is unusual. It illustrates that many self-identified Elves (and Pagans in general) want to legitimise their claims by appealing to a mighty tradition and/or lineage *in general*, but that details do not matter. Self-identified Elves and other 'Cardiac Celts' (cf. Bowman 1996) want to descend from the legendary conquerors of Ireland, and the Elves furthermore like to identify one of these conquering peoples as the real tribe which gave rise to the later legends about elves. It does not matter, however, whether the elves are identified as the fourth people to conquer Ireland, the Fir Bolg (Zell 2004, 321), the fifth, the Tuatha Dé Dannan (Tribunal of the Sidhe), the sixth, the Milesians (Silversong 1995), or a bit of them all (L. Gardner 2003, cf. ch. 12).

[319] The Manifesto was originally posted on eleven (!) Usenet groups in 1995, but was banned from Usenet because it transgressed the cross-posting regulations. It was later reposted and discussed on other lists, including the Elfinkind Digest (Sandstorm 2012, 34). A short-lived email list sprung from it, and excerpts from this list can be read at http://www.rialian.com/elvsnatn.htm [130812]. On Otherkin millennialism

In the Elven movement, the two narratives of genetic descent (from aboriginal 'fairies' and from star elves) co-exist with rationalisations that consider Elvishness to be a *spiritual* matter. For example, in his master's thesis in depth psychology, Zardoa professes the belief that Elves are essentially spiritual beings who can "incarnate within any culture [they] choose" (2005, 25). Zardoa expressed the same view when he pledged that he would continue working towards the awakening of all Elves in future incarnations (cf. section 11.1 above). According to the spiritual rationalisation of Elvishness, it is thus the *spirit* or soul (rather than the body) which is Elven, and it is this spirit which will remain Elven in future incarnations.

Self-identified Elves who believe their spirit or soul to be Elven have developed various rationalisations for how that can be. There are two main theories, a cautious and a bold one. According to the Silver Elves, everyone (also humans who do not identify as Elves) have a true spiritual nature, and self-identified Elves merely differ from normal humans in that they *label* this spiritual nature Elven. For this reason, the Silver Elves have no problem being human Elves (310813). Most other Elves, especially those active in the Otherkin movement, insist that the Elves are essentially non-human, possessing a particularly Elven *rather than* human soul or spirit. These Elves have developed a number of explanations for how Elven souls, which do not naturally belong in human bodies, have ended up there nonetheless. A common belief is that Elven souls may choose to reincarnate into human bodies. In this case, the Elven soul is believed to enter the human body at conception, thus taking up the place that would otherwise have been filled by a human soul. The Elves also reckon with the existence of more complex incarnation scenarios. One scenario is the *walk-in*, a kind of possession referring to a foreign soul entering the body after birth, either displacing the original soul or co-existing with it. The condition of two or more souls co-existing in the same body, either naturally so or as the result of a walk-in, is referred to as *multiplicity*.[320]

Spiritual rationalisations of Elvishness tend to come with the claim that the true home of the Elves is situated in another, spiritual world, which is typically referred to as the Otherworld, the astral plane, or Faery. Like Pagans in general, many Elves slide between a literal affirmation of the existence of this spiritual world and a psychological-reductive interpretation of it along Jungian lines. In his thesis, Zardoa for instance equates "Faerie" with Jung's collective unconscious (2005, iv), but he later explained to me that he had only done so to make the thesis acceptable to the psychology department (120310). Most 'soul-Elves' consider Faery to exist independently of the collective uncon-

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concerning the Veil, see also Laycock (2012a, 77). For the manifesto, see http://groups.google.co.uk/group/alt.magick/msg/e5adba21569abd19?dmode=source&hl=en [070812].

[320] The Elves share these explanations of how a non-human soul can end up in a human body with other Otherkin. See Lupa (2007, ch. 2) and Kirby (2009a, ch. 3) for details. As Laycock (2012a, 70) points out, the notion of 'walk-ins' was coined already by nineteenth century Spiritualists; it was revived by Ruth Montgomery's book *Strangers Among Us* (1979).

scious, though they maintain that the unconscious can serve as a bridge between this world and the other. This position avoids reducing Faery to a purely psychological realm while explaining why psychological techniques (e.g. the Tarot, the I Ching, and the active imagination) can give one access to Faery/Otherworld.

Like the genetic Elves, many soul-Elves trace their history back to a past among the stars. The Silver Elves claim that they have worked Elfin Magic and awakened other Elves "for lifetimes, for aeons both on the Earth and previously among the stars" (191209). Also Lady Danu of the Tribunal of the Sidhe told me that the kin folk "came from the stars" (290909).[321] The Elenari, a group of self-identified, reincarnated Star Elves, likewise claim to hail from a cluster of home worlds among the stars. It remains unclear whether these home worlds are situated among the physical stars or on a non-physical, astral (!) plane. One complex theory is that the Elves were first incarnated from the astral plane into a life on other planets before coming to Earth in this life.[322]

The variety of rationalisations of the Elven self makes clear that the Elves are forced to negotiate a balance between *fabulousness* and *plausibility*. On the one hand, it is the fantastic and fabulous, such as the identity as a descendant of star elves-Atlanteans, which makes it worthwhile at all to identify as an Elf. People want to be Elves because the Elven identity combines a sense of sectarian exclusivism (Elves are more authentic and more in touch with nature) with ontological exclusivism (the Elves constitute a superior and spiritually advanced race) and sometimes fuses the two into a mission (out of compassion, the Elves have incarnated to educate spiritually laggard humanity). On the other hand, many self-identified Elves are uneasy about these strong claims and feel drawn to the more plausible, but also less attractive notion that Elvishness is purely cultural.

Fabulousness and plausibility can be seen as two opposite attractor points between which all Elven rationalisations are stretched out. We can observe, therefore, that even when Elves emphasise either fabulousness or plausibility, that emphasis is somewhat offset by the opposite attractor point. Those individuals who claim to descend from the ancient Elves who raised Atlantis (fabulousness) do not claim to have inherited their powers (plausibility). By contrast, those individuals who merely claim to continue the

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[321] It must be mentioned that also a number of individuals who do not identify as Elves consider themselves to be "starseed", "star people", or "Wanderers", i.e. incarnations of souls who have lived on other planets before (Virtue 2007, ch. 4; Elkins and Rueckert 1977; Mandelker 1995; Rueckert 2001). In fact, it seems to be much more common for people to identify as star seed in general rather than as (Star) Elves in particular. By their example, the many self-identified starseed lend plausibility to the Elves' claim to originate from the stars: If the existence of starseed is already accepted, it becomes easier to believe that some starseed are also Star Elves.

[322] The homepage of the Elenari can be visited here: http://www.elenari.net/ [180712]. Another attempt to harmonise the physical and metaphysical views on the nature of the Elven astral home world involves the postulated existence of "Faerie Gates or physical wormholes to faerie" (McGowan 2011).

aboriginal religion of the human 'so-called elves' (plausibility) insist that these tribes possessed magical powers and that they themselves share these to some extent (fabulousness).[323] In all cases, claims which are considered too unrealistic for the physical present are projected either in *space* (to another plane, to another star system, or to the unconscious) or in *time* (to a mythological protology or eschatology). While all self-identified Elves who want respect in the Elven community will deny that they or other contemporaries possess the magical powers or near-immortality of Tolkien's Quendi, they will consider it possible that Elves of such stature exist in another star system, on another plane, existed on our planet in the past, and/or will come to exist again in the (near) future, either as a result of the confluence of the scattered Elven gene pool[324] or because of the sundering of the Veil.

11.3.2. Semiotic Strategies for Plausibility Construction II: Legitimisation and Relativisation

No matter how the Elves rationalise their claims to Elvishness, they further tend to engage in a variety of epistemological defences of their rationalisations. Interestingly, the Elves simultaneously engage in both of the two meta-strategies of justification identified in chapter 5, happily combining *legitimisation*, which seeks to prove the objective truth of their claims, with *relativisation*, which reduces the veracity of their claims to a matter of subjective feeling.

The awakened Elves possess two main strategies of legitimisation, the first of which makes an appeal to subjective experience. Elves who believe to possess an Elven soul often report past-life memories from previous Elven lives. We have already seen this in the case of Syleniel who remembered scenes from previous lives which resembled the representations of Lothlórien in the *LR* movies (cf. section 11.2.4 above); in section 11.3.3 on conversion we shall see another example. Subjective proof is also claimed by those self-identified Elves who regularly visit Elven home worlds by means of astral projection or similar techniques and who consider their ritually induced experiences to

[323] In a similar way, other Otherkin communities have sought to negotiate rationalisations that strike a balance between fabulousness and plausibility. In the Therian community, for instance, claims to nobody takes people seriously who claim to physically shape-shift like the werewolves of folklore (Robertson 2010). Therefore, only a few Therians claim to be shifters, and those who do so consider shape-shifting a mental (one's inner wolf awakes), phantom (increased awareness of phantom limbs), or astral affair (Lupa 2007, 283). Similarly, self-identified Vampires do not claim to be Undead or immortal and only scoff at the allegedly 439-year-old Elizabeth who called Vampire investigator Stephen Kaplan to tell him her story (cf. Kaplan 1984, ch. 5). Furthermore, most Vampires rationalise the thirst for blood which defines Sanguinarian Vampires as merely a form of Psychic Vampirism, it being the life force *in* the blood rather than the blood itself that they crave (Laycock 2012b, 145).

[324] In the 'folk evolutionism' which predominates among genetic Elves, Elven genes are considered to be not only dominant, but also to be able to extinguish human genes altogether over generations. The offspring of two half-elves (each with 50% Elvish genes) is considered to have *more than* 50% Elvish genes.

demonstrate the existence of these otherworlds. Also the use of Tolkien's works can be justified with subjective experience. For instance, Lady Danu of the Tribunal of the Sidhe explained that when she read *LR* as a child "it felt like I had come home, I felt as though I was remembering the stories as I was reading them" (290909).

The Elves' second legitimisation strategy is to appeal to authoritative sources, whose established prestige the Elves enlist to back up their own claims. These authoritative sources come in different kinds. The self-identified Elves regularly refer to mythology, folklore, and legend, especially the *Book of Invasions* and other parts of the Celtic tradition, which they consider to contain a core of historical truth. They also refer to works that insist on the reality of spiritual or physical Elves, such as the works of Walter Yeeling Evans-Wentz, Margaret Murray, Gerald Gardner, Robert Graves, and Dion Fortune. Many of these works are academic in their own self-understanding, and the Elven community consider them to provide scholarly proof of their beliefs. The Elves can use these works as sources of legitimisation, because they are considered authoritative within the cultic milieu in general, and it does not matter that they are dismissed as outdated, forged and/or pseudo-scientific by contemporary mainstream scholarship. Elves who believe to descend genetically from historical elves furthermore back up their view with reference to Laurence Gardner (2003), an esoteric historian whose speculations about an "Elven bloodline" will be discussed in detail in chapter 12. Tolkien's works are sometimes used as a source of legitimisation as well, often based on the assumption that Tolkien possessed genuine knowledge of the Elves which he esoterically conveyed in his works. The Elves are divided on this issue, however. Many Elves find that Tolkien's literary mythology cannot be used as a source of legitimisation, and that it is Tolkien's massive influence on the Elven movement which itself needs to be legitimised, for instance by pointing out the more authoritative sources which Tolkien drew on.[325]

The Elves' use of scholarly sources as a strategy for legitimisation is broader than the epistemological strategy of "scientism" identified by Olav Hammer (2004), cf. section 5.1.4 above. Discussions of scientific legitimisation in new religions (e.g. Hammer 2004; Lewis 2007; Lewis and Hammer 2011) tend to focus on how religionists appeal to

[325] It is worth noting that many of the works which Elves today refer to as sources of legitimisation are the very same sources out of which the idea that one can be an Elf was created in the first place several decades ago. In the previous chapter on the Tribunal of the Sidhe, I showed that it was the 'fairy theories' of Graves, Evans-Wentz, and others which originally facilitated the formation of the identity as Changelings. Though I have not discussed it in this chapter, those same theories helped formulate the Elven movement's notion that one can be an Elf. As soon as the idea that one can be an Elf/Changeling was established, however, this notion began to live its own life, and individuals could now be introduced to this idea without knowing anything about the sources out of which it had originally been forged. From this point onwards, the identity as Elf/Changeling became the core belief of new religious movements (the Elven movement; the Tribunal of the Sidhe), and rationalisations of this identity began to be developed which went beyond the original sources. The fairy theories which originally had supplied building blocks for the religious blend 'humans can be Elves' continue to play a role for the Elven movement (and for the Tribunal of the Sidhe), but now as indirect sources of legitimisation rather than as direct sources for religious blending.

contemporary and cutting-edge research fields such as quantum physics and systems theory (e.g. in so-called New Age physics) and how they use pseudo-scientific jargon (e.g. in Scientology). The appeal to scholarship which the Elven movement engages in is different from scientism and focuses instead on the strategic use of disciplines such as archaeology, anthropology, history, and folkloristics for purposes of legitimisation.[326] Since mainstream scholarship does not support the Elves' claims, an appeal is made instead to various forms of *stigmatised scholarship*. The Elves appeal to *superseded scholarship* which mainstream academia no longer considers legitimate (Nutt, Murray); to *rejected scholarship* which has been denied scholarly legitimacy from the outset on methodological grounds (Graves); and to *suppressed scholarship* which allegedly reveals knowledge which mainstream academia acknowledges as true, but suppressed out of political motives (Laurence Gardner and Nicholas de Vere).[327]

In combination with the elaborating rationalisations and objectivising legitimisations discussed so far, the Elves use a third semiotic strategy to defend their beliefs. They often relativise their beliefs, thus de-objectivising them and making them immune to rational critique. The Elves use two major strategies of de-objectivisation that both can be considered variations of subjectivisation (rather than compartmentalisation). The first is an appeal to subjective *feelings*. We already saw that the Silver Elves, according to Adler, "feel themselves to be" Elves. Along the same lines, Zardoa writes in his thesis that it ultimately does not matter whether his claim about possessing an Elven soul is accurate as long as it helps him sustain a meaningful "personal myth" (Love 2005). He also states that the Elves do not know for sure whether their Elvishness is "inherited" or whether they have themselves "created" it (Love 2005, 23). While asserting that he "always felt, deep, deep within, that [he] was descended from elves" (Love 2005, 24), Zardoa also writes that "if there never were a historical people called elves, there are now!" and that is ultimately what matters (2005, 23-24). Along similar lines, another prominent Elf, Rialian Ashtae, writes in his foreword to Lupa's *Field Guide* that for him the core of being an Elf is to have an "identity feeling" as Elf and *to accept* it as true because "it feels right" (2007, 15, 16).

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[326] Appeal to non-scientific scholarship is not restricted to the Elven movement, but is widespread in the cultic milieu. On alternative appeals to archaeology, see for example Andersson (2012), Lewis (2012b), Cusack (2011), and Nickolls (2011).

[327] The categories stigmatised, superseded, rejected, and suppressed scholarship are constructed to mirror Michael Barkun's notions of stigmatised, superseded, rejected, and suppressed knowledge (2003, 27). Together with forgotten knowledge and ignored knowledge, superseded, rejected, and suppressed knowledge constitutes the five principal types of stigmatised knowledge out of which conspiracy theories are created (Barkun 2003, 26-29).

A related strategy is to appeal to individual *choice*. In an article from 1986 in the *Circle Network News*, the Silver Elves seem to consider Elvishness a freely chosen thing.[328] They write:

> We never anoint someone as an elf. It has always been our position that no one, absolutely no one, has the right to say who is or is not an elf save the individuals themselves. They and only they have the final word on whether they are elves, gnomes, pixies, men or women. We may sometimes have our opinions and intuitions, but only they know. Should they stay with us or go their way is of no consequence, for *they are still elfin so long as they wish to be* (Silver Elves 1986, 23; emphasis added).

At the time, the Silver Elves were living with various house-mates, many of whom identifying as other-than-humans (there was a Gnome, a Faerie, some Star Elves, etc.; Sandstorm 2012, 22). The above quote seems to reflect the Silver Elves' experience with these (sometimes only temporarily) elfin people. The statement could also be a token of respect for the Elf Queen's Daughters who indeed remained Elves only as long as they chose to.

It should be emphasised that in the Elven community as such, the view that Elvishness is consciously chosen is very rare. That is probably because this view undermines all but the cultural understanding of what it means to be an Elf, as one can obviously not choose to have Elven ancestors or an Elves soul. Indeed, Elves will as a rule assert that they *are* Elves. Even if they have not always identified as Elves, they will explain that they always *were* Elves, but that they only realised this fact at a certain point in time, when they 'awakened' as self-conscious Elves.

This sub-section and the previous one have shown that the Elves possess a repertoire of semiotic strategies – rationalisations, legitimisations, and relativisations – which they use to protect the plausibility of their basic identity claim, namely that they are Elves in one way or the other. Before moving on to a discussion of Elven conversion, let me make two additional points about these semiotic strategies.

First, it is noteworthy that the Elves draw on established strategies of rationalisation and justification from the cultic milieu to construct their own particularly Elven versions. They do so, not only because the cultic milieu provides readily available models, but also because these models come with prestige and plausibility. Consider, for instance, the Elven claim that not only are there spirits on the astral plane, but many of them prove to be Elves and some of them walk among us, incarnated in human bodies. This is not so difficult to believe for one who already believes in astral spirits. Because the Elves intertwine their own particular ideas with ideas which are widely accepted, their rationalisations, such as being incarnated astral spirits, can pass as plausible both

[328] The Circle Sanctuary's quarterly *Circle Network News* was founded in 1974 and is among the chief national Pagan magazines in America.

within the Elven movement and within the cultic milieu at large.[329] Self-identified Elves also adopt established strategies for producing evidence for their beliefs. The best example is perhaps the use of past-life regression to 'retrieve' memories of past Elven lives. Past-life regression is considered s viable sources of knowledge within the cultic milieu, and the authority of the technique translates directly into the plausibility of the experience: if one has memories of previous Elven lives, then one ha really lived as Elf before. Finally, the Elves' appeal to subjective feelings is possible because the cultic milieu promotes the relativistic epistemology which underpins it.

The final thing I want to emphasise is the ease with which the Elves' combine the various semiotic strategies of plausibility construction. Individual Elves do not subscribe to just one particular view of why they are Elves, but slide between various explanations and happily hold several to be true at the same time. Indeed, I have quoted the Silver Elves throughout to illustrate how the same Elves can simultaneously subscribe to virtually all available rationalisations and justifications of being Elves. This approach is not particular for the Silver Elves, however. Like the Silver Elves, Elves in general feel that they are both the genetic and spiritual descendants of the gentle folks, and they tend to combine legitimisation with relativisation. Similarly, all Elves refer to subjective experience to justify their claim to Elvishness. Depending on mood and context, however, they will slide between referring to subjective experiences in order to objectivise their Elven identity (i.e. I feel it, so it is true) or to de-objective it (i.e. I feel it, so it is true for me, even if it is not objectively true).

11.3.3. Interpretive and Epistemic Drift: 'Conversion' to Elvishness

Like the two previous sub-sections, this one is concerned with the construction of plausibility in the Elven movement, but the emphasis is different. The previous sub-sections took up the issue how the Elven community as a collective actor constructs plausibility through the development of a repertoire of rationalisation and justification strategies. The present sub-section takes the point of view of the individual member and zooms in on the gradual 'conversion' process through which individuals become convinced that they are Elves.

Sociologists of religion agree to such a degree on how conversion to new religious movements takes place that we can aggregate their theories into a 'standard model'.[330] This standard model for conversion to new religious movements can be summed up in

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[329] To speak with Colin Campbell, the Elves join the game of "mutually supporting ideas" (1972, 123) which helps keep the cultic milieu together.

[330] I have aggregated the standard model from the work of Robert Balch (1980), Eileen Barker (1984), David Snow and Richard Machalek (1984), Brock Kilbourne and James Richardson (1988), and Lewis Rambo (1993; 1999). The sociological approach to conversion as a gradual process was initiated by John Lofland and Rodney Stark (1965).

three points. First, agency is placed with the convert. The initiation of the conversion process is seen as freely chosen, and converts are not believed to be 'brainwashed' or socially coerced. Sociologists of religion emphasise that individuals are free to break off from the conversion process before it has been completed and point out that most converts-in-being in fact do so. Second, the standard model conceives of conversion as the adoption of a new religious worldview which replaces a previously held worldview. According to this view, conversion thus entails the substitution of a secular worldview for a religious worldview or the substitution of one religious worldview with another. Third, the standard model emphasises that the conversion process is gradual. The replacement of worldviews is preceded by a long phase in which the convert acquires the movement's beliefs and practices and learns its social roles and rules of conduct. Conversion is realised when the convert reaches a point of conviction and publicly confesses this conviction. That the conversion process is gradual does not rule out that converts may have a significant conversion experience that for them clearly marks the transition from a pre-conversion state to a post-conversion state. In any case, converts will typically construct 'conversion narratives' which emphasise one experience or choice as the crucial one which signifies the transition from their previous life from their present commitment.

Elven conversion largely conforms to the first and the third points of the standard model, but not to the second. Concerning the first point, agency clearly lies with the individual convert in conversion to Elvishness. The loosely organised Elven community does not engage in proselytising and boasts no initiatory training programmes. The community has little formal power with which to compel, convince, and socialise potential members. To be sure, the online Elven groups that constitute the main social hubs of the Elven movement possess social codes which newcomers are expected to learn and adopt, but it is the individuals themselves who choose whether they want to join these groups and let themselves be socialised. Furthermore, members are free to leave the online Elven groups and continue as solitaire Elves, or even to abandon the Elven identity all together. The social cost of defecting is minimal because social ties are weak and because those who give up the Elven identity can usually fall back on a more fundamental identity as Pagans.

This takes us to the second point. Elven conversion does not involve the substitution of one worldview for another, but rather the addition of a new identity on top of an already held religious worldview. The situation is similar to the kind of conversion which Christel Manning refers to as "combination" (1996, 311) and which she observed in a group of Christian women who adopted a form of feminist Paganism focused on the Goddess *without* giving up their Christianity. As Manning put it, these women embraced Jesus *and* the Goddess. Conversion to Elvishness is different from the 'combination conversion' studied by Manning, however. Whereas the women studied by Manning worshipped both God and the Goddess and hence engaged in practices of the same type and function but from two different traditions, the adoption of an Elven identity

does not compete with any beliefs and practices centred on divine beings that one might already hold. As a consequence of this, the Elves can synthesise their newly gained identity with their former beliefs whereas the women studied by Manning did not merge Christianity and Goddess spirituality into a new synthesis.[331]

Like all other conversions, conversion to Elvishness is a gradual process. Inspired by Tanya Luhrmann's (1989) study of how newcomers in the magical milieu gradually adopt an identity and ideology as magicians, one can perceive conversion to Elvishness as an "interpretive drift". Luhrmann defines interpretive drift as

> the slow, often unacknowledged shift in someone's manner of interpreting events as they become involved with a particular activity. As the newcomer begins to practice, he becomes progressively more skilled at seeing new patterns in events, seeing new sorts of events as significant, paying attention to new patterns (1989, 312).

Luhrmann's description of interpretive drift is focused particularly on the change in magicians' experiences and interpretation of events as they come to see events in their lives as effects of magic. Also in the Elven movement, however, one can speak of interpretive drift. Awakening Elves are subject to an interpretive drift towards perceiving themselves as Elves and asking themselves 'what the Elves would do' in any given situation.

The interpretive drift involves, or leads to, what I suggest to call an 'epistemic drift'. Luhrmann observed that newcomers entered the magic milieu with only "a vague notion" that magic might influence the outer world (1989, 317), but that this vague notion with time crystallised into a firm belief in the reality of magic (1989, 315). Also the self-identified Elves go through a process of epistemic drift from hunch to conviction. They join the Elven community with a hunch that there is something Elven about themselves. After adopting the social role as Elf and learning the Elven community's rationalisations of Elvishness, they gradually come to believe and assert that they are Elves. This account still leaves open the questions: where does the hunch to be Elven come from in the first place? And how is the hunch transformed into certainty? Let me

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[331] Manning defines "combination" as a conversion process resulting in "the blending of two or more religions into a new syncretistic worldview" (1996, 311). Also Snow and Machalek (1984, 169-170) have pointed out that there exist forms of conversion in which the convert is not required to give up his old worldview, or in which the new worldview is a development of the old rather than a substitution of it, but according to Manning, Snow and Machalek do not go far enough. That is because they still count on conversion as resulting in the commitment to one particular religious institution, even though this institution may be syncretic, as in the case of the Theosophical Society or the Jesus Movement (Manning 1996, 311). The women studied by Manning combined church membership with private Pagan gatherings. Put in my own terms (cf. section 4.1.1 above), they hence did not really engage in syncretism, but rather in supplementary bricolage, i.e. combining two separate religious commitments without seeking to formally synthesise them (cf. Manning 1996, 300).

first quote from Arethinn's account of her awakening as fae, and then draw up an ideal-typical model of Otherkin 'drifting'.

> Me, I was one of the ones who always "felt a little different", something I generally attributed to the fact that I was the only pagan/witch I knew of in my high school or junior high, and in addition to that, kept secretly believing in unicorns and all that well into my teen years. When I was 11, a friend of mine and I used to pretend that we were characters from ElfQuest [a cult comic about Elves on an exo-planet], and that is really what started the whole thing, [...] About December of 1997 I had been looking at [online] pages about elves and things, mainly on account of playing Menzoberranzan [...] [a *Dungeons & Dragons* game set in a place dominated by Dark Elves, so-called Drow]. Naturally, this led me to a few [online] pages of "real" dark elves and such. Didn't think much about it at the time, beyond "wouldn't that be neat." Some months later [...] I found a link on some page to join the original wyldefae elist [...] Wow, but wasn't this a revelation. It was weird to encounter so many magickal people in one place, so many fae. [...] I was still a little "left out" until I started having – or properly, retrieving, since it was through a shamanic journey – memories. And the fact that my worldview coincides with so many of the fae – well, it's just more evidence.[332]

Several phases of interpretive drift precede the formulation of a hunch that one might be an Elf oneself. The very beginning of the drift to Elvishness must be sought in individuals' initial *fascination* with elves. This fascination does not come out of nowhere, but is usually the result of the consumption of fantasy fiction. In the case of the Silver Elves and many others, Tolkien's fiction ignited the first interest in elves; for Arethinn it was the ElfQuest comics.[333] The fascination with elves is gradually consolidated into an *identification* with the elves as individuals engage in some combination of the following practices: consuming additional fiction on elves in particular, searching the Internet for information about elves, dressing up as elves at the Elf Fantasy Fair or at similar

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[332] http://www.eristic.net/fey/living/howiawoke.php [100713].

[333] Most scholarship on the Otherkin movement emphasises its fiction-based character (e.g. Kirby 2009a; 2009b), but the role of fiction in the Vampire community is contested. The established view is that the Vampire community owes its existence largely to Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire* (1976; movie adaptation 1994) which humanised and eroticised the Eastern European ghoul (Keyworth 2002, 355, 357; Hume 2006). In his work on the Vampire community, Joseph Laycock has challenged this dominant position, however, and adopted the view of Vampire intellectual Michelle Belanger. Belanger claims that the Vampire community is made up of individuals who share a particular psychic condition, namely the need to receive additional life energy (referred to as *prana*) from others. So-called "energy workers" with this need only subsequently *chose* the vampire myth and identity as their metaphorical emblem (Belanger 2004, 36-37). Many so-called Sanguinarian (i.e. blood-drinking) Vampires also claim that their blood cravings came first and that they only adopted the Vampire identity as a means to make sense of this condition (Laycock 2009, 10). Even so, Laycock acknowledges the importance of fiction for sustaining the Vampire identity and community (2009, 39-48). On fiction supporting the Vampire Community in general, see also Partridge (2004, 126-131).

events,[334] and playfully and temporarily experimenting with being an elf in role-playing games. These role-playing games can either be paper-and-pencil games like *Dungeons & Dragons* or *Changeling: The Dreaming*, live action role-playing games, or online games, such as *World of Warcraft*. The identification with elves can further evolve into a *hunch* of being oneself an Elf as one becomes aware that there exist communities of individuals who seriously self-identify as such, especially if one joins such communities, adopts an Elven name (for instance from *LR*) as magical name or Internet alias, and so on. Typically it is not only the attractiveness of being an Elf that propels the interpretive drift, but also a feeling of being different or alienated and hence in need of a new, positive self-image. It is entirely typical that Arethinn begins her account with the words: "Me, I was one of the ones who always "felt a little different"".[335]

The Elven community consists of three types of members: those who 'know' they are Elves (the 'awakened Elves'), those who have a hunch that they are Elves, and those who are just interested in studying elves. Most joiners, like Arethinn, belong to one of the two latter categories, but with time, some of them drift towards a steady belief in being Elves themselves. New members use online groups as a relatively safe environment to practice the social identity as Elves and to learn the Elven community's stock of rationalisations of what Elves really are, how one can be an Elf, and why the Elves have come to earth. Electronic mailing lists also include accounts of senior Elves' awakenings which new members can use as models for their own. Many Elves, including Arethinn, ritually induce visualisations which can be interpreted as retrieved memories or journeys to other worlds. Experiences such as these are psychologically important as subjective evidence that can gradually consolidate the hunch of *perhaps being* an Elf into the conviction that one *is* an Elf. Awakening experiences are also socially important because a plausible awakening story is the key to acceptance within the community. One can know for sure that a shift from hunch to belief has taken place when Elves are willing to defend their Elven identity and justify it to strangers with the various rationalisations from the community's repertoire (descent, soul transmigration, etc.) As shown in figure 11.1 below, the epistemic drift to Elven awakening can be conceptualised in Greimasian terms as a drift through the various epistemic modalities of a semiotic square (cf. section 5.1.4 above).

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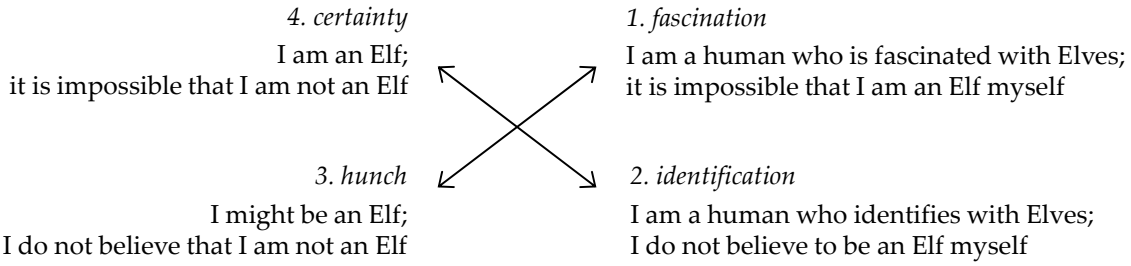
[334] The Elf Fantasy Fair is held twice a year in the Netherlands. See www.elffantasyfair.com [100212] and Ramstedt (2005, 183-185).

[335] Lupa (2007, 28) and Laycock (2012a, 74) consider the Otherkin movement *in toto* to be a reaction to a general condition of alienation in modern society.

Figure 11.1. Epistemic Drift to Elvishness



11.3.4. Plausibility Structures and Plausibility Threats for the Elven Movement

So far, we have examined the processes through which an Elven identity can be rationalised, justified, and adopted. Let me now turn to the social and cultural structures which help maintain plausibility for the Elven identity once it has been constructed and embraced. I touch upon four plausibility structures for the Elven movement, namely fantasy fiction, the cultic milieu, the Internet as a social platform, and the Elven community's movement intellectuals. I also discuss the plausibility threat posed by deconverted Elves and Otherkin who publicly denounce their former conviction of being a non-human.

First of all *fiction*. Tolkien's fiction and that of other fantasy authors not only offers an Elven identity for individuals to adopt, but also helps sustain such an identity through continued reading. Even when the Elves read fantasy fiction in a binocular mode, doing so reinforces their fundamental belief that Elves, magic, otherworlds, and so on exist. Fiction with Elven characters, such as Tolkien's narratives and Freda Warrington's *Elfland* (2009), furthermore provide role models for self-identified Elves and provide information about 'what the Elves would do' in various situations. As such, fantasy fiction fulfils the same identity-stabilising function as religious narratives (such as the Christian gospels) do in established religions. That fiction can play this role is not distinctive for the Elven movement and other Otherkin groups, but characterises also the Neo-Pagan movement and New Age in general (cf. sections 8.3.3 and 2.2.2).

Second, the *cultic milieu* works as a strong plausibility structure for the Elven movement. In sections 11.3.2 and 11.2.2 above, we have already seen that the cultic milieu in general and the Otherkin movement in particular have provided the Elven community with models for rationalisation and justification. In this way, the cultic milieu has facilitated the construction of theories about Elvishness which the Elves themselves find plausible. The cultic milieu works as a plausibility structure for the Elven movement in two additional ways. First, the fact that the belief in elves/fairies is completely normal within the cultic milieu seems to rub off an aura of plausibility onto the awakened Elves' more wide-ranging claim to be Elves themselves. When a large group of people believe in something (*in casu* that elves exist), it becomes more plausible for a sub-group to take this belief one step further (*in casu* to believe to be themselves Elves). Second, the cultic milieu supplies the Elven movement with an infrastructure.

Because the Elven movement is too small, for example, to maintain its own magazine running or to organise offline gatherings with more than a handful individuals, it has been necessary for the Elven community to connect itself to larger and better organised groups within the cultic milieu. In the 1970s through 1990s, the Elven movement constituted a part of the Neo-Pagan fringe and used the Pagan movement's infrastructure. For example, self-identified Elves published in Pagan magazines, as I have demonstrated by quoting articles from two such magazines, namely *Green Egg* (articles from 1976, 1995, and 1996) and *Circle Network News* (one article from 1986). In the 21st century, the Elven movement has merged with and become a substantial part of the Otherkin movement. The self-identified Elves now benefit from the Otherkin's infrastructure, especially their well-organised online communities and occasional offline gatherings.

This brings us to the *Internet*, which plays a more ambiguous role. On the one hand, the Internet facilitates information exchange and socialisation, and provides assurance and affirmation for new members. As we have seen in section 11.2.1 above, this is particularly true of the large Otherkin sites which have well-moderated forums, succeed in guaranteeing the privacy of their members, and encourage and facilitate occasional offline gatherings. Even though they are located online, these sites harbour real communities and maintain a social reality, a *nomos* in which the existence of reincarnated and genetically descended Elves is a matter of fact. In this sense, the online communities function as plausibility structures for religion in the classic sense formulated by Peter Berger (1967 45). On the other hand, Internet communities can also be disenchanting. They expose one to fellow Elves who naturally fall short of the idealised (Tolkien-inspired) sages. Furthermore, though the Internet facilitates the sharing of ideas and experiences, online Elven groups lack some of those characteristics which normally turn religious communities into particularly strong plausibility structures (cf. Durkheim 1995; Rappaport 1999). There is no physical co-presence and no collective rituals that can strengthen identity and social cohesion. In other words, while the online Elven communities certainly function as plausibility structures, these plausibility structures are relatively weak compared to those possessed by most religious offline groups.

Finally, the Elven community's *movement intellectuals* can be said to constitute a plausibility structure for the members at large. The Silver Elves, in particular, provide plausibility support in two ways. First, their very continued presence lends plausibility to the Elven community. It simply makes it easier to claim that one is an Elf when others have made that same claim for almost 40 years. Second, while the Silver Elves have not been alone in developing the Elven community's repertoire of rationalisations and justifications (cf. sections 11.3.1 and 11.3.2 above), they stand out from other movement intellectuals because they have published their ideas about the Elvishness and Elven spirituality. Indeed, they have published all their Magical Elven Love Letters and more than twenty other books.[336] All the Silver Elves' works are self-published, however, and

[336] See footnote 287 above.

lack the quality that a professional editor could have helped to achieve. Perhaps partly for this reason, none of the Silver Elves' books have achieved the status of a standard work. Their books thus stand in contrast to Michelle Belanger's *The Psychic Vampire Codex: A Manual of Magick and Energy Work* (2004) which has come to define the Vampire community and which serves as a strong plausibility structure.[337]

Summing up the plausibility structures of the Elven movement and the types of support they provide, we can say that (a) fantasy fiction helps sustain the core identity as Elf through continued reading, (b) the cultic milieu provides an infrastructure for the Elven movement as well as more inclusive groups (Otherkin, Neo-Pagans) to identify with and gain (perceived) social support from, (c) Internet communities help disseminate ideas, attract new members, and sustain the identity of those who have already joined, and (d) movement intellectuals provide role models and rationalisations. All in all, the plausibility structures are fairly strong, but not as strong as those enjoyed by most offline religious groups.[338] It is a good question whether these plausibility structures are strong enough to facilitate further growth in the Elven movement, especially when taking into consideration that the Elven movement does not only possess plausibility structures, but also faces plausibility threats.

The most notable plausibility threat faced by the Elves is public ridicule. One form of public ridicule is constituted by campaigns of so-called trolling, i.e. postings of messages on online forums that make the Elves out for freaks and lunatics. While such trolling is annoying, it is not completely dissuasive. It is worse when journalists join in the mocking, informing the public that Elves and Otherkin are weirdoes. For good reasons, the Otherkin community did not cheer when Zack Parsons published *Your Next-Door Neighbor is a Dragon* (2009), which included an unflattering portrayal of Roger the Elf and his blatant failures in demonstrating his magical powers.

Even worse than journalists writing mockingly for a general public, are testimonies by 'deconverted' Otherkin who state that their earlier conviction to be a non-human was a regretful delusion. One such testimony was published by Belladonna, a former Fairy, in the Pagan online magazine *Witchvox* in 2011.[339] Belladonna wrote that she had always been and still was a Pagan, but that she around 2001 had also believed that she was a Fairy with a Fairy soul and phantom wings. Belladonna had been part of a group of friends that also included a Wolf, an Angel, and a Dragon, but she now believes that she and her friends were delusional, and that she had been manipulated into believing those

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[337] Michelle Belanger's book is so far the only work by an Otherkin intellectual which has been published with a commercial publisher rather than by means of self-publishing.

[338] By comparison, the plausibility structures of the Vampire community are stronger. The Vampires have a stronger offline presence, more visible movement intellectuals, and specifically Vampiric practices related to blood-transfer and psychic Vampiric energy working. These superior plausibility structures have allowed the Vampire community to grow much larger than the Elven movement.

[339] See http://www.witchvox.com/va/dt_va.html?a=uspa&c=words&id=14693 [100713].

weird things by the shamanistic, self-identified Werewolf who led the group. Testimonies such as Belladonna's constitute a double plausibility threat for Elves and Otherkin. They hurt extra much because they are formulated by former insiders, and because they are written for Neo-Pagans, a group which most Elves and Otherkin feel to belong to and on which they count for recognition. Putting even more plausibility pressure on the Otherkin movement, Lupa, for years a self-identified Wolf Therian and chief movement intellectual within the Otherkin movement, recently confessed on her blog: "I no longer identify as a therianthrope".[340] While Lupa did not regret having "explored [her]self within the Otherkin framework", she symbolically marked her deconversion by withdrawing her *Field Guide to the Otherkin* (2007) from print.

It remains to be seen how strong the plausibility threats facing the Elven and Otherkin movements are relative to the plausibility structures that support them. As things stand, it is difficult to predict whether the 2010s will lead to further growth of the Otherkin movement and the Elven community within it, or to plausibility crisis and collapse.

[340] http://therioshamanism.com/2013/04/02/letting-go-of-therianthropy-for-good/ [120713].

Chapter 12. Esoteric Historians on the 'Truth' Behind Tolkien's Elves

There exists a subgenre of alternative history – we can call it conspiracy genealogy – which purports to reveal the secret history of a royal (and potentially messianic and/or magical) bloodline. Since Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh, and Henry Lincoln's best-seller *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail* (1982), it has been genre convention that (a) the royal bloodline has survived to this day, (b) that the contemporary heirs are known to the authorities, but are being denied their birth right, and (c) that the bloodline can be traced back in history through various European dynasties (especially the Merovingians) to Jesus Christ and Mary Magdalene. Later writers have elaborated on this basic scheme and offer various views on exactly *who* can legitimately claim messianic heritage and on exactly *how* the lineage can be traced back and how far. Any book in the genre will offer a complicated genealogy including prestigious dynasties (Merovingians; Stewarts) and legendary peoples (such as the Tuatha Dé Dannan), seek the origin of the bloodline among ancient civilizations (Egypt; Mesopotamia), and claim that the bloodline's supporters and protectors throughout history have included secret societies (Knights Templar; Freemasons) and heretics (esp. the Cathars).

This chapter focuses on the work of conspiracy genealogists Laurence Gardner (who should not be confused with Gerald Gardner) and Nicholas de Vere, both of whom passed away while I was working on this book. Gardner styled himself Presidential Attaché to the European Council of Princes and Jacobite Historiographer Royal, and de Vere claimed to be HRH Nicholas II de Vere, Prince of Drakenburg, Hereditary Dragon Lord, and Grand Master of the Knights Templar. Besides being colourful figures, Gardner and de Vere are relevant for this thesis because they link Tolkien's literary mythology to their own pseudo-historical speculations. They have done so by demonstrating that certain motifs can be found both in Tolkien's narratives and in bloodline lore and by suggesting that Tolkien therefore must (or at least might) have known about the royal bloodline and consciously hinted at it in his books.

In the previous chapter I mentioned that Gardner and de Vere's esoteric historiography contributes to plausibility maintenance in the Elven movement. In the present chapter I analyse the content of Gardner's *Realm of the Ring Lords* (2000/2003) and de Vere's *The Dragon Legacy* (2004). In the cultic milieu in general, Gardner is the more influential and well-known of the two, but de Vere, who was an associate and informant of Gardner's before going solo, is interesting as well because he makes more sweeping claims about the bloodline, lead a political-religious organisation that claims to represent

it, and because he draws more extensively and explicitly on Tolkien's literary mythology to support his claims.

The writings of Gardner and de Vere differ in two related ways from (most of) the empirical material otherwise considered in part II of this thesis. First, Gardner and de Vere are not engaged in Tolkien spirituality in the strict sense of integrating elements from Tolkien's literary mythology into their beliefs and practices. They do not, for instance, make shamanic journeys to Middle-earth or worship Varda. Second, Tolkien's mythology occupies a different, indeed inverted, position in Gardner and de Vere's dynamics of belief compared to standard Tolkien spirituality. Normally, Tolkien spirituality involves, first, the integration of Tolkien elements into actual beliefs and practices, and, as a second step, a justification of the religious use of a fictional source. The alternative historians in this chapter, by contrast, have first developed their bloodline theories without integrating any Tolkien material, most strikingly ignoring Tolkien's Maian-Elven-human bloodline (cf. section 9.2.1). Only as a second step do Gardner and de Vere compare Tolkien's work with their own theories and *affix*, as it were, his work to their own. Reading Tolkien in the binocular mode, they invoke his works as sources of legitimisation, claiming that Tolkien consciously, but indirectly referred to the 'real' bloodline, i.e. the bloodline they themselves claim to reveal. It is therefore more precise to label the use of Tolkien's literary mythology by Gardner and de Vere as *Tolkien-affixing* rather than Tolkien-integrating.

The unusual position of Tolkien's mythology in the dynamics (or rhetoric) of belief of the conspiracy genealogists is reflected in the organisation of this chapter. The first and longest section analyses the conspiracy genealogy of Gardner and de Vere as Tolkien-affixing religion. After providing some necessary background information on conspiracy genealogy, I discuss Gardner's and de Vere's theories in turn with an emphasis on their legitimising use of Tolkien. A second section raises the questions *why* esoteric historians (can) use Tolkien's work as a source of legitimisation. I seek the answer in the authority and prestige which Tolkien's literary mythology and Tolkien himself enjoy within the cultic milieu.

12.1. The Elven Bloodline: Tolkien and Conspiracy Genealogy

12.1.1. The *Sang Réal*: Esoteric Speculations about a Secret Royal Bloodline

Gardner and de Vere draw on two established notions within conspiracy genealogy, namely that (a) the line of the Merovingian king Dagobert II secretly survived and that (b) Jesus Christ and Mary Magdalene married and had children. They also add many of their own ideas, but let me begin by introducing the Merovingian and messianic motifs.

The Merovingian motif is tied to Rennes-le-Château. This French hamlet rose to fame when Robert Charroux (1962) publicised Noël Corbu's claim that a nineteenth-century priest, Bérenger Saunière, had found a huge treasure here. The treasure legend

inspired Pierre Plantard to claim that some secret "parchments", originally recovered by Saunière, had come into his possession. Plantard's associate Gérard de Sède (1967) published the content of some of these parchments which allegedly demonstrated the survival of the line of Dagobert II, a 7th century Merovingian king of Austrasia (a part of the Frankish empire). Plantard hereby challenged the established view among historians that Dagobert II died without an heir, after which dominion over the Frankish empire gradually shifted from (another line of) Merovingian kings to their Mayors of the Palace, until one of the Mayors, Charles Martel, proclaimed himself Duke of the Franks and founded the Carolingian dynasty. According to Plantard, the truth about Dagobert II's rightful heir was purposely hidden by later Frankish and French kings, but the line survived as did knowledge of it. More than that, the parchments 'proved' that Plantard himself was a descendant of Dagobert II, and hence possibly the rightful heir to the throne of France.[341]

In their conspiracist best-seller *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail* (1982), Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh, and Henry Lincoln propagated Plantard's claim of descent from Dagobert II. To this they added the notion that the Merovingians (and thus Plantard) were in turn descendants of Jesus Christ and Mary Magdalene (Baigent, Leigh, and Lincoln 1982, esp. 274-276). The authors base their claim in part on a hagiography in Jacobus de Voragine's *The Golden Legend* (Jacobus 1993, I, 374-383; cf. Baigent, Leigh, and Lincoln 1982, 304, 342) in which we are told that Mary Magdalene was no whore, but "wellborn, descended of royal stock" (Jacobus 1993, I, 375). Jacobus further tells us that

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[341] Rennes-le-Château continues to be the centre of conspiracy theories involving leylines, UFOs, the Knights Templar, and more. Particularly interesting are two books about Rennes-le-Château written by Lionel Fanthorpe, an Anglican priest, science fiction author, and investigator of Fortean phenomena, together with his wife Patricia (1982; 1991). In these two books, the couple connects the "mysteries and secrets" of Rennes-le-Château to motifs in *LR* (they do not refer to *S*). The Fanthorpes consider it "a serious possibility" that Tolkien "may have known more than most about the mysteries of Rennes-le-Château" and hinted at this knowledge in his books (1991, 127). They suggest, for instance, that the reinstatement of Aragorn as the rightful king of Gondor after a long period in which the realm has been ruled by the Stewards could be a hint to the reinstatement of king Dagobert II after the exile forced upon him by his Mayor of the Palace, Grimoald the Elder (Fanthorpe and Fanthorpe 1982, 38-40; 1991, 127). That could very well be, but it would be uncontroversial, for historians agree that Dagobert II was probably exiled and reinstated; historians disagree with conspiracy theorists only regarding the notion that Dagobert II should have had a secret heir. The Fanthorpes also note that Tolkien's detailed description of the magical door through which the fellowship enters the Mines of Moria closely resembles the watermarks in one of Sir Francis Bacon's books and speculate that Tolkien might have been initiated into the use of this enigmatic watermark code (1982, 90; 1991, 92-94). The connection of the watermark code to Rennes-le-Château remains vague, however, the logic being seemingly that all esoteric things are connected and that Bacon, because he used watermark codes, must have known the secrets of Rennes-le-Château as well. The Fanthorpes generally assume that Tolkien and many other fiction authors, including C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, George MacDonald, and especially Victor Hugo, possessed esoteric knowledge that they hinted at in their books (1982, 100-103; 1991, 127-128). What that knowledge exactly is and what the hints are supposed to mean remains unclear.

as a result of the persecution of Christ's followers, Mary Magdalene and many other disciples were captured and put out to sea on a ship without pilot. Their captors intended them to succumb, but by God's will the steer-less ship was guided to Marseilles where the disciples landed and where Mary lived until her death and preached the gospel (Jacobus 1993, I, 376).[342]

Baigent, Leigh, and Lincoln consider Jacobus' legend to be based on fact. They also hold that another legend, which adds that Mary Magdalene was accompanied by Joseph of Arimathea and the Grail, has an historical core (Baigent, Leigh, and Lincoln 1982, 433). To this, they add a motif of their own invention, namely that the Grail was not a cup that held Jesus' blood, but that it really referred to Mary and Jesus' offspring. According to Baigent, Leigh, and Lincoln, this truth about Christ's lineage had been preserved but obscured in the grail mythology which mistook references to a royal bloodline (a *sang réal*) for references to a Holy Grail (a *san greal*).[343] As they explain, the grail bloodline can be qualified as royal, not (just) because of Jesus' alleged divinity or messianic status, but also because both Mary (cf. Jacobus) and Jesus (through Joseph and David, cf. Luke 2:4) were of royal blood. Since Mary was thought to have lived in Southern France, the messianic bloodline could easily be linked to the Merovingians.[344] Baigent, Leigh, and Lincoln further developed their bloodline ideas and linked them to various other conspiracy theories in *The Messianic Legacy* (1986). Dan Brown later popularised the *sang réal* tradition with his novel *The Da Vinci Code* (2003).

12.1.2. Laurence Gardner's *Realm of the Ring Lords* as Tolkien-affixing Conspiracy Genealogy

Laurence Gardner has written three books about the secret bloodline. In the first, *Bloodline of the Holy Grail* (1996), Gardner adopted the notion of a messianic *sang réal* from Baigent and associates, but did not mention Plantard's claims. This was probably because Plantard, in reaction to *The Holy Blood and The Holy Grail*, had publicly professed that his parchments were forgeries (Introvigne 2005). Gardner instead supported Michel Roger Lafosse, another doubtful throne contender who claimed to be the rightful

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[342] Jacobus was a Dominican monk from Varazze, a city close to Genoa, and his legend collection reflects this geographical fact. Marseille is a large and ancient port city not far from Varazze.

[343] The Grail was introduced as a literary motif with Chrétian de Troyes's *Perceval ou Le conte du Graal* (*c.* 1190) and subsequently became a key motif in a cycle of medieval romances. In these romances, written against the backdrop of the crusades and often commissioned by crusader patrons, the Grail became related to the Holy Land and identified as a cup owned by Joseph of Arimathea (Wood 2000, 171).

[344] As Wood points out, Baigent, Leigh, and Lincoln's combination of the Merovingian and messianic motifs was probably also indebted to the anthroposophist Walter Johannes Stein (1928) who had identified the grail guardians as Charlemagne's heirs (Wood 2000, 183).

Jacobite heir to the Kingdom of Scotland.[345] In two later books, *The Genesis of the Grail Kings* (1999) and *Realm of the Ring Lord* (2000/2003), Gardner went beyond the information received from Lafosse, and traced the bloodline back to ancient times. In these books, he claimed to reveal material about the bloodline which had not before been published, but which had been kept safe in the archives of "the Imperial and Royal Dragon Court" (1999, xv). These very pompously sounding archives were in fact Nicholas de Vere's family archives. Gardner thanks "HRH Prince Nicholas de Vere von Drakenberg" for granting him access to these archives (1999, xviii), and de Vere in turn expresses his appreciation of Gardner's work in a foreword. *Realm of the Ring Lords* was first published in 2000 by Multi MediaQuest International with the subtitle *The Myth and Magic of the Grail Quest*, but was reissued in 2003 by Element, an imprint of HarperCollins. HarperCollins, who also publish all Tolkien's works, took advantage of the strongly increased interest in Tolkien which the *LR* movies had generated after the initial publication of *Realm* by marketing the book as the true story behind Tolkien's fiction. Already in the original edition, Gardner had discussed Tolkien in the main text, but now the book was given a new subtitle, *The Ancient Legacy of the Ring and the Grail*, and a new front cover prominently featuring a ring very similar to The One Ring in the movies. Furthermore, the new back cover promised that the book reveals the "magical history of the Ring Lords" which is "alluded to in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*".

In Gardner's take on the *sang réal* the bloodline from Christ via the Merovingians (from the Rennes-le-Château tradition) is related to the Tuatha Dé Dannan. He is not interested in the Tuatha Dé Dannan as conquerors of Ireland, however, but frames them as important bloodline ancestors and pushes their origin back to ancient Mesopotamia. The bloodline is ultimately claimed to originate with the "Ring Lords" who from their homeland in Scythia descended into Sumer where they were worshipped as gods.[346] Gardner variously refers to the bloodline as the Grail bloodline (cf. the *sang réal*

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[345] Lafosse, who styles himself HRH Prince Michael of Albany, also claims to be the president of the European Council of Princes. It was the cooperation with Lafosse which earned Gardner the dubious titles of Jacobite Historiographer Royal of the Royal House of Stewart (of which Lafosse claims to be the head) and Presidential Attaché to the European Council of Princes (of which Lafosse claims to be the president). Historians dismiss Lafosse's claims. The European Council of Princes, if the organisation exists at all, has no formal power.

[346] The location of the origin of the Dragon/Grail bloodline in the East seems to be inspired by theosophical speculations about the Aryan root race (cf. Trompf 2006, 282-285; Ellwood 1986, 87-102) and by Ludwig E. Iselin (1909) and Emma Jung and Marie Louise von Franz' (1960) theory that the grail myth could be traced back via the Persians to Genghis Khan (cf. Wood 2000, 184). Another possible source of inspiration is C. Scott Littleton's thesis that the legends about the Holy Grail and the Knights of the Round Table have their origin among the Sarmatians, a Scythian people, and that they were brought to Britain by a group of Sarmatian auxiliaries, led by Lucius Artorius Castor, who settled in Britain in the second century (Littleton and Thomas 1978; Littleton and Malcor 1994). In any case, Gardner places the origins of the bloodline in Scythia, though he explicitly dismisses Littleton's idea that there should be a connection between Artorius and Arthur (2003, 92-93).

tradition), the Elven bloodline (cf. the Tuatha motif), and the Dragon bloodline (cf. de Vere's notion of a Royal Dragon Court). Gardner's merging of traditions into one genealogical synthesis is based on the synonymisation of peoples, on the selective and creative use of sources, and on imagined etymological connections – obviously the Scots must descend from the Scythians, for what else can explain the similar names?

Gardner's bloodline begins with the Anunnaki. The Anunnaki were worshipped as gods in ancient Sumer, but Gardner asserts that they were in reality "the remnants of an advanced earthly [rather than heavenly] race" (2003, 26). Gardner further identifies the Anunnaki with our familiar Tuatha Dé Dannan, but he renders their name "Tuadhe d'Anu". This is significant, because Gardner thus transforms the people of the European goddess Danu into the people of the male Mesopotamian god Anu (2003, 31). With a further move of synonymisation, he considers Elohim to be the Hebrew word for the Anunnaki/Tuadhe tribe (Gardner 2003, 25).[347] Since Elohim is claimed to mean "the Shining Ones", and since the elves share both this epithet and the first two letters of their name with the Elohim, Gardner sees reason to believe that the elves of the Anglo-Saxon tradition (and by implication the Celtic fairies as well) and the Elohim refer to the same actual people (2003, 25).[348] These synonymisations are further strengthened by the adoption of Margaret Murray's (1921) identification of the elves/fairies with the Picts (or Picts-*sidhe* or pixies; Gardner 2003, 32, 76).[349] Gardner considers the Picts (or at least their kings) to be descendants of those of the Tuadhe d'Anu who conquered Ireland as told in *The Book of Invasions* (cf. section 10.2.1 above). All in all we have the following chain of synonymisations: Anunnaki = Tuadhe d'Anu = Elohim = Elves = Picts.[350]

Gardner claims to reconstruct the true story about the Tuadhe d'Anu behind the Christianised version in *The Book of Invasions* (2003, 77). This 'reconstruction' involves taking the Tuatha, together with the peoples with whom they are synonymised, and domesticating them in the light of contemporary bloodline speculations. Most importantly, Gardner reinterprets the Tuatha's source of distinctiveness by investing the term *sídhe* (which he renders 'Sidhé') with a new meaning. Rather than meaning hollow hill, *sídhe* originally, claims Gardner, referred to a special magical power, "a transcendent intellect" which was called "the Web of the Wise" (2003, 32). This resemantisation of the concept *sídhe* implies also a resemantisation of the Tuatha who, according to Gardner,

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[347] In the Hebrew Bible, the term Elohim is used to refer both to pagan gods, to the one God of Israel, and to earthly rulers.

[348] It is actually the *sídhe* in Celtic folklore rather than the Anglo-Saxon *álfar* (Elves) who are traditionally referred to as the Shining Ones, but that does not concern Gardner who considers the folklore on *sídhe*, fairies, and elves to refer to the same actual human race.

[349] The Pictish connection is important to back up Lafosse's claim to throne of Scotland (Gardner 1996) and to inscribe the British de Vere family into the bloodline (Gardner 1999; 2003).

[350] Gardner's complicated genealogy also includes Christ, Vlad Dracula, Robin Hood, and many other historical and legendary figures of renown.

together with all other members of the bloodline shared the *sídhe* power which Gardner supposes to be situated in the mitochondrial DNA (2003, 14, 29, 51). Besides granting magical powers, the special *sídhe*-DNA gives members of the bloodline a very long lifespan. These effects were most visible long ago, before the blood was diluted through marriages with families outside the *sang réal*. Gardner explains the fact that the Tuatha were sometimes referred to as the *sídhe* as a mistaken meronymy, i.e. that the race became known by the name of the power which made them special (2003, 32).

By attributing magical powers to the bloodline, Gardner goes an important step further than Baigent, Leigh, and Lincoln for whom the bloodline is merely royal. Gardner's addition also makes the members of the bloodline more similar to Tolkien's Quendi. Like Gardner's Tuatha d'Anu, Tolkien's Quendi possess magical powers, a long life span, and the ability to interbreed with normal humans (cf. section 9.2.1 above).

According to Gardner, the similarity between Tolkien's fictional Quendi and the 'real' Elven/Grail/Dragon bloodline is not coincidental. On the contrary, Gardner believes that Tolkien intended his Quendi to hint at the true bloodline in two ways. First and most importantly, Gardner points out that Tolkien's Quendi do not resemble the diminutive fairies of folklore, but the 'real' Tuadhe d'Anu, being physical beings of human stature, but with innate magical powers and a long lifespan (Gardner 2003, 32). Such a similarity, runs the argument, can only mean that Tolkien knew about the bloodline and cautiously, but consciously referred to it, i.e. in the binocular mode.[351] Secondly, Gardner finds it striking that Tolkien has estimated that the events of *LR* took place around 4,000 BC, roughly at the time when Gardner's Anunnaki enter the scene (2003, 6). It is true that Tolkien in a letter playfully made such an estimate (*Letters* 283), but that should be read in the context of his feigned history ploy (cf. section 7.3.1 above and section 15.1 below). Gardner refers to David Day, an author of popular books on Tolkien's mythological sources who discusses this letter, but fails to acknowledge that also Day writes tongue-in-cheek.[352]

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[351] Though I cannot demonstrate it, it is of course possible that the similarity between Gardner's bloodline and Tolkien's Quendi is due to Gardner being inspired by Tolkien, possibly via de Vere. Just as likely, Gardner and Tolkien were simply inspired by the same stock of mythological sources.

[352] Day wrote that "Tolkien estimates [that] our own historic time was some six thousand years after the Third Age. […] So, like those who attempt to date the creation of the world back through the texts of the Bible, we may now reckon the time of Tolkien's War of the Ring at something between 4000 and 5000 BC; while the creation of his world of Arda must be placed at 41,000 BC" (1994, 13; 2003, 14). Possibly inspired by Gardner, also other Tolkien religionists refer to this passage of Day's to back up a more or less historical reading of Tolkien's literary mythology.

12.1.3. Nicholas de Vere's *The Dragon Legacy* as Tolkien-affixing Conspiracy Genealogy

The collaboration between Gardner and de Vere seems to have gone awry. Gardner, who thanked de Vere in his 1999-book, does not mention him with a single word in the 2003-book though he still refers to material from de Vere's 'archives'. De Vere, on his side, went solo and published *The Dragon Legacy* (2004). 'Revealing' new and exclusive information from the "family records", de Vere made even grander claims than Gardner, especially about himself. De Vere claimed to belong to a "senior" lineage of the Dragon bloodline (2004, 34) and to be the head of The Imperial and Royal Dragon Court of the Dragon Sovereignty, an organisation allegedly founded in 1408 (2004, 23). Together with "H.E. Count" Michael Hunter, de Vere later published a sequel, *The Dragon Cede* (De Vere and Hunter 2011), which tracks the "Fairy Bloodlines of Houses Vere, Weir and Collison" in great detail and includes additional essays by Hunter and other Dragons together with Tracy R. Twyman's interview with de Vere, entitled "My Kingdom is not of this World" (de Vere 2011).

A portion of de Vere's first book, *The Dragon Legacy*, was originally self-published on the Internet under the title *From Transylvania to Tunbridge Wells*. Both books were later published in printed form with The Book Tree, a minor American publisher of "metaphysical, spiritual, and controversial books", according to its homepage.[353] The books appear completely unedited, have no bibliography, and the genealogical charts in *The Dragon Legacy* are of such poor quality that they are barely readable (this last problem does not mare *The Dragon Cede*). In all these respects, de Vere's books are strikingly different from Gardner's. The content is intriguing, however, because de Vere himself claimed to belong to the bloodline and thus speaks in this book from an insider position that is more radical than Gardner's. Furthermore, and perhaps to trump Gardner, de Vere claims that some of his knowledge has been achieved "from the application of the Derkesthai phenomenon" (2004, 4), i.e. the special magical (and divinatory) faculty that members of the Dragon bloodline possess and which Gardner referred to as the Sidhé or transcendent intellect.[354]

De Vere's Dragon bloodline is constructed in much the same way as Gardner's lineage, but de Vere goes beyond Gardner in four ways. First, he pushes the beginning of the bloodline further back to a postulated Derkesthai culture blossoming from 10,000 BC onwards. As de Vere-disciple Tracy R. Twyman puts it in her foreword,

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[353] See http://thebooktree.com/ [280214].

[354] De Vere and his followers refer to the bloodline as the Dragon bloodline, but contrary to self-identified Dragons in the Otherkin community, they do not claim to possess a dragon soul or anything of that sort. The Dragon bloodline bears its name because it is ultimately traced back to Tiamat, the Dragon Queen, of whom de Vere claims that she was a queen of the Dragon race who unfairly became mythologised as a chaos monster in Mesopotamian mythology.

> [d]e Vere paint[s] a picture of the beginnings of the Grail bloodline in an antediluvian civilization, with a super-human, red-haired race of Grail kings that conquered and ruled over the primitive hordes of the ancient world, with tribes on each continent. They were overseers, "navigators", directing the affairs of the world with the Solomonic wisdom inherent in their blood. They watched over a perfect caste-ordered society, in which all people worked and lived within their proper station, creating a harmonious, inter-dependent and respectful relationship between the classes. They created all of the traditions, customs and institutions upon which civilization depends, and of which our current traditions, customs and institutions are pathetic bastardizations (Twyman 2004, 8).

Second, de Vere develops the notion that members of the bloodline possess an innate magical faculty. Like Gardner, de Vere biologises this faculty and claims that only Dragons with "the right blood serum [and] the right connections in their cerebral lobes" can work magic (2004, 25). Contrary to Gardner, however, who seems to believe that the blood of contemporary Dragons is so diluted that little of this power remains (just as the lifespan of Dragons today is no longer extraordinarily long), de Vere insists that Dragons, at least those of the purer or senior lineages such as his own, still possess substantial magical capacities (cf. Twyman 2004, 8).[355] By making a deft distinction between the inclusive category of individuals with some measure of Dragon blood – a category to which ten per cent of the European population allegedly belongs[356] – and the exclusive category of senior lineages with serious magical abilities, de Vere offers his followers an identity of superiority compared to normal people while effectively monopolising charisma within his movement.

Third, de Vere makes it clear that the Dragons originally constituted a non-human species, though they were evidently able to procreate with humans. Gardner had referred to the Anunnaki as "the King tribe" (2003, 32), suggesting that they were a special, but still human tribe. De Vere adds to this account that the King tribe originated through the "hybridisation" of ordinary humans and an entirely non-human species "that scientists now assert preceded the human genetic bottleneck by about thirty thousand years" (2011, 56). As de Vere himself points out, this non-human component of the Dragon bloodline explains why the elves of legend are reported to have special physical features. It also makes his account more similar to Tolkien's notion of the Line of Lúthien (cf. section 9.2.1)

Finally, de Vere went beyond Gardner in that he had political ambitions of realising the 'natural' caste-ordered and monarchic Derkesthai society with himself as

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[355] De Vere believes that the so-called witches of the Middle Ages belonged to the bloodline and therefore possessed real magical powers. He is therefore particularly dismissive of Gerald Gardner's "inauthentic witchcraft" that allows the initiation of non-Dragons (De Vere 2004, 25, 29-32).

[356] De Vere told Twyman that much in an interview in 2004 for the conspiracy theory magazine *Paranoia* and also claimed that scholars from Oxford University had established this fact (De Vere 2011, 66).

king. De Vere claimed that a first step in this political process had been taken when Drakenberg (which he also refers to as Lothlórien), the Nation State of the Dragon Peoples, had been officially recognised by one Western government in 1997 (he conveniently avoided to tell which one) (2004, 323).[357]

If the self-identified Elves of the previous chapter raised subcultural capital by casting the Elven race as superior, ancient, and bestowed with the mission to educate humanity, de Vere takes this effort to the second power by claiming to possess the legitimate authority and innate magical powers of the Elven/Dragon Bloodline. The self-identified Elves recognise themselves in de Vere's claims that the Elves/Dragons guard the ancient wisdom and possess innate magical abilities, but most distance themselves from de Vere's dreams of the righteous hegemony of a superior race. Nevertheless, de Vere's political vision appeals to a portion of the Pagan right-wing, and some Tolkien religionists are clearly fascinated. For example, Lomelindo, who was a member of Ilsaluntë Valion when I talked to him in 2009, claimed to descend from the Merovingians himself, professed to be a monarchist on his Facebook profile, and made claims about his family ancestry that were almost *verbatim* loans from de Vere's book. Lomion/Adam Hayden, a former member of Tië eldaliéva, is now involved in the Imperial and Royal Dragon Court, a rival to de Vere's organisation of the same name.[358]

In a chapter entitled "Myth or Reality? The World of J.R.R. Tolkien", de Vere relates Tolkien's narratives to his theories. He does so in much greater detail than Gardner, drawing extensively on *S* where Gardner uses only *LR*. De Vere's strategy is similar to Gardner's, however, and consists mostly of identifying concepts in Tolkien's literary mythology which are similar to concepts in other lore, and of ascribing significance to these similarities. For instance, de Vere points out that Tolkien's Ainur resemble the Anunnaki both in name and function; that the Valar might be related to Vala, a Vedic demon slain by Indra; and that the term Maiar resembles both Maja, a Spanish female line of nobility and royalty, *magus* (magician), and *mana*, a term which de Vere understands as the "spirit of the god carried in the blood" (2004, 215-217). De Vere does not think it a coincidence that the most powerful Valar, the Aratar, are eight in number as are the Anunnaki,[359] nor that the very name Aratar is similar to the Hindu concept Avatar. Also the Quendi are sought connected to the Anunnaki with whom they suppo-

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[357] De Vere's theory thus inverts the standard conspiracy model. Political conspiracy theories are usually concerned with an elite group that controls (or attempts to control) the world unrightfully and should therefore be revealed and disposed of. De Vere twists this scenario by postulating instead the existence of a persecuted elite group with a *right to rule*. There is still a conspiracy, namely one suppressing this natural right, but the desired outcome of revealing the conspiracy is not a simple abolishment of an undue state-of-affairs, but the substitution of an illegitimate hegemony for a rightful one.

[358] Se http://imperialandroyaldragoncourt.ning.com/ [280214].

[359] The number of the Anunnaki varies in different Mesopotamian myths; that there are exactly eight Anunnaki is de Vere's interpretation. Laurence Gardner claims that the Anunnaki were nine in number, as this fits his numerological speculations better (2003, 51-53).

sedly share the epithet "People of the Stars". It is apparent to de Vere that the Edain, the purest race of men, must have come from Biblical Eden, and that Tolkien's Avallónë is a rendering of Avalon.

It is beyond doubt that Tolkien's Avallónë is based on Avalon, and de Vere may indeed have encountered other real loans of Tolkien's as well. It is no secret that Tolkien was inspired by mythology, but de Vere draws a bold conclusion from his findings. He states: "Tolkien, in his epic works, with their plethora of borrowed names and borrowed linguistics and their elder and younger races, is obviously writing about the family [=the Dragon bloodline]" (De Vere 2004, 217). That is to say that according to de Vere, Tolkien did not only draw on the world's mythologies, he probably knew about the Dragon bloodline and borrowed from secret "Dragon lore" as well. De Vere believes that the true Middle-earth lay around the Caspian Sea and that the Third Age of Middle-earth corresponds with the Derkesthai golden age around 10,000 BC (2004, 324). He is cautious enough to state that Tolkien cannot be used as a "scholarly resource" on the history of the Dragon people, but bold enough to contend that Tolkien's work "uses aspects of lore that exist in human history" (De Vere 2004, 325).

12.2. Why Refer to Tolkien? Tolkien's Literary Mythology as a Source of Legitimisation in Conspiracy Genealogy

Laurence Gardner and Nicholas de Vere do not consider Tolkien's literary mythology to reveal the historical facts about the bloodline in a straightforward, literal-affirmative sense. Even so, they invoke Tolkien as a fellow esotericist and ally and ascribe a derived factuality of the binocular-affirmative sort to his works. In particular, they suggest that Tolkien's human-like Elves were intended to indirectly reveal the truth *that* a special bloodline exists. In other words, Gardner and de Vere claim to expose the historical truth behind Tolkien's Elven race, a truth which they furthermore claim that Tolkien knew of, though he for some reason chose not to unveil it in full.

In previous chapters we have encountered claims about Tolkien's alleged esoteric knowledge that are similar to those put forward by Gardner and de Vere. The Tribunal of the Sidhe claims that Tolkien knew about the kin folk and wrote their history in mythic form. Many self-identified Elves similarly assert that Tolkien intentionally conveyed the real truth about an elder race, though he overlaid this truth with a fictional varnish. Gardner and de Vere's claims about Tolkien as an esoteric historian are thus not unique, but the context in which these claims are put forward differs from the context in which similar claims are made by self-identified Changelings and Elves. The spirituality and identity of the Tribunal members and the self-identified Elves is clearly inspired by Tolkien's narratives, a fact which they *have to* justify by asserting that Tolkien's text is in some way more than fiction. Gardner and de Vere, by contrast, construct their bloodline without using Tolkien – de Vere claims, for instance, to descend from Anu and Robin

Hood (2004, 389, 419), but not from Aragorn and do not *need* to affix Tolkien material to their bloodline speculation. Yet they do so and even consider it a form of proof when they are able to point out similarities between their own ideas and Tolkien's narratives. The question therefore arises: What do Gardner and de Vere (attempt to) gain from using Tolkien's work as a source of legitimisation? How can they legitimise their speculations with reference to a fictional text when the religious use of the very same text is usually itself considered to be in need of justification?

The answer must be sought in the massive prestige and authority which Tolkien's literary mythology and Tolkien himself enjoy throughout the cultic milieu – also far beyond the spiritual Tolkien milieu *sensu stricto*. It is useful to consider in turn the authority enjoyed by Tolkien's narratives and by Tolkien himself as author and scholar, though of course the two aspects are connected and reinforce each other in practice.

In the cultic milieu in general, Tolkien's literary mythology occupies a special position fiction and myth, not the least because of especially *S*'s architextual and hypertextual relation to conventional mythology (cf. section 9.3 above). Even outside the spiritual Tolkien milieu proper, Neo-Pagans (cf. ch. 8), theosophists, Jungians, and others (cf. section 0.2.2) consider Tolkien's narratives to be "mythopoeic fiction" and approach them either in the mythopoeic mode, as narratives in which archetypal powers reveal themselves, or in the binocular mode, as rewritings of more fundamental myths. Gardner and de Vere adopt the binocular approach and read Tolkien's narratives as fictional palimpsests, thus following a reputable custom within the cultic milieu. Contrary to the Neo-Pagans, however, but similar to many self-identified Elves, they take Tolkien's literary mythology be to a palimpsest of original sources which in turn must be read historically or euhemeristically rather than mytho-cosmologically or mythopoeically.[360] Concretely, Gardner expresses his view that Tolkien's narratives that "*The Lord of the Rings* constitutes a modern rendering of the world's greatest mythological tradition and should rightly be placed with the classics of the genre, from Homer to Malory" (2003, 315). This is so, because for Gardner, the term mythology does not stand in opposition to historiography. On the contrary, Gardner considers the works of both Homer and Malory to be "qualified lore of the most ancient kind" (2003, 315) which preserve a core of historical truth about the 'original' "Ring of Power and Divine Justice" held by Anu in ancient Mesopotamia (2003, 314). Since *LR*, according to Gardner, emerged from "research, linguistic study and general enthusiasm for all things related to the Ring [i.e. Anu's]", Tolkien's works, while themselves fictional palimpsests, contain within them a derived factuality. It is the status of Tolkien's narratives as derived mythology which makes it possible to enlist them as a source of legitimisation by Gardner and de Vere.

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[360] This illustrates that a binocular reading of Tolkien's literary mythology can be combined with readings of the alleged source in any of the four referential reading modes, mytho-historical, mytho-cosmological, mythopoeic, and euhemeristic.

If the prestige of Tolkien's mythology is partly derived from its sources, another part is tied to Tolkien himself as author and, most importantly, as scholar. Tolkien's authority as professor in Oxford adds legitimacy to his fiction, and Gardner and de Vere take advantage of this. By citing Tolkien's writings, even his fictional ones, they seek to rub off some of his authority as a scholar of mythology and philology onto their own claims about myth and etymology. Rather than a random add-on or simple marketing trick, Gardner and de Vere's references to Tolkien must therefore be seen as part of their strategic staging of themselves as scholars.[361] The fact that neither Gardner nor de Vere refers to the *LR* movies, demonstrates that they were interested in enlisting the prestige already held by Tolkien's writings, not in selling books to people who were being introduced to Tolkien's world through the movies.[362]

Gardner and de Vere cannot backup their claims with references to conventional scholarship, for such scholarship does not support their claims. They are therefore forced to refer instead to 'stigmatised' scholarship (cf. section 11.3.2), such as Murray's and Graves', which supports the claim that an Elven bloodline exists. Gardner and de Vere also cite Tolkien's narratives because they, even though they are fictional, have two advantages as legimatory sources compared to stigmatised scholarship. These advantages have to do with Tolkien's person. One advantage is that Tolkien was a respected scholar and still is, while the theories of Murray and Gardner are rejected by mainstream scholarship. While references to Murray will be considered authoritative within the cultic milieu, references to Tolkien are likely to be more edible for readers who are not already convinced, prior to reading Gardner or de Vere, that a special bloodline exists. Another advantage is that presenting Tolkien's narratives as suppressed knowledge in the form of parable gives great interpretive freedom. Based on the fact that Tolkien was an expert on mythology, languages, and all ancient things, one can easily assume that if a secret bloodline exists, Tolkien must have known about it though he did not dare reveal the truth openly and risk his job and academic standing. Fortunately for Gardner and de Vere, Tolkien nowhere makes the alleged sub-text explicit (because there never was one), and they are therefore free to construct claims about Tolkien's esoteric message, claims that are conveniently unfalsifiable. Again, when trying to persuade those who are not already convinced, it is more attractive to claim that Tolkien's narratives have a secret message than to cite non-fictional and falsifiable claims such as Murray's. Furthermore, Tolkien is dead and cannot object to the esoteric charisma which is ascribed to him. And according to good conspiracy logic any dismissals of Tolkien's esoteric convictions on

[361] Gardner, and to a lesser extent de Vere, consciously stage themselves as scholars through the use of genealogical charts and references. Gardner's books also include footnotes and a bibliography.

[362] The 2003-reissue of *Realm of the Ring Lords* by HarperCollins seems to have been designed to profit from the Tolkien-craze generated by the movies (cf. the section 12.1.2), but that was not Gardner's original intention.

behalf of the Tolkien estate or official biographers can be taken as further proof that the establishment is attempting to silence the truth.

In this chapter and the two preceding ones we have seen that an important religious affordance of Tolkien's literary mythology is the attractive identity provided by his Elves, the Quendi. We know from the Elf Queen's Daughters and Laurence Gardner that identification with Tolkien's Elves is possible on the basis of *LR* alone; but the Silver Elves, the Tribunal of the Sidhe, and Nicholas de Vere's writings have demonstrated that individuals who maintain their Elven identity over time typically draw on *S* to do so. In the previous chapters we have also seen that elements from the narrative religion of *S*, especially concerning the Valar, are sometimes integrated into the religious beliefs and practices of self-identified Elves and other Tolkien religionists.

It is still too early to evaluate the four hypotheses on *S*-based religion which I formulated at the end of chapter 9 (i.e. introduction of Valar-directed rituals; substitution of the binocular approach to Tolkien's literary mythology for a mytho-cosmological or mytho-historical approach; increased identification with the Elves; and emergence of a Christian wing of Tolkien spirituality). Before we can do so, we must complete the survey of *S*-based Tolkien religion with an analysis of how contemporary magicians have incorporated elements from Tolkien's literary mythology into their ritual practice.

Chapter 13. Summoning the Valar, Divining with Elves: Tolkien and Western Magic

Two cases of Tolkien-based magic shall be treated in this chapter. The first case is the "High Elvish Working", an elaborate piece of ceremonial magic in which the Valar are evoked. The Valar ritual was developed in 1993 by a North Carolina group, the Fifth Way Mystery School, and was later widely disseminated in Neo-Pagan circles. It also influenced the rituals of the Legendarium-based groups to be discussed in chapter 16. The second case is the *Lord of the Rings Tarot Deck and Card Game* published in 1997 by British Tarot expert Terry Donaldson. The deck is accompanied by a 200-page long book with card interpretations, new spreads, and guidelines on how to use the deck to induce visualisations of Middle-earth.

The classification of the Valar Working of the Fifth Way Mystery School and Donaldson's *LR* Tarot deck as magic does not rest on a Frazerian or Durkheimian distinction between magic and religion. Instead it means that the rituals and rationalisations to be considered here are formulated within the Western magic tradition, a stream of Western esotericism which was given almost canonical form by the British *fin de siècle* group the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. The order was founded in 1888 by Samuel Liddell "MacGregor" Mathers and William Wynn Westcott and experienced a short golden age in the 1890s with more than a hundred members. Rivalry among the leading members led to the formation of several splinter groups in which prominent former members continued to develop the Golden Dawn tradition. These members included Arthur Edward Waite, the creator of the standard Rider-Waite Tarot deck, and Aleister Crowley who is probably the most well-known twentieth century occultist.[363]

Like the Tribunal of the Sidhe and the Elven movement, both the Fifth Way Mystery School and Donaldson's *LR* Tarot can be considered instances of *Tolkien-integrating religion*. Tolkien material is integrated into a framework of Golden Dawn-inspired ceremonial magic (FWMS) or Golden Dawn-inspired Tarot (Donaldson). The Valar Working and the *LR* Tarot differ from the rituals of other Tolkien-integrating groups (considered in chapters 11 and 14) because they were never intended to form the core of a new religious tradition. The Valar Working was a playful experiment and never

[363] For a short overview of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn and of Aleister Crowley's offshoot, the Ordo Templi Orientis, see Asprem (2014). The history of the order and the early splinter groups is told in full by King (1970) and Gilbert (1997). For collections of the Golden Dawn's teachings and rituals, see Torrens (1969), Regardie (1989), and King and Skinner (1976).

a part of the Fifth Way Mystery School's standard practice. And while Donaldson seeks to correlate Tolkien's mythology with other esoteric traditions, the *LR* deck itself is but a religious optional which Tolkien religionists and other individuals within the cultic milieu can combine freely with other practices. In other words, while both the Valar Working and the use of the *LR* Tarot are 'blended rituals' that merge elements from Tolkien's mythology with other material, they are not parts of new religious syntheses on the level of tradition.

Since the material analysed in this chapter constitutes prescribed rather than actualised rituals, I cannot say anything conclusive about how ritualists have rationalised the Tolkien entities evoked in the Valar Working or in meditations based on the *LR* Tarot. Although literal affirmation is possible (or *afforded* by the ritual formats), both the Fifth Way Mystery School and Terry Donaldson seem to intend some form of transformative rationalisation hovering between the dynamistic and the Jungian (cf. ch. 5). Underlying this is a reading of Tolkien's literary mythology in the mythopoeic mode, i.e. as stories in which real powers, be they cosmic of psychological, reveal themselves in mythically transfigured forms.

13.1. The Valar Working of the Fifth Way Mystery School

13.1.1. Steeped in Tolkieniana: The Valar Working as Tolkien-integrating Magic

The Fifth Way Mystery School (FWMS) was a North Carolina initiative, founded in 1988 and devoted to various kinds of ceremonial magic and occult mysteries, including the Kabbalah, Enochian Magick, the Grail, Earth mysteries, Elven Magick, and more.[364] Members shared an interest in magic, but combined this with different religious commitments as testified by the fact that former FWMS members in the 1990s founded both the Christian "non-denominational interfaith church" Red Grail Ministries, and a Pagan organisation called Order of the Red Grail: Church of Transformational Wicca, in Nebraska (Bridges 030310).[365] Among the persons instrumental to the creation of the FWMS was Vincent Bridges, a magician and (co-)author of several books and articles on alchemy, eschatology, UFOs, the Grail, and other esoteric subjects.[366] Led by Bridges, a group of FWMS members who were all "steeped in Tolkieniana" decided in 1993 to create a Tolkien-based ritual (Bridges 030310).

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[364] The homepage of the FWMS went offline in 2013, and had by then not been updated for several years. At the time of writing (late 2013), the group seems defunct in its original constitution, but its initiators are still active in other groups and projects. The "overview" page, which describing the founding of the FMWS, was captured for the last time by the Internet Wayback Machine on 30 August 2013. See http://web.archive.org/web/20130430165925/http://www.fifthwaymysteryschool.org/overview.html [050314].

[365] The Red Grail Ministries can be visited at http://www.redgrail.org/ [050314]. The Order of the Red Grail: Church of Transformational Wicca in Nebraska can be visited at http://orderoftheredgrail.org/ [050314].

[366] Vincent Bridges' homepage can be found http://www.vincentbridges.eu/ [050314].

Despite being both Tolkien fans and fascinated by elves, none of the members of FWMS had been in contact with any self-identified Elves or other groups integrating elements from Tolkien's literary mythology. According to Bridges, the FWMS did not even know that any such groups existed (030310). They composed from scratch an Elven magical ritual in which ceremonial magic provided the structure and form, while the content was made up by elements from the narrative religion of *LR* and *S*. From *LR* was lifted Arwen's hymn to Elbereth (*LR* 238) which is the closest we come to an Elven ritual in *LR* (cf. section 7.2.4). From *S* was taken a great deal of information about the Valar (cf. sections 9.1.2 and 9.1.3), not only from the *Valaquenta*, but from the entire book. As a consequence, familiarity with *S* is required to comprehend and enjoy the ritual. Furthermore, an exchange of greetings was taken from one of the books of *HoMe*, and phrases were composed in Quenya for the ritual. Like in all the *S*-based instances of Tolkien spirituality considered so far, religionists take the perspective of the Elves, not of the Hobbits.

13.1.2. Summoning the Valar: The High Elvish Working as Religious Blending

The prescribed format for the "High Elvish Working Based Upon J. R. R. Tolkien's Mythic World" proceeds in the following seven phases.[367]

1. No Form, breathing, OMs
2. Meta-programming protocol (Lesser Banishing Ritual of the Pentagram, Cross of the Elements, Middle Pillar, Caduceus)
3. Elvish Supreme Invoking Ritual of the Pentagram
4. Rending of the Veil/Hymn to Elbereth
5. Calling the Lords of the Valar
6. Silent Communion with the Valar
7. Closing/Hymn to Elbereth

As preparation for the ritual, the FWMS produced various Tolkien paraphernalia (banners, tablets, etc.). Every participant took on a role, impersonating one of the Elven characters of *LR* during the ritual.

The first two phases of the Valar Working are identical to the standard opening of the rituals of the group.[368] The "No Form" exercise is a basic bodily exercise aimed at "calming and comforting the physical body so that it can access higher energies". It is followed by a breathing exercise and the repeated intonation of the sacred Sanskrit syllable 'Om'. The second phase consists of the group's elaborate "Meta-programming

[367] http://web.archive.org/web/20130430174512/http://www.fifthwaymysteryschool.org/valar.html [050314]. This page has been captured for the last time by the Internet Wayback Machine on 30 April 2013.

[368] Therefore information about these phases is found on the page with overviews of the "FWMS Exercises & Basic Rituals" rather than in the Elvish ritual format itself. Also this page has been captured on 30 April 2013 by the Internet Wayback Machine. See http://web.archive.org/web/20130430154434/http://www.fifthwaymysteryschool.org/fwmsx.html [050314].

protocol" aiming to create and purify a magical space within which contact can be sought with the spiritual realm. In the characteristically pseudo-scientific and geomantic terminology of the FWMS, the protocol is described as employing a "series of ortho-rotational processes" to create a "metaxic monad" in which "space/time is folded back into an embedded hyper-sphered cube", allowing "spiritual energy, or psions, to be stepped down through the orthogonal layers of the Omni-verse directly into our DNA".[369] The meta-programming protocol is a sequence of preparatory rites built around the Lesser Banishing Ritual of the Pentagram and includes a total of seven sub-phases:

1. The Cross of the Elements
2. The Middle Pillar
3. Formulation of the Pentagrams
4. Hailing of the Archangels
5. The Cross of the Elements
6. The Middle Pillar
7. The Caduceus

The central phase of the meta-programming protocol is The Formulation of the Pentagrams, in which each cardinal point and corresponding element is contacted in turn (East/Air, South/Fire, West/Water, North/Earth) while intoning the corresponding names of God (IHVH, ADNI, AHIH, AGLA). The banishing pentagram of Earth is drawn for each cardinal point. This phase is followed by the hailing of the four Archangels, Raphael, Gabriel, Michael, and Auriel, and of "Shekinah El, the presence of God itself".[370] The Pentagram Ritual (sub-phases three and four) is both preceded and followed by the Cross of the Elements and the Middle Pillar Exercise. The aim of the Cross of the Elements is to draw the qualities and powers of the elements into the magician. In the Middle Pillar Exercise, the magician visualises himself as the middle pillar (of Balance) of the Kabbalistic Tree of Life and intones the names of the pillar's five *sefirot* in order to draw down the power of Spirit through the five corresponding chakras. The Caduceus, named after the staff of Hermes, is a visualisation sequence.[371]

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[369] See footnote 368.

[370] See footnote 368.

[371] The meta-programming protocol is a variation of the preparatory rites used by the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn to ready the magician and the space for magical work. The FWMS follows roughly the formats and instructions published by Golden Dawn members Aleister Crowley (1929a), Israel Regardie (1989; 1998), and Robert George Torrens (1969) and by later ceremonial magicians in the Golden Dawn tradition, such as Francis King and Stephen Skinner (1976).

The FWMS breathing exercise is probably a variation of the "Four Fold Breath" prescribed by Regardie as preparation for any mediation or magic (1989, Vol. 1, 105). The No Form exercise has roughly the same form and function as the basic "Meditation No. 1" (Regardie 1989, Vol. 1, 105), and the OM exercise of the FWMS might be based on another basic meditation of the Golden Dawn centred on OM (spelled AUM; Regardie 1989, Vol. 1, 133). The presence of The Lesser Banishing Ritual of the Pentagram is to be expected, as this ritual should, according to Regardie, "precede every phase of magical work, elementary as

The elaborate introductory rituals focusing on the cardinal points and elements are continued in phase three of the Working with a Supreme Invoking Ritual of the Pentagram. In the Golden Dawn system, the Supreme Ritual of the Pentagram differs from the Lesser Ritual by having four different invoking pentagrams drawn, corresponding to the four elements, rather than simply the banishing pentagram of Earth for all cardinal points. In addition, one of the pentagrams of Spirit is formulated for each cardinal point.[372] In the Valar Working, the FWMS simplifies the Golden Dawn format, using only the four invoking pentagrams of the elements, but not the pentagrams of Spirit. They also fill the format with Elven content. Instead of vibrating the names of God, two vibrations are made in Quenya for each cardinal point/element. For East is vibrated "Palanquen lom luineil aglar rom!" (Qu: "Far and wide, the echoes speak of the Blue light's brilliance at the moment of its arising!"), and after drawing the invoking pentagram of Earth is intoned "Romen" (Qu: "The Eastern Way!").[373] The standard order

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well as advanced" (1989, Vol. 1, 75; cf. Vol. 3, 15; cf. King and Skinner 1976, 204). The standard banishing ritual proceeds in four phases: 1. Qabalistic Cross, 2. Inscription of Pentagrams, 3. Invocation of the Archangels, 4. Qabalistic Cross (Regardie 1989, Vol. 1, 107; King and Skinner 1976, 205-206). The FWMS follows the Golden Dawn format fairly close in phases 2 and 3 (cf. Crowley 1929a, 379-380; Regardie 1989, Vol. 1, 106-107; Vol. 3, 9-17; 1998, 47-67; Torrens 1969, 155-156; King and Skinner 1976, 207-208), though the hailing of "Shekinah El" is an unusual addition. The Cross of the Elements used by the FWMS in phases 1 and 4 as a substitute for the Qabalistic Cross is basically a de-Christianised and elaborated version of the latter. The Lesser Banishing Ritual of the Pentagram is widely known in the cultic milieu because it was among the rituals taught to non-initiated aspirants by the Golden Dawn, and because it was transformed by Gerald Gardner into the basic circle-casting ritual of Wicca by substituting the hailing of the Archangels with the de-Christianised hailing of the "Watchtowers" or "Guardians" of the four cardinal points.

The Middle Pillar Exercise (cf. Regardie 1998, 69-83; 209-219; also Regardie 1989, Vol. 1, 181; Torrens 1969, 171-172; King and Skinner 1976, 236-237) was originally a ritual for the Inner Order, being the "practical exercise that accompanied the Portal grade" (Regardie 1989, Vol. 1, 79). Regardie considers it to be "one of the most important practical systems employed by the Order" (1989, Vol. 1, 80), and one that can be performed as alternative to the Pentagram Ritual (1989, Vol. 1, 180). The FWMS follows Torrens' advise to use the Middle Pillar exercise in combination with the Pentagram Ritual (1969, 189). In Regardie's elaborations on the Middle Pillar Exercise, it is always concluded with a "circulation of the light" or a "circumambulation" of the raised energy through one's body (1998, 85-100, 218-219). The Caduceus of the FWMS can be seen as a variation of this phase.

[372] The Golden Dawn sources use different names for this ritual. Crowley calls it the "Greater Invoking Ritual of the Pentagram" (1929a, 380-382), a practice followed by King and Skinner (1976, 209). Regardie refers to it as the "Supreme Invoking Ritual of the Pentagram" (1989, Vol. 3, 18). FWMS follows Regardie. All sources agree that this ritual can only be performed after clearing the space with a Lesser Banishing Ritual of the Pentagram (cf. King and Skinner 1976, 209). In the Golden Dawn system, the Greater/Supreme Invoking Ritual of the Pentagram consists of the same four phases as the Lesser Pentagram Ritual (1. Qabalistic Cross, 2. Inscription of Pentagrams, 3. Invocation of the Archangels, 4. Qabalistic Cross), with only the second phase being different and more elaborate (Regardie 1989, Vol. 3, 18-19; King and Skinner 1976, 214). The FWMS did not repeat their preparatory sequence (Cross of the Elements and Middle Pillar Exercise) around the Elvish Supreme Pentagram Ritual. Nor did they hail the Archangels again, perhaps because the Calling of the Lords of the Valar was seen as substituting that phase.

[373] See footnote 367. The four phrases seem to have been created for the occasion of the ritual.

in pentagram rituals is altered slightly by swapping North and West as to end up facing the Blessed Realm for the following phase, the rending of the Veil.[374]

Having now prepared the magical space, a connection with the spiritual realm can be established by rending the Veil. This is done by reciting Arwen's hymn to Elbereth/Varda from *LR* (238). Adding a touch of ceremonial magic, each of the seven lines of the hymn is accompanied by a specific gesture. The hymn is to be recited in its original Sindarin, but Bridges has supplied a translation in an appendix to the ritual format. It is given here below together with an alternative translation provided by Gwineth of Ilsaluntë Valion:

Table 13.1. Translations of Arwen's Elbereth Hymn

Sindarin original	*Vincent Bridges' translation*[375]	*Gwineth's translation*[376]
A Elbereth Gilthoniel,	Oh Queen of the Stars, the brilliant Starlight	Oh Elbereth starkindler!
silivren penna míriel	(is a) high shining being – a radiant star shone	white-glittering, sparkling like a jewel
o menel aglar elenath!	of heavenly glory – crystallized starlight	slants down the glory of the starry host
Na-chaered palan-díriel	(nah-chaered) far and wide the starlight shines	Having gazed into the distance
o galadhremmin ennorath,	on the tree woven world of this middle land	from this tree-woven land of Middle-earth
Fanuilos, le linnathon	(Fanuilos), let the holy beings sing	Snow-white, I will sing to Thee
nef aear, sí nef aearon!	without my holiness, no one is holy!	on this side of the Sundering Sea!

The personal mode of addressing, initiated with the Elbereth hymn, is continued in the fifth phase of the ritual with the calling of the "Lords of the Valar". In seven evocations, the seven male Valar (Lords) and a single Valië (Lady) are called forth and greeted in the following order: Manwë, Varda (Elbereth), Ulmo, Aulë, Oromë, the Fëanturi (Námo and Irmo), and Tulkas. Each is addressed with a spoken "call" (or in Aulë's case a short hymn). Oromë is for instance hailed with these words:

> We greet thee now, great Orome, King of the forest and opener of the Way. With Vana you have refreshened and served Valinor. In darkness you once sought your people, bringing them into the light. You taught them songs

[374] This is no unusual variation (cf. King and Skinner 1976, 204), and follows the Enochian correspondences of cardinal points and elements given by John Dee rather than the correspondences used by the Golden Dawn.

[375] See footnote 367.

[376] Gwineth (030310).

> and the secret songs of bird and beast. At the sound of your horn, the trees did grow.
>
> As Tauron you rode forth upon the white steed, pursuing the Enemy to the ends of the Earth. Alone among the Valar you faced him without fear. And in the time of Great Darkness you helped bring forth the two great lights. When we were lost and forsaken, you alone remained among us, your secret songs a light for us all. Come now again to the aid of those who would be your people.
>
> Show us again the secret path to the High Place; teach us again the mysteries of the Wild Hunt; once more bring your light to us. [377]

These calls show that Bridges and associates were well verged in the theology of *S*. We have references to each Vala's epithet (here Tauron), role (hunter), attributes (the horn Valaróma and the steed Nahar), and important deeds (Oromë first found the Elves, "us"/"your people", *S* 40; led them on "the Way" to the West to live with the Valar in the "High Place", *S* 50-51; and helped create the Sun and the Moon, "the two great lights", *S* 110). Often the spouse (here Vána) is mentioned, but not herself addressed. The only exception is Varda, Manwë's spouse.[378]

Each call is followed by an exchange of greetings in Quenya:

> Caller: "Eleni silir lumesse omentiemman" (Qu: The stars shine on the meeting of our people).
> Rest of group: "Elen sila lumenn' omentielvo" (Qu: A star shines on the hour of our meeting).[379]

This is a variation of the greetings exchanged by Frodo and Gildor in *LR* (81, 85). The answer corresponds to Frodo's salutation (*LR* 81), but the call is found in neither *LR* nor *S*. It comes instead from the sixth volume of *HoMe, Return of the Shadow* (*RS*), where we encounter it in an early version of the *LR* passage as "Eleni silir lúmesse omentiemman" (*RS* 324).

The calling of the Valar is followed by a silent communion with the Valar, in which lembas bread and cordial or mead is shared (phase 6). This phase of the ritual seems to be based on the "cakes and wine" ceremony which is common in Wicca after magical work. As the seventh and closing phase of the ritual, the Elbereth hymn is repeated and the summoned Valar are given license to depart.

The Valar Working can be characterised as a blended ritual. It mixes elements from two sources: ceremonial (Golden Dawn) magic and Tolkien's literary mythology. The manner of blending is asymmetric in that one tradition (ceremonial magic) provides the frame, and the other (Tolkien's mythology) merely part of the content. That the Tolkien-

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[377] See footnote 367.

[378] Yavanna and Nienna are not mentioned, even though they are counted among the Aratar, the eight most powerful Valar (*S* 21; cf. section 9.1.2). I cannot explain the focus on the male Valar, which follows no logic inherent to Tolkien's texts.

[379] See footnote 367.

esque ritual was constructed in this way – with Tolkien material being framed, rather than providing the ritual frame itself – was to be expected, as Tolkien's literary mythology hardly includes any rituals (cf. sections 7.2.4 and 9.1.5).

The FWMS did more, however, than just fitting existing Tolkien lore (the Elbereth hymn and greetings) into a Golden Dawn ritual. The most fascinating thing about this ritual, and a fact that heralds the creativity of later Tolkien-based groups, is that they also created several new ritual elements following the logic of Tolkien's mythology. These were the callings of the Valar and the vibrations for the Supreme Invoking Ritual of the Pentagram, the latter even being written in Quenya. To some extent, the creators of this ritual asked themselves 'what would the Elves have done?' and tried to elaborate on Tolkien's literary mythology from inside the tradition. In other words, besides the integration of Tolkien material into a ceremonial magical frame, another principle of religious creativity was at work here, namely that of intra-traditional elaboration and invention.

13.1.3. The Truth beyond Tolkien's Created Arda: Rationalisation in the Fifth Way Mystery School

I do not know which 'social contract' governed the performance of the ritual, i.e. whether the participants considered the activity to be play or ritual. As pointed out in section 2.1.3 above, play (or make-believe) is governed by a fiction contract which deems all utterances made in the play mode referential only relative to a fictional play world and not relative to the actual world. By contrast, the utterances made in religious rituals, like the utterances made in all other forms of non-play activity, are recognised by the participants as being intended to refer to states of affairs in the actual world. Religious rituals are thus governed by what I referred to as a 'reality contract'. Since play can imitate non-play, we do not know for sure whether the members of the FWMS approached the Valar Working as a serious ritual or as a playful imitation of a serious ritual. We also do not know how the participants experienced the ritual, or how they rationalised it *post hoc*. I have asked Vincent Bridges per email about these matters both in 2010 and 2012 and contacted also another member, StormBear, in 2012, but I never received an answer. We will therefore have to make do with a preliminary answer based on hints in the ritual format itself.

In the preamble to the ritual format, it is explained that the Valar Working was set up in order to "explore the Truth beyond J.R.R. Tolkien's created Arda" with "known and effective magickal techniques and theory".[380] That Arda is characterised as "created" and not as for instance "discovered" or "channelled" suggests that the FWMS viewed Tolkien's mythology as fiction rather than as revelation. The fact that each participant identified with a particular Elven character and thus played a role also makes the ritual

[380] See footnote 367.

look somewhat more like live action role-playing than like serious ceremonial magic. Furthermore, the FWMS considered this ritual particularly appropriate for public performance (Bridges 030310). Clearly, the Valar ritual was seen as more playful and experimental than the group's usual rituals. Nevertheless, the FWMS believes a (capitalised) Truth to hide behind Tolkien's work. It thus seems that Tolkien's mythology is considered to occupy a space between revelation and fiction, as truth camouflaged as myth.

We can say that the Valar Working affords three different rationalisations of itself and of Tolkien's literary mythology. First, it is possible to consider the Valar to be real and distinct spiritual beings with whom real contact can be made during ritual. Such a literal-affirmative rationalisation of the Valar would go together with a mytho-cosmological reading of Tolkien's literary mythology. The ritual also affords the rationalisation of the Valar as mere names for other real divine powers (supernaturalistic transformation), and hence a reading of Tolkien's literary mythology in the mythopoeic mode. Finally, the ritual can be performed entirely in the mode of play, i.e. as a make-believe ritual based on a real ritual format. Even in this case, however, the ritual should probably be considered an instance of 'serious play'. That is to say, while the Valar would in this case be considered entirely imaginary entities, that would not rule out a binocular reading of Tolkien's literary mythology as fiction pointing to real spiritual truths. I do not know in which of these three ways the FWMS originally performed the ritual or intended others to use it.

13.1.4. The Place of the Valar Working in the Spiritual Tolkien Milieu

The FWMS has occasionally performed the Valar Working at Pagan festivals. When I corresponded with Bridges in early 2010, his group was planning to perform the ritual in May of the same year at a festival in Haluzice in the Czech Republic (Bridges 030310). Bridges further told me that the Valar ritual had circulated in print among Pagans in the United States and New Zealand before it was published online. He also said that he knew of "other magickal and Pagan groups who have worked similar rituals based on our ideas" (Bridges 030310), though he had no overview over exactly which groups had adapted the Valar Working and to what extent. As we shall see in chapter 16, the rituals of Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion, which are definitely religious in character, are inspired by the FWMS ritual. Even if the Valar Working was originally just a peripheral and playful ritual of the FWMS, it later inspired the central religious rituals of other groups.

13.2. Terry Donaldson's *Lord of the Rings* Tarot

13.2.1. Divining with Elves: The *Lord of the Rings* Tarot as Tolkien-integrating Magic

In 1997, leading British Tarot developer Terry Donaldson published *The Lord of the Rings Tarot Deck & Card Game* with U.S. Game Systems, the company that also publishes the Rider-Waite-Smith and Crowley-Harris Thoth decks.[381] Peter Pracownik, who had already worked together with Donaldson on the collectible card game *Wyvern*, illustrated the deck. The *LR* Tarot follows the Rider-Waite system and is accompanied by a short booklet (Donaldson 1997b) that briefly introduces *LR* and the general meanings of the Tarot cards. The cards depict artefacts, characters, and scenes from *LR* (and sometimes *H*), but not from *S*. For instance, the seven Palantíri are shown on the Seven of Clubs, and we meet Gandalf (The Magician), Elrond (The Emperor), Gollum (The Fool), and so forth, but not the Valar. Most cards show scenes from the narratives, such as Gandalf's confrontation with the Balrog (Death) and Frodo lying unconscious in Shelob's web (Eight of Swords). In other words, the card illustrations refer to many of the fantastic elements of *LR* (cf. section 7.1), but Pracownik draws little on the narrative religion. This means that the deck can be used by people who are familiar with *LR* (and *H*), but have not read *S* nor studied the appendices of *LR* in detail.[382]

People who have read *S* can get much more out the deck by buying it together with the 268 page long accompanying manual (Donaldson 1997a). In this book – which like the short booklet is dedicated to Gandalf – Donaldson introduces the Middle-earth universe in great detail, relates the meaning of the various cards (especially the Trumps) to Tolkien's mythology, and explains how to use the deck. While the opening chapter of

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[381] Donaldson's homepage can be found at http://terrydonaldson.com/ [020212]. The Rider-Waite deck was designed by Arthur Edward Waite, a prominent member of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, in cooperation with the artist Pamela Colman Smith. It was originally published by William Rider and Son in 1909 (Waite 1909) and accompanied two years later by Waite's manual *The Pictorial Key to the Tarot* (Waite 1911). Most people consider this to be the standard deck. Aleister Crowley, who like Waite had been a member of the Golden Dawn, created an Egyptian-inspired deck which was illustrated by Lady Frieda Harris. This so-called Thoth deck was created in the early 1940s, but first published in 1969 (Crowley and Harris 1986). The names, meanings, and numbering of several cards in both the major and the minor Arcana differ between the two decks. On the history of the Tarot, see Farley (2009).

[382] I first learned about the *LR* Tarot deck from an article by Martin Ramstedt (2007a) which I have already discussed in section 5.3 above. In this article, Ramstedt uses the *LR* deck to illustrate his thesis that a "metaphorical turn" is taking place in contemporary religion, exemplified by the convergence of Paganism and fantasy fiction. Ramstedt discusses Donaldson's deck at length, and interested readers can compare my discussion with his. Ramstedt provides more background information on Donaldson and Pracownik and compares the *LR* Tarot deck with the collectible card game *Magic: The Gathering* (2007a, 7-10). For a treatment of the *LR* Tarot deck from an art historical perspective, see Auger (2008). Auger's article contains some quite problematic passages, though, because she adopts Donaldson's Jungian framework and interprets both *LR* and Tarot in general as manifestations of the archetypes and as representations of the hero's journey (cf. Campbell 1949) towards Jungian individuation.

the book, "Welcome to Middle-earth", retells the storyline of only *H* and *LR*, the rest of the book abounds with references to *S*, both to the book itself (e.g. Donaldson 1997a, 32) and to narrative motifs and key cosmological ideas in it. Donaldson uses the name Ilúvatar for the god who in *LR* is only referred to as the One (e.g. 1997a, 32, 147, 248) and he identifies the Wizards Gandalf, Saruman, and Radagast as Istari (1997a, 21, 57, 87, 201, 212; cf. section 9.1.2). Other *S*-motifs referred to by Donaldson include Fëanor as the creator of the Palantíri (1997a, 225), the tale of Lúthien and Beren (1997a, 248), the Vala Ulmo (1997a, 138), and the creation of the Elves (1997a, 159). He alludes several times to the creation of the two Lamps, the two Trees, and the Sun and the Moon (Donaldson 1997a, 32, 159-160, 176).

Donaldson knows *S* very well and his references to this work will be stimulating for those users of the deck who also know it. Nevertheless, the references to *S* all have an *ad hoc* character and it is striking that he never refers to Ilúvatar and the Valar as objects of worship, nor to the rituals, hymns, calendars, and eschatology of *LR* and *S*, i.e. to all that which provides structure to Tolkien's narrative religion. After all, the deck is not called the "*LR* Tarot" rather than the "*S* Tarot" without reason. Like in Middle-earth Paganism (cf. ch. 14), the fascination with Middle-earth and its fantastic inhabitants, especially the Elves and the Wizards, is the key. The Elves are venerated, not the Valar. As Emily Auger has pointed out (2008, 318-319), the fact that the main Hobbit characters (Frodo, Sam, Merry, and Pippin) are not depicted individually on Donaldson's cards has the effect of inviting the Tarot querent to identify with the Hobbits, just like a reader of *LR*. A truly *S*-based deck, by contrast, would have taken an Elven rather than a Hobbit point of view, and would have cast Manwë (not Elrond) as the Emperor, Morgoth (not Wormtongue) as the Devil, and Beren and Lúthien (not Aragorn and Arwen) as the Lovers. In short, the Donaldson-Pracownik deck is based on the narrative of *LR*, not on the mythology of *S*, and as such stands in sharp contrast to the FWMS's Valar Working.

The prescribed uses of the deck are conventional. The deck can be used for readings with classical spreads (such as the Celtic Cross) or by means of one of Donaldson's two new Tolkien spreads, the Hobbit spread (shaped like an H) and the Gandalf spread (shaped like the Elvish letter G; Donaldson 1997a, 256-259). Next to this classic use of the Tarot deck, Donaldson suggests a solitaire and meditational use in which one is supposed to visualise oneself in Middle-earth:

> You may wish to journey to Middle-earth in this way, and "meet" the characters there, such as Gandalf, Sam, Galadriel, the Lady Arwen. In doing so, you will enhance what the characters are able to do for you in the context of your own life. [...] Pick out the relevant card which will act as a doorway, and, either while staring into the card in a relaxed way, or closing your eyes, imagine yourself as being part of the scene. [...] Imagine yourself surrounded by a green light, filtering in through the back of your neck, and filling your body. Then let yourself be transported into the scene you have selected, and "look around." See what you are wearing. Feel the texture of your clothes in this dimension. Feel what the ground is like under your feet. [...] Let the

> character or characters begin to talk to you. They may take you somewhere, or show you something. They may even give you a gift. Look after it. What they show you may pertain to your past, your present situation, or even something which the future holds (Donaldson 1997a, 252).

Using Tarot as a vision-inducing device is certainly not unique to the *LR* deck. The practice of using Tarot and other means to induce magical visualisation was pioneered by the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn whose members practised projections of the "astral body" in order to visit "astral realms" (esp. Moina Mathers 1989; cf. Asprem 2008, 157-159). These techniques were later developed (and Jungianised), not the least by Dion Fortune and her associates in the Fraternity of the Inner Light (Drury 2009, 49). Visualisations are very common among magicians (cf. Luhrmann 1989, 191), Pagans (cf. Hume 1997, 154-155), and Tolkien religionists (cf. ch. 16).

13.2.2. Integrating Middle-earth into the Golden Dawn Tarot system: The *Lord of the Rings* Tarot as Religious Blending

The *LR* Tarot deck is a product of a more comprehensive, and practice-removed process of religious blending than the Valar Working discussed above. The logic of the integration of Tolkien material is the same, however, namely that another tradition, *in casu* the Tarot tradition from the Golden Dawn, provides the frame into which Tolkien material is selectively projected and domesticated. Tolkien characters and scenes are depicted on the cards, and in the accompanying book the card illustrations are interpreted in the light of established Tarot lore. The illustrations on the Trumps of the Major Arcana are given in the table below. As can be seen, especially characters but also certain key scenes from *LR* are depicted on the Trumps. (Scenes from *H* are found only in the Minor Arcana). The artwork of the cards refers not only to *LR* (and *H*), but also to various esoteric traditions. The Kabbalistic Tree of Life, for instance, is depicted on the Nine of Coins.

Table 13.2. The Major Arcana of the *LR* Tarot Deck

Trump	***LR* character or scene**	**Trump**	***LR* character or scene**
I. The Magician	Gandalf	XII. The Hanged Man	Faramir on the pyre
II. The High Priestess	Éowyn	XIII. Death	Gandalf facing the Balrog of Morgoth
III. The Empress	Galadriel (flanked by Belladonna Took and Rose Gamgee)	XIV. Temperance	Frodo sparing Gollum's life
IV. The Emperor	Elrond	XV. The Devil	Wormtongue
V. The Hierophant	Saruman	XVI. The Tower	Isengard being destroyed by the Ents

VI. The Lovers	Aragorn and Arwen	XVII. The Star	The Star Eärendil and the spirit of Nenya, Galadriel's ring
VII. The Chariot	Théoden	XVIII. The Moon	Shagrat and Gorbag in front of Minas Morgul
VIII. Strength	The White Tree of Gondor	XIX. The Sun	The Sun shining over the Shire
IX. The Hermit	Tom Bombadil	XX. Judgment	Gandalf and Frodo or Bilbo by the hearth
X. The Wheel of Fortune	The One Ring	XXI. The World	Map of Arda showing the two landmasses Middle-earth and Aman, the Blessed Realm
XI. Justice	The Oathbreakers of Dunharrow	0. The Fool	Gollum

In his discussions of the individual cards in the accompanying book, Donaldson links the portrayed Tolkien motifs to the cards' established Tarot meanings. He here engages in a rather complicated form of religious blending because he integrates Tolkien material into an existing synthesis of Tarot lore which is itself syncretic in character. Let me illustrate Donaldson's religious blending with his discussion of the Trumps.

Donaldson's discussion of each Trump card includes a description of the character or scene depicted on the card, an elaborate section on the card's "astrological association", and a section in which the character of the card addresses the reader in direct speech. In the sections on astrological associations, Donaldson establishes connections and correspondences between various mythologies and domains of esoteric knowledge, drawing selectively on the correspondence system established by Aleister Crowley.[383]

[383] Crowley continued a tradition of integrating the Tarot cards with other esoteric systems, building on the work of Éliphas Lévi (1854; 1856) and Samuel Liddell "MacGregor" Mathers. Drawing on Mathers' *Book of Correspondences* without crediting him, Crowley in 1909 published an extensive system of correspondences as *Liber 777* (Crowley 1977, book 2, 1-36), using the 10 *sefirot* and 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet as its foundation. The tables of correspondences include the *sefirot* and paths on the Tree of Life (column XII), the Tarot (c. XIV), Egyptian, Hindu, Greek, and Roman gods (cs. XIX, XXII, XXXIV, and XXXV), colours (c. XV), precious stones (c. XL), planets (c. LXXVII), and the signs of the zodiac (c. CXXXVII). Some of the tables are also given as an appendix to his *Magick in Theory and Practice* (Crowley 1929a, 303-324). Donaldson can draw on Crowley's *Liber 777*-correspondence system because that system still followed the Raider-Waite baseline (apart from the unusual naming of a few Trumps). When Crowley later created his own Thoth deck, he adapted his correspondence tables accordingly (cf. 1944, 278-287).

Crowley's correspondence system was so extremely elaborate that Egil Asprem has referred to it as a project of "programmatic syncretism" (2007, 136). The system involved the synonymisations of similar concepts and deities from various mythologies, and Crowley legitimised this by claiming that he purified the world's spiritual traditions in order to reconstruct the perennial wisdom inherent in them all (Asprem

For instance, the Magician's astrological connection is Mercury. Mercury, in turn, refers not only to an astrological body (the innermost planet of our solar system), but also to an alchemical substance (quicksilver), and to a member of the Roman pantheon. The god Mercury, or an "aspect" or "version" of him, is additionally said to have "appeared in the mythology of every society since the dawn of humanity to educate human beings" (Donaldson 1997a, 61). He appears for instance as the Greek Hermes, as the Egyptian Thoth, as the Aztec Quetzalcoatl, and as the Norse Loki.

Obviously, Donaldson's integration of Tolkien's literary mythology into the Crowleyan correspondence system is a novel addition. It is thus for example Gandalf, rather than Mercury or a generic magician, who is depicted on the Magician card. In the book, Gandalf's deeds, powers, and attributes – he is the teacher, the inspirator, and the gods' messenger – are all discussed in relation to Mercury and his associations (Donaldson 1997a, 59-61). From this context the reader infers that Gandalf is the guise in which Mercury appears in *LR*, or better, that Gandalf is the guise in which that deity or force, which reveals itself as Mercury in Roman mythology, appears in the context of Tolkien's narratives.

Besides the systematic correspondence exegesis drawn from the Golden Dawn tradition, Donaldson's accompanying book also includes many loose references to various esoteric motifs, most of which are popularised versions of theosophical and occult teachings. Like in his discussions of the Tarot, Donaldson often links elements from Tolkien's literary mythology to the esoteric beliefs he expresses. For instance, he seems to believe in the historicity of Atlantis and points out that Tolkien's Númenor or Atalantë must refer to this sunken continent (Donaldson 1997a, 20, 31, 147). Donaldson also explains Gandalf's incarnation in *S* as Gandalf "coming down from the astral plane" (1997a, 21), and he certainly believes in reincarnation and karma (1997a, 131) and in auras (1997b, 25). Donaldson is also convinced that a coming "New Age" of cosmic evolution is near (1997a, 44-45, 115, 162), an age that will "involve the unfolding of such psy-

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2007, 136, 139, 148). Also Donaldson believes that Tarot lore expresses a "tradition of ancient wisdom, some of which has been carried down through the dark ages by esoteric associations, such as the Rosicrucians" (1997a, 38). Donaldson believes that this ancient wisdom is expressed, in symbolic form, in the ancient mythologies, and has been more or less uncovered by the likes of Crowley, Edward Waite, Carl Gustav Jung, and Joseph Campbell.

Crowley considered his correspondence so objective that the veracity of visions and channelled messages could be tested against it (Asprem 2008, 157-162). Others have aimed to expand, refine, and further objectivise the Mathers/Crowley system of correspondences, the most extensive system to my knowledge being the one published by Skinner (2006). Most magicians, however, have used Crowley's system freely and selectively, following Robert George Torrens, a Freemason who published several accessible books on the Golden Dawn teachings and rituals and hence played a central role in the dissemination of Golden Dawn ideas in the cultic milieu. Torrens considered correspondences to be a "personal matter and very individualistic" and taught that those given by others (especially Crowley's) are merely "suggestions" (1969, 114). Donaldson follows Crowley quite closely, though he does not mention his name a single time (nor that of Mathers).

chic abilities as telepathy and astral projection" (1997a, 44-45). These beliefs are all common in the cultic milieu, but foreign to Tolkien's literary mythology. It is clearly not Donaldson's purpose to construct a purist Tarot deck that draws on Tolkien's works and nothing else, but rather the idea to use Tolkien's narratives as pedagogical instruments to explain more serious spiritual matters.

Donaldson's mode of religious blending and his attempt to integrate Tolkien's literary mythology into an existing body of lore is somewhat similar to what we have seen among the alternative historians of chapter 12. Donaldson goes beyond Gardner and de Vere, however, as he does not just affix Tolkien material *post hoc* for reasons of legitimisation, but has created a Tarot deck which invites practitioners and querents to integrate elements from Tolkien's literary mythology into their actual divinatory practice. Because of this Donaldson's *LR* Tarot is Tolkien-integrating, rather than merely Tolkien-affixing.

I have also characterised the Tribunal of the Sidhe as Tolkien-integrating religion, but clearly Donaldson's *LR* Tarot, together with the FWMS's Valar Working, is Tolkien-integrating in a different way. In the terminology of chapter 4, Donaldson and the FWMS's blending of Tolkien's literary mythology with other traditions is of an ambiguous and temporary nature, and hence constitutes instances of religious *mixture*. By contrast, the Tribunal's integration of Tolkien elements is of an affirmative, permanent, and stable nature, and hence constitute an example of religious *synthesis*. Like Donaldson and the FWMS, the Tribunal integrates Tolkien's literary mythology into another frame (i.e. it is also Tolkien-integrating rather than Tolkien-based), but Tolkien elements are integrated into the very core of the group's beliefs and practices. Tolkien's literary mythology plays a stable and important role for the members' identity (some Changelings are also Elves), practices (Valar-directed rituals), and justifications (Tolkien as bard of the kin folk) of the group. By contrast, the High Elvish Working was created as a playful supplement to a more serious magical engagement, not as part of a new tradition based partly on Tolkien's works. Similarly, Tarot practitioners can use the *LR* Tarot occasionally, but the deck is not intended to compete with the standard decks. Nor is Donaldson attempting to found a new divinatory school of Tarot and astrology that takes Tolkien's literary mythology to be equal to other mythologies. While both the Valar Working and the *LR* Tarot themselves constitute 'blended rituals' in which elements from Tolkien's mythology are merged with other material, they are not parts of a 'blended tradition' (i.e. a synthesis) which blends in Tolkien material on a larger scale.

13.2.3. Tolkien as Mythopoeic Channeler: Rationalisation and Legitimisation in Donaldson's *LR* Tarot

The *LR* Tarot deck is one among a huge assortment of themed Tarot decks, Oracles, and other divination and visualisation tools which have flooded the market since the 1980s. It is one of only very few decks, however, which are inspired by a particular work of

fantasy.[384] That raises three related questions: Why has Donaldson found Tolkien's literary mythology and not some other fantasy work with religious affordances worthy and suitable as a basis for a Tarot deck? Which ontological status or truth value does he ascribe to Tolkien's works? And how does he justify his use of Tolkien? These questions can only be answered together with two additional ones: Which ontological status does Donaldson ascribe to the other mythologies and pantheons (the Roman, Egyptian, and so forth) that he refers to? And does he consider Tolkien's mythology to be on a par with these conventional mythologies or to be inferior in some way?

It is clear that Donaldson considers Tolkien's literary mythology to stand out among fantasy in general. In what amounts to an allographic preface, he asserts that it would be "missing the point" to read Tolkien's works as "a fairy story" (Donaldson 1997b, 7). Tolkien's works have a spiritual quality to them, one which Donaldson wants to uncover. According to Martin Ramstedt, Donaldson does so by reinterpreting Tolkien's mythology "in the light of contemporary Pagan spirituality and Joseph Campbell's take on Jungian psychoanalysis" (2007a, 9).

As far as the inspiration from Jung and Campbell goes, Ramstedt is clearly right. Even though Donaldson never refers explicitly to either of the two, he clearly reads Tolkien's literary mythology and other myths as well in the mythopoeic mode. Deities and members of Tolkien's gallery of characters alike are thus interpreted according to the archetypal hermeneutics of Jungian transformation as expressions of cosmic or psychological forces (cf. ch. 5). For instance, Donaldson does not see Gandalf as an historical person nor as a spiritual entity inhabiting some other plane or world (literal affirmation). Instead he sees him as a metaphorical expression of a more real archetypal force: Gandalf is a "Merlin-type" (Donaldson 1997a, 21) or a symbol of the "inner teacher" (Donaldson 1997a, 21, 59). Galadriel (The Empress) is said to articulate the "wise woman" archetype (Donaldson 1997a, 21), and when Donaldson characterises Saruman as a "shadow self" (1997a, 60), we sense Jung's Shadow archetype. The description of Éowyn and Galadriel as "archetypes" that express the "feminine within us all, men as well as women" (1997a, 21) is reminiscent of Erich Neumann's notion of the archetypal feminine, a force which supposedly underlies both Jung's *anima* and mother archetypes (1963). Drawing implicitly on the work of Joseph Campbell (esp. 1949), Donaldson comfortably moves beyond the Jungian catalogue of archetypes when consi-

[384] The *LR* deck is the only fiction-based deck analysed in Emily Auger's (2004) extensive review of the aesthetics of more than fifty Tarot decks on the market. The only other fiction-based deck I know of is Donald Tyson and Anne Stokes' *Necronomicon Tarot* (2007), so named after a fictional tome in H.P. Lovecraft's novellas. See Cowan (2012) for a discussion of the Necronomicon Tarot. There is also a *Tarot of the Elves* (McElroy 2007). McElroy does not refer to Tolkien's works, but Davide Corsi's artwork is clearly inspired by Tolkien's image of the Elves, especially as they appear in Peter Jackson's movies. I was made aware of this deck by Calantirniel of Tië eldaliéva, who pointed out that she is the unnamed "representative of […] an online organization dedicated to the articulation and practice of an Elven spiritual path [i.e. Tië eldaliéva]" whom McElroy refers to in the foreword to the novel accompanying the *Tarot of the Elves* (2007, 7).

dering Gandalf to be a manifestation of the archetype of the "savior or redeemer" (1997a, 37). Furthermore, and reflecting the use of Jung within the cultic milieu, Donaldson does not distinguish strictly between the archetypes in themselves and the archetype images to which they give rise in myths and the personal psyche. For example, he refers to Éowyn and Galadriel as "archetypes" while a strict Jungian would have referred to them as archetypal images.

Donaldson's Campbellian Jungism seems to take a Pagan twist, such as Ramstedt (2007a) suggests, in the direction of Wiccan duotheism with his identification of Gandalf with "God" (1997a, 37) and Galadriel with "the goddess" (1997a, 42). As far as I can see, however, the references to God and the goddess can better be explained without Wicca. Indeed, while Donaldson obviously refers to several pre-Christian mythologies, he does not refer to a single Neo-Pagan author or organisation, nor to any particularly Neo-Pagan ideas. By contrast, he refers to many theosophical ideas (e.g. the astral plane, Atlantis, reincarnation, and cosmic evolution) and does not refrain from using Christian references either. For instance, Gandalf, who dies and returns, is considered to be "analogous in some ways to Christ" (Donaldson 1997a, 21). Also Aragorn, the uncrowned king, is seen as a Jesus figure (Donaldson 1997a, 21), and Frodo is compared with Moses because they both overcome their weakness and accept their difficult destinies (Donaldson 1997a, 41). Donaldson sees both Sauron and Morgoth as Satan-figures (1997a, 28), and compares *LR* with Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (1997a, 23). He even quotes John 8:32 (Donaldson 1997a, 56), perhaps the favourite theosophical Bible passage, in which Jesus addresses his disciplines with the words: "And you will know the truth and the truth will make you free". Most significant of all, "God" is capitalised and "goddess" is not, while standard Pagan practice would be to capitalise both. Donaldson's practice seems to reflect a monotheistic position, probably a form of theosophical Christianity, in which the goddesses of myth refer mythopoeically to the archetypal feminine and not to a real Goddess, while God is a real power or being who is more than such an archetypal principle. In sum, Donaldson can be described as a Jung-inspired theosophist, but there is no reason to describe his take on Tolkien's literary mythology as reflecting "contemporary Pagan spirituality" as suggested by Ramstedt.

As we have seen in chapter 5, Jung's own thinking about the archetypes is stretched out between a naturalistic interpretation of them in purely psychological terms and a cosmological interpretation of them as fundamentally extra-psychic cosmological principles or powers. Jungians in the cultic milieu in general tend to emphasise the cosmological position in Jung's work, but Donaldson is quite cautious. Throughout his book, he professes a quite psychological-reductive view on religious experience and magical efficacy. He believes, for instance, that "past life" experiences in regression therapy do not bring one in contact with previous lives, but can best be explained as archetypal representations (Donaldson 2007a, 132). More importantly, Donaldson has a psychological theory of the effects of magic, including Tarot divination. He states that "[m]agic may or may not work objectively, but it certainly does subjectively, in the sense of getting things

out of your system though a miniaturization of the forces involved in any situation" (1997a, 39). In a later section on how to do a Tarot reading with the deck, Donaldson advises against "casting spells" and using "supernatural nonsense" and "heavy occultism" (1997a, 255). Instead he advises Tarot practitioners to plant "positive seeds" in the querent and he ensures his reader that "most predictions become self-fulfilling" (1997a, 255) – through psychological rather than metaphysical means, that is. Being the author of a book entitled *The Tarot Spellcaster* (Donaldson 2001), the idea of casting spells with Tarot cards is definitely not foreign to Donaldson, but he wants to warn against an overly metaphysical expectation of the working of such spells.

Some readers might want to protest that the passage on the meditational use of the deck quoted in section 13.2.2 goes beyond a Jungian interpretation. Donaldson invites people to travel magically to another world and interact with the characters there, so does he not prescribe a literal-affirmative rationalisation of the experiences generated? Certainly the passage and visualisation practice *affords* such a literal-affirmative and mytho-cosmological rationalisation, but that is not Donaldson's intention. The scare quotes around "meet" in the sentence "you may wish to journey to Middle-earth […] and "meet" the characters there" (Donaldson 1997a, 252) indicate that Donaldson considers the characters to be symbols or images created by the visualising mind rather than beings with independent existence.

All in all, we can conclude that Donaldson reads both Tolkien's literary mythology and other mythologies (Pagan and Christian alike) in the mythopoeic mode. As a consequence, Donaldson considers Tolkien's literary mythology as being in principle equal to other mythologies. This is possible because the mythopoeic approach simultaneously elevates certain pieces of fiction to mythopoeic status while at the same time reducing myths to stories without literal reference on historical and cosmological matters. Besides Tolkien's literary mythology, Donaldson only refers to one other "modern-day mythology", namely *Star Wars* (1997a, 37). This brings us to the final question: if not all supernatural fiction can pass as "modern-day mythology", why can Tolkien's?

It turns out that Tolkien's literary mythology is special because Tolkien, according to Donaldson, was in some way inspired. As he puts it, Donaldson "feel[s] that, energy-wise, [Tolkien] was linked with the tradition of ancient wisdom" (1997a, 38). This is a variant of the appeal to tradition, but Donaldson goes beyond a merely binocular reading of Tolkien's narratives as rewritings of more authentic sources by stating that Tolkien himself was directly, "energy-wise" linked up with the ancient wisdom. That is to say, Tolkien's texts directly express the ancient wisdom, though they do it figuratively, as myth. Donaldson expresses this view even more clearly when stating that "Tolkien's work was in reality a monumental act of channeling" which resulted in "a symbolic history of the universe and many spiritual lessons for us to apply in our own lives as

well" (1997b, 7). In other words, Tolkien's literary mythology is doubly legitimised as the expression of authoritative tradition (the Ancient Wisdom) and divine revelation.[385]

It is interesting to note that although Donaldson and the FWMS both draw on the tradition from the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, they prescribe ritual contact with the characters of Tolkien's literary mythology in opposite ways: Where the FWMS follows the Golden Dawn formats for invoking spirits, i.e. summoning them to come visit from their otherworld, Donaldson, in the tradition of Golden Dawn astral projection, suggests a journey to the otherworld to meet the characters there. Already in the Golden Dawn, this second technique, requiring a creative imagination and no further paraphernalia, was much more common than elaborate ceremonial magic (Asprem 2014, 2.2). Even more so, this holds true in the cultic milieu today, where all kinds of active visualisation, projection, and travelling techniques – from active imagination via shamanic journeying to regression therapy – are popular and have influenced various strands of Tolkien spirituality (cf. esp. chs. 11 and 16).

The difference between 'summoning' and 'travelling' is not trivial, but crucial for the ways in which the ritual communication can be subsequently rationalised. When summoning spirits, the spirits are conceived of as inhabiting another world which they leave in order to enter the empirical world. This is particularly visible in the Valar Working in which a purified magical space has been prepared for the Valar to enter. In summoning rituals, communication with the spirits is believed to take place in the empirical world and the spirits are addressed by means of linguistic utterances and bodily gestures as if the spirits are present and can hear and see. Because such summon-

[385] Donaldson's is not the only Jungist take on Tolkien. Others include Timothy R. O'Neill's book *The Individuated Hobbit* (1979) and Robert Ellwood's more recent *Frodo's Quest* (2002). Ellwood's book offers a Jungian-theosophical reading of *LR*, describing the novel as a "tale of every reader's higher consciousness, death and rebirth, and triumph over evil", and explaining that its characters express the "archetypes we can meet in ourselves: a spiritual guide like Gandalf, a friend like Sam, or, heaven forbid, shadows like Orcs or Ringwraiths" (2002, back cover). Throughout, Ellwood approaches *LR* in the binocular mode, describing it as a "mythic novel" (2002, 141) which is true, not "as history, but as a description of the many planes on which the human spirit lives" (Ellwood 2002, 12). Contrary to Donaldson's mythopoeic claim that Tolkien channelled his stories and that the archetypes therefore broke through in his stories by their own volition, Ellwood takes the more careful and binocular view that Tolkien authored his works in an ordinary way, but so doing drew on theosophical sources. Because the "Ancient Wisdom [...] certainly influenced Tolkien in countless ways", *LR* can be read as a palimpsest of that ancient tradition of religious knowledge which finds a contemporary expression in Theosophy (Ellwood 2002, 12). Interestingly, Ellwood reads the theosophical sources, to which *LR* is indirectly taken to refer, in a way that denies them the objective and historical-literal reference which they themselves claim to possess, and which hovers between the mytho-cosmological and mythopoeic. His overall approach is mytho-cosmological, for he asserts that both the cosmos and the individual are constituted by seven "planes" (Ellwood 2002, 149). His reading of Blavatsky's macro-history is mythopoeic, however, for he transforms her history of physical events into a history of the evolution of consciousness, taking Atlantis and the Atlantean root race, for instance, to refer to a stage in this evolutionary process rather than to a physical continent and race (Ellwood 2002, 154).

ing rituals are based on the assumption that the spirits are real entities, it is easy and natural also to rationalise the spirits in literal-affirmative rather than in psychological terms and thus to assert that both the spirits and their otherworldly abodes are real. By contrast, a journey to the otherworld by way of the imagination, as in the case of Tarot-induced visualisations, places the locus of communication in the otherworld and exchanges direct communication (utterances, gestures) with indirect imagined communication. Such rituals are more open for a rationalisation along Jungian lines which deems the spirits to be expressions of archetypes according to either a supernaturalistic-dynamistic or reductive-psychological logic.

13.2.4. The Place of the *Lord of the Rings* Tarot in the Spiritual Tolkien Milieu

On the final pages of the book, Donaldson invites interested users to contact him for more information about both a "special personalized training program" and a correspondence course based on the deck which he offers out of his London Tarot Centre (1997a, 267-268). I emailed him (230312) to ask for information about the content and popularity of his training program and correspondence course. I also asked him whether he had integrated the *LR* Tarot into some of the more general courses on Tarot that he also offers, and about how well the deck has sold. Unfortunately, Donaldson never responded to my inquiries.

Lacking precise information from Donaldson himself, it is still possible to say something about the success of the *LR* Tarot deck. It certainly testifies to the success of the original English edition, that deck and book have been translated into both German (Donaldson 2002), Spanish (Donaldson 2003), and Dutch (Donaldson 2005). Also, the *LR* deck must have been successful enough to warrant a sequel. In any case, Donaldson and Pracownik followed it up in 2012 with *The Hobbit Tarot* (appearing without an accompanying book). Given that the *Hobbit* deck appeared roughly simultaneously with the first instalment of Peter Jackson's movie adaptation of *The Hobbit*, it stands to reason that the main intended audience of the *Hobbit* deck (and by implication of the *LR* deck) are Tolkien fans.

While the two decks indeed seem popular with Tolkien fans and Tarot collectors, they are less popular within the spiritual Tolkien milieu proper. Strikingly, none of the Tolkien religionists I have talked to brought up the deck by themselves.[386] When I enquired with Calantirniel of Tië eldaliéva, whom I knew to use Tarot professionally, she told me that she owned the deck, but would not use it with clients (090710).

It is not difficult to explain why the deck appeals less to serious Tolkien religionists and professional Tarot readers than to fans and collectors. As a piece of art, the deck does not compare favourably with the classics. Furthermore, users reviewing the deck on

[386] I only learned about the deck after having carried out most of my interviews and therefore did not have a chance to ask systematically whether people knew about it.

amazon.com point out that Pracownik is unfamiliar with Tolkien's works, depicting Orcs with white skin (they are black) and Elrond with a moustache (Elves have no beard).[387] The fact that the deck can also be used to play a card game designed by Mike Fitzgerald (Donaldson 1997b, 28-42) contributes to the impression that it is more a piece of merchandise than a serious Tarot deck. In short, the low style of the deck itself stands in an odd contrast with the very elaborate and well-crafted accompanying book.

To sum up, the *LR* deck must be considered quite successful in the genre of collectible Tarot decks, and certainly one equipped with an accompanying book of a quality far above average for that genre. While the deck is widely disseminated in the cultic milieu and among Tolkien fans in general, it has had no particular impact within the spiritual Tolkien milieu. Contrary to the Valar Working, the *LR* Tarot has not provided new ideas or ritual formats that could be integrated into a new tradition of Tolkien-based spirituality. It is not unthinkable, however, that the *LR* Tarot has reinforced sentiments already present in Tolkien religionists who have encountered the deck.

13.3. Tolkien Religion Based on *The Silmarillion*: A Summary

At the end of chapter 9, I formulated four hypotheses on how *S*-informed religious activity, given the religious affordances of *S*, might be expected to differ from purely *LR*-based religion. I suggested, first, that the inclusion in *S* of detailed information about the Valar could be expected to lead to Valar-directed rituals. Such rituals would by definition express first-order beliefs in the existence of the Valar, and might therefore lead to literal-affirmative rationalisations of the Valar. In this case, second, *S*-based religion would adopt a mytho-cosmological (or possible even mytho-historical) approach to Tolkien's literary mythology and hence move beyond the binocular approach that dominated *LR*-inspired religion. Third, I speculated that the decidedly Christian flavour of *S* might attract individuals to Tolkien spirituality with a Christian rather than a Pagan background. My fourth hypothesis was that the substitution of the human/Hobbit point of view in *LR* with an Elven perspective in *S* would be mirrored by a change in the self-identification of Tolkien religionists. That is to say, that I expected religionists drawing on *S* to identify, metaphorically or literally, with the Elves.

Now, about a hundred pages later, it is time to assess whether the four predictions held up. For the sake of clarity, I treat the hypotheses in another order than the one in which they were originally formulated. In what follows, I assess first whether *S*-based religion really adopted an Elven perspective (hypothesis 4) before moving on to the issues of Valar-directed rituals (hypothesis 1), affirmative ontology assessment of Tol-

[387] A note on "artistic interpretation" in the accompanying book shows that Pracownik expected such criticism (1997a, 50-51, also 267). Though he is right to point out that Hobbits sometimes wear shoes and boots in *LR* – they systematically do so in his artwork – it is clear that his artistic freedom on many other cards takes him beyond Tolkien's intentions.

kien's literary mythology (hypothesis 2), and the possible formation of a Christian wing of Tolkien spirituality (hypothesis 3). I have summarised the findings of in table 13.3 at the end of this chapter for easy reference. Besides findings relating to the four hypotheses on *S*-based religion, the table summarises other findings from chapters 10 through 13 pertaining to the main hypotheses formulated in chapter 6.

It is clear that Tolkien religion after *S* substitutes a Hobbit/human perspective with an Elven perspective treating the Valar and/or Eru as supernatural others. In all the cases treated, individuals identify as Elves, either in a supernaturalistic way (Tribunal of the Sidhe; most self-identified Elves), in a euhemeristic way (Nicholas de Vere; some self-identified Elves), or in a metaphorical way (FWMS; some self-identified Elves). The only exception to this pattern is Donaldson's *LR* Tarot deck. That can easily be explained by the fact that the deck itself, in contrast to the accompanying book, is explicitly *LR*-based rather than *S*-based. The fact that the *LR* Tarot takes a Hobbit perspective and makes no distinction between Elves (e.g. Galadriel) and Maiar (e.g. Gandalf) as supernatural others, only serves to stress the principal difference between *LR*-based and *S*-based religion.

Identification with the Elves typically goes together with some extent of ritual communication with the Valar. The Valar are occasionally addressed in the rituals of the Tribunal of the Sidhe, they were evoked in the High Elvish Working of the FWMS, and especially Elbereth/Varda has played a role in the Elven movement, at least for the Silver Elves and the Elf Queen's Daughters. The Valar do not constitute the most important deities for any of these groups, however, but are rather perceived as one legitimate pantheon among others. In other words, none of the groups considered in chapters 10 through 13 are Tolkien-based in the narrow sense of drawing exclusively (or at least primarily) on Tolkien's literary mythology. They are instead *Tolkien-integrating* groups that blend Tolkien elements with more central beliefs and practices.

In the *S*-inspired groups, the centrality of Tolkien elements in actual practice is positively correlated with the degree of reality ascribed to Tolkien's literary mythology. In the Tribunal of the Sidhe, which regularly performs collective rituals directed at the Valar, these beings are rationalised in a literal-affirmative way. In general, the Tribunal reads Tolkien's literary mythology in the mytho-cosmological mode as an imaginary story about real beings (Valar, Quendi). By contrast, those Tolkien religionists who perform Valar-directed rituals only individually (some self-identified Elves) or collectively but rarely (FWMS) tend to rationalise the Valar by way of supernaturalistic transformation. This can take the form of either theistic transformation, as when the Elf Queen's Daughters consider Varda merely a fictional epithet of the real Mother Goddess, or as Jungian transformation, which I assume was intended by the FWMS. Correspondingly, Tolkien's literary mythology is read in the binocular or mythopoeic mode in the Elven movement and the FWMS, i.e. as stories which refer to supernatural realities, but do so only indirectly. Also Terry Donaldson and the esoteric historians, for whom Valar-rituals play no role at all, approach Tolkien's literary mythology in this way. In other

words there is a correlation, and possibly a causal relation, between frequent and collective ritual communication with the Valar and the subsequent literal-affirmative ontology assessment of them and of Tolkien's literary mythology in general.

As we saw in the general introduction (section 0.2.1 above), many Christian spokespersons have pointed out that Tolkien's mythology is Christian in character. Most importantly, a single, male creator god, Ilúvatar, presides over the world. The cosmic dualism of Tolkien's world is an asymmetric moral dualism in which the forces of good/Ilúvatar are more powerful than the forces of evil/Morgoth/Sauron, not a symmetric ontological dualism in which two complementary forces are in balance. The Christian motifs in *S* have attracted the attention of a wide spectrum of Christians, most of whom read Tolkien's literary mythology in the binocular mode, perceiving Ilúvatar as a reference to the Christian God and Frodo and/or Gandalf as transfigured Christs. The theosophical-Christian references in Donaldson's Tarot book fall into this category.

There are individuals in the cultic milieu who both subscribe to some form of Christianity and are deeply into Tolkien, and who want to combine the two commitments like the Tolkien-integrating Pagans do. I have not said much about this group in the preceding chapters because it is very small. Also, I will touch upon both Christian Elves and Christian Tolkien religionists in chapters 14 and 16 below. Let me nevertheless draw some conclusions from the material already at this point.

A severe problem facing Tolkienesque Christians is that it is difficult to create rituals which are both distinctively Christian *and* Tolkien-based. Self-identified Elves and Tolkien religionists with a Christian background sometimes address God as Eru or Ilúvatar in prayer, but this practice is not distinctively different from conventional Christian prayer. To be distinctively Tolkienesque, Christians must engage also with the Valar. This can work as Tolkien has pointed out that the Valar are equivalent to angels rather than gods – interaction with the Valar is thus not at odds with monotheistic Christian worship. Even so, most branches of Christianity have no angel-cult whose rituals can readily be used as models for Valar veneration. By contrast, Neo-Pagans can, due to their polytheistic religion, easily adopt the Valar as an extra pantheon and use their existing ritual formats as the base for Valar-directed rituals. I think that the difficulty of creating distinctively Tolkien/Christian rituals is one of the reasons why there are so few 'Tolkien Christians' and many more Tolkien-integrating Pagans.

The Elven movement includes a minority of Christians, and in chapter 14 I briefly discuss the Indigo Elves who are led by a Biblical literalist. Even so, Christian Elves face problems similar to Christian Valar-venerators. That is because pagan mythologies contain beliefs about Elves, while Christianity has distanced itself from such beliefs. In fact, *S* is the only text that combines an Elven perspective with monotheism. (In *S*, the humans who have contact with the Elves, worship Eru rather than the Valar, and one can infer that the Elves also do so; cf. section 9.1.5). Christian Elves therefore need *S* to sustain their identity, while Pagan Elves can draw on many other texts as well. For these

reasons, Christian Elves are less numerous than Pagan Elves and, it is my impression, more Tolkien-centred.

All in all, the four hypotheses have held up reasonably well. Tolkien religionists after *S* certainly adopt an Elven perspective and in many cases even a self-identify as Elves. As we have seen in chapter 11, the self-identification as Elf, while often initially Tolkien-inspired, can become dissociated from Tolkien with time. Tolkien-dissociated Elves lose interest in the deities of Tolkien's literary mythology, but those who maintain a Tolkien-based Elven identity tend to combine this with rituals directed at the Valar (if they are Pagans) or prayers directed at Eru (if they are Christians). Tolkien-based practices increase the likelihood that Tolkien's literary mythology is approached in the mytho-cosmological mode rather than in the binocular (or mythopoeic) mode. There are not as many Christian Tolkien religionists as one might have expected from the Christian flavour of *S*. That is not because *S* does not afford a combination with Christianity (indeed it affords combined ritual interaction with Eru *and* the Valar), but because monotheistic Christianity discourages such religious blending while Neo-Paganism endorses it.

Table 13.3. Overview of Tolkien Religion Based on both *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Silmarillion*									
	Use of *S*'s Religious Affordances (cf. hypotheses, ch. 9)			**Religious Blending**		**Reading Modes**		**Legitimisation**	
	Elven identification /Rationalisation	**Valar rituals /Rationalisation**	**Christian wing**	**Framing /Domains**	**Type**	**Myth**	**TLM**	**Of TLM**	**With Tolkien**
Tribunal o/t Sidhe (ch. 10)	Yes: Identity as Changelings /Literal affirmation	Occasionally /Literal affirmation	No	T-integrating /I, R, D	Synthesis	M-H	M-C	-	Tolkien is himself a Changeling
Elven movement (ch. 11)	Yes: Elven identity /Literal aff. (genetic, spiritual) /Naturalistic T (cultural)	Occasionally /EQD/SE: Theistic T /ER minority: Lit. aff.	Minority of Christian Elves	T-integrating /I, (R)	Assimil-ation	M-H M-C E	B, MP (M-C)	TLM is Elven history in mythic form	-
FWMS Working (ch. 13.1)	Yes: Elven role /Role-playing	Yes /? (Lit. aff., Supern. T or Lit. disaff.)	Christian members	T-integrating /R	Mixture	M-C	MP (M-C, B)	TLM reveals a "Truth"	-
***LR* Tarot (ch. 13.2)**	No: Hobbit perspective /Elves and Gandalf (not Valar) as supernatural others	No; visualisations of *LR* characters /Jungian T	Christian references	T-integrating /R, D	Mixture	MP	MP	TLM's mythic sources	Tolkien channelled TLM
Esoteric historians (ch. 12)	Gardner: Elven perspective De Vere: Elven identity /Euhemeristic	No /-	Christian references	T-affixing /I, D	-	E	B	-	Tolkien knew about the blood-line

TLM = Tolkien's literary mythology; EQD = Elf Queen's Daughters; SE = Silver Elves; ER = Elven Realities; Supernaturalistic/Naturalistic/Theistic/Jungian T = transformation (cf. section 5.2.1); T-integrating/affixing = Tolkien-integrating/affixing religion; I/R/D domains = identity, rituals, doctrines; M-H/M-C/MP/B/E reading modes = mytho-historical, mytho-cosmological, mythopoeic, binocular, euhemeristic modes (cf. section 5.2.2).

Chapter 14. Peter Jackson's Movies and Middle-earth Paganism

During 1955 and 1956, immediately after the publication of *LR*, the BBC broadcasted a condensed and dramatised version of Tolkien's narrative in 12 episodes. The 13-hour long radio production stayed quite close to the original storyline (Rosebury 2003, 204, 206-207), yet Tolkien was not content. In a letter, he remarked: "I think the book [*LR*] quite unsuitable for 'dramatization', and have not enjoyed the broadcasts" (*Letters* 228). In another letter he characterised the achievement of the BBC as a "sillification" of his book (*Letters* 198).[388]

Three Americans, Forrest J. Ackerman, Morton Grady Zimmerman, and Al Brodax, thought differently. Believing *LR* to be adaptable into an animated movie, they approached Tolkien with a storyline and some sample artwork for such a movie in September 1957 (Carpenter 1977, 301). Tolkien was impressed by the artwork, but found Zimmerman's proposed storyline – which consequently misspelled names and included major plot changes – to be disrespectful (*Letters* 270-277; cf. Carpenter 1977, 301; Rosebury 2003, 205). He decided to turn down the proposal. This incident seems to have reinforced Tolkien's conviction that his books were unfilmable, yet he sold the film rights of both *H* and *LR* to United Artists for a substantial amount of money in 1969.

Initially, Tolkien's intuition seemed justified. Apple Films, the Beatles' production company, suggested a joint venture with United Artists, but the project was never realised. After another failed attempt to get a film project off the ground, United Artists gave up and sold the film rights to producer Saul Zaentz in 1976 (Thompson 2007, 19). Adaptations were Zaentz' specialism and he had just won the Best Picture Oscar for *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1975), based on Ken Kesey's 1962 novel of the same name.[389] He was determined to give the 'unfilmable' *LR* a try and in 1978 produced the animated *J.R.R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings* with Ralph Bakshi as director. The movie covered about half of *LR*, and the intention was to follow it up by a sequel (Thompson 2007, 19-20). This plan was not communicated in the marketing of the film, however, and the abrupt ending confused cinemagoers who were unfamiliar with Tolkien's book, just as it disappointed fans who had expected the whole story. Tolkien's fans also disliked the childish depiction of the Hobbits and the changes to the storyline, such as the deletion of

[388] Also in other letters, Tolkien expressed discontent with the BBC broadcast (*Letters* 229, 253-255, 257).

[389] Zaentz would later win the Best Picture statuette also for *Amadeus* (1984), adapted from a stage play, and for *The English Patient* (1996), adapted from a novel.

Tom Bombadil.[390] The reaction from the film critics was lukewarm, and even though the film was a financial success, the planned sequel was never realised.[391]

About the same time, two animated TV movies, *The Hobbit* (1977) and *The Return of the King* (1980), were produced by Jules Bass and Arthur Rankin, Jr. Tolkien fans liked these movies even less than Bakshi's. According to Jennifer Brayton, fans felt that all three animated films "were being wrongly oriented towards a children's audience [...] [and] that Tolkien's voice and vision had been mutilated" (2006, 141). Indeed, the animated movies damaged the reputation of Tolkien's works. Whereas bands such as Led Zeppelin and Motörhead had referred to *LR* in their song texts in the 1970s, Tolkien became unhip in the 1980s and Tolkien fandom went hibernating.[392] Nobody dared attempt a *LR* movie for the next fifteen years, and it seemed that Tolkien was right after all in his judgement that it was impossible to make a movie out of *LR* and still do justice to the original text.

Tolkien's doubts would eventually be put to shame by Peter Jackson, a young director who was most well-known for splatter movies such as *Bad Taste* (1987) and *Braindead* (1992). Having proved with *Heavenly Creatures* (1994) that he could also do serious drama, Jackson approached Zaentz (who still held the film rights to *H* and *LR*) in 1995 and started negotiations with him and with potential production companies about a film adaptation of both *H* and *LR* – this time with real actors. After a long and complicated process of negotiations and turnarounds (Thompson 2007, 21-39), the project ended up with New Line. It was decided to start with *LR* and to split the story up into three instalments.

Jackson's movie trilogy was an immense success. In 2004, the three films, *The Fellowship of the Ring* (2001), *The Two Towers* (2002), and *The Return of the King* (2003), ranked 9th, 4th, and 2nd on Box Office Mojo's all-time international record list of box office turnovers (Mathijs 2006, 5).[393] Together the three instalments were awarded 17 Oscars and nominated for an additional 13. *The Return of the King* alone took home 11 statuettes, winning in all categories in which it was nominated, including Best Motion Picture and Best Director. The three movies are currently (as per September 2013) ranked the 12th, 20th, and 9th best movies ever by the users on the International Movie Data Base (IMDB).[394]

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[390] The critique of Bakshi's storyline was not entirely fair, for actually Bakshi sticks very close to Tolkien's original. Arguably, Bakshi's film is more loyal to Tolkien than Jackson's, for Bakshi retained both the enunciative narrator, Tolkien's narrative chronology, and several scenes which Jackson cut out.

[391] For a recent and appreciative discussion of the Zaentz-Bakshi production, see Rosebury (2003, 207-208).

[392] Documentary, *Ringers: Lord of the Fans* (2005).

[393] At the time of writing, the three movies rank 32nd, 24th, and 7th. Their drop is caused largely by the fact that the list is not adjusted for inflation. For current figures, see http://boxofficemojo.com/alltime/world/ [040913].

[394] http://www.imdb.com/chart/top?tt0167260&ref_=tt_awd [040913].

The *LR* movie trilogy led to a renewed public interest in Tolkien's works, and to an expansion and revitalisation of Tolkien fandom. A new generation of Tolkien enthusiasts, the so-called Ringers, encountered Tolkien's work for the first time through Jackson's movies, and for most of them the movies, rather than the book, came to constitute the authoritative version of the narrative. In the wake of the movies followed also a deluge of popular and academic books on Tolkien, and the first academic peer-reviewed Tolkien journal, *Tolkien Studies*, emerged in 2004.[395] Finally, and of more direct importance to the present work, Jackson's movies led to the emergence of a second wave of Tolkien spirituality.

As already mentioned in section 11.2.4 above, the movie trilogy led to an influx of new, Tolkien-inspired members into the Elven movement, and this spurred a debate within the movement about the legitimacy of Jackson's movies and Tolkien's narratives. The dominant Elven view was that Jackson's movies were illegitimate sources of inspiration and that Tolkien's books could be classified, at best, as spiritually insightful fiction, but not as legitimate myth. As a result, Tolkien-affirming Elves and Elf-believers founded their own communities, three of which will be discussed later in this chapter. Besides Tolkienesque Elven groups, the movies were instrumental also to the rise of two other new kinds of Tolkien religion, Middle-earth Paganism, which will be treated in this chapter, and Legendarium Reconstructionism, which is the subject of chapter 16.

Middle-earth Paganism has three defining characteristics. First, it is the only form of Tolkien religion treating Jackson's movies as its main authoritative texts. This is revealed for instance by Middle-earth Pagans' fascination with Arwen who plays an important role in the movie trilogy, but is barely mentioned in Tolkien's book. Second, Middle-earth Paganism, as the name says, focuses on Middle-earth rather than on the Blessed Realm. Third, it is a form of fiction-integrating religion blending important elements from *LR* into a Pagan, typically Wiccan, frame.

Legendarium Reconstructionism emerged out of the renewed interest for Tolkien's works and languages generated by the movies, but this form of Tolkien religion does not use the movies as authoritative texts. Instead, Legendarium Reconstructionists focus on Tolkien's written works, including *S* and the appendices to the book version of *LR*. Mirroring Reconstructionist tendencies within the Neo-Pagan movement, they furthermore venture beyond the edited version of *S* to look for Tolkien's original spiritual vision as it is hinted at in his letters (*Letters*) and in the earliest versions of his tales in *The History of*

[395] See section 0.2 above for references to the new wave of academic studies of Tolkien's works and for references on movie-inspired Tolkien fandom. See section 0.2 also for references to some of the many books published in the wake of the movies that aimed to appropriate Tolkien's works from the point of view of Christian theology or from other religious perspectives. On production, marketing, and reception of Jackson's *LR* as motion pictures, see Thompson (2007) and the edited volumes by Mathijs (2006), Mathijs and Pomerance (2006), and Barker and Mathijs (2008). See also Shefrin (2004), Pryor (2004), and Wright (2004).

Middle-earth (*HoMe*). As a consequence, they do not only use Tolkien's narratives as spiritual resources, but also consider Tolkien himself a spiritual role model.

Counterbalancing the difference between them, Middle-earth Paganism and Legendarium Reconstructionism share one important characteristic. They both emerged on the Internet. Contrary to the offline groups that constitute the first wave of Tolkien religion (the Mojave group, the Silver Elves, the Tribunal of the Sidhe, and so on), the second wave groups emerged as, and continue to be, fundamentally online endeavours. To my knowledge, none of the online groups that were founded in the 21st century have moved towards an offline organisation with real-life gatherings. Some have sought other ways to bolster their feeling of community, such as performing group rituals mediated by Skype, but this has not been a success. The failure of Skype-mediated rituals illustrates that the Internet has proved a double-edged sword for second wave Tolkien religion. On the one hand, the Internet greatly facilitates initial group-formation and long-distance communication; on the other hand, it is difficult to turn online groups into stable and enduring communities – more difficult than with offline groups. After a few active years, the Middle-earth Pagan groups have largely collapsed. Small groups of Legendarium Reconstructionists still hold together, though they struggle with widely differing opinions among their members on how to approach Tolkien's works spiritually. One of the questions that I seek to answer in this chapter and chapter 16 is therefore why the Legendarium Reconstructionist groups have survived (so far) while the Middle-earth Pagan groups (together with most Tolkienesque Elves) have crumbled. This analysis will enable me to say something in the conclusion about the Internet's affordances for religious community-building in general.

In this chapter and chapter 16, I discuss six online networks and communities whose members can be categorised predominantly as either Middle-earth Pagans (Middle-Earth Pagans[396]), Legendarium Reconstructionists (Tië eldaliéva; Ilsaluntë Valion), or Tolkien-affirmative Elves (Children of the Varda; Elende; Indigo Elves). Let me stress that Middle-earth Paganism, Legendarium Reconstructionism, and Tolkienesque Elf-belief are ideal types to do with a particular way of religionising Tolkien's literary mythology. None of the six groups discussed here are completely homogeneous, and all include (or have included) members with a different 'religionising' style than the one which is dominant in the group. For instance, while Tië eldaliéva (Qu: The Elven Way) is predominantly a Legendarium Reconstructionist group, it includes members who lean towards a Tolkien-affirming Elven style of religionising Tolkien's texts. Furthermore, Middle-earth Pagans, Legendarium Reconstructionists, and Tolkienesque Elves are not

[396] This group spells its name with a capital E even though Middle-earth (with an 'e') would be correct. The name of this group should not be confused with the term Middle-earth Paganism which I use as a general designation for Tolkien religion in which elements from Tolkien's literary mythology are combined with Pagan (often Wiccan) material.

found exclusively in the groups discussed here. All three forms can also be found in general Pagan and Elven groups online and offline and it is likely that also solitaire Pagans have experimented with Tolkien-integrating rituals.

Figure 14.1 gives a graphic depiction of the relations between the six second wave groups in early 2010 and shows, Faer en Edhel Echuiad (Si: The Spirit of the Elf Awaken Again), a short-lived group whose core members later became active in Tië eldaliéva and which I will therefore not discuss separately.[397] The member figures are per 3 March 2010, but they should not be given too much weight.[398] The vast majority of the members in Middle-Earth Pagans, Children of the Varda, Elende, and Indigo Elves are inactive lurkers, and the number of active core members in these groups is much closer to the 4-7 range of Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion. The figure shows only a few individuals, mainly moderators and highly active members, but that suffices to demonstrate the interlinked nature of second wave Tolkien religion online. Individuals such as Calantirniel, Lomelindo, Laurasia, and Ravenwolf have been highly active in more than one group and thus helped glue the different groups together into a single network.[399]

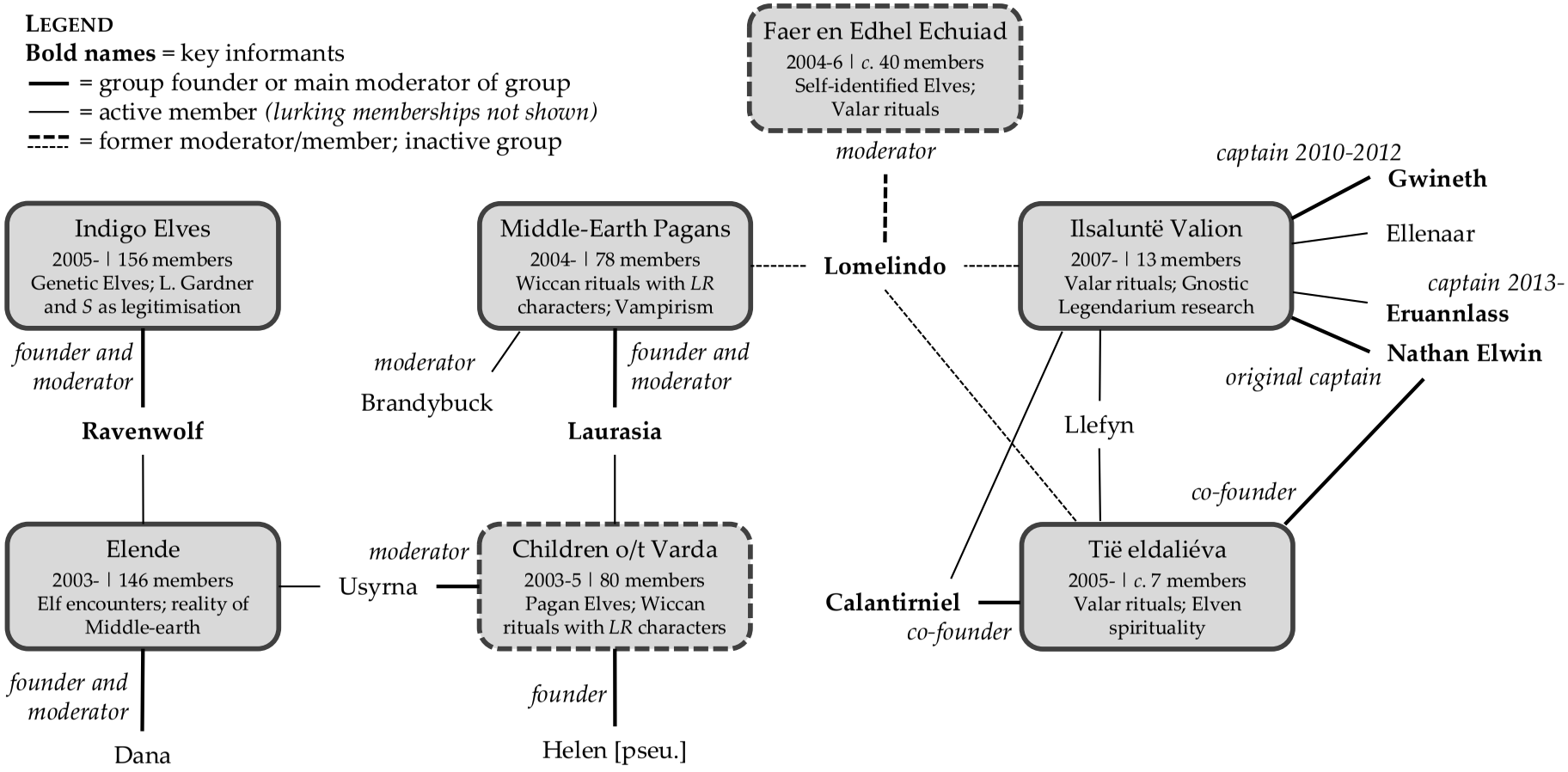
The rest of this chapter falls into three sections. In the first, I sketch the religious affordances of Jackson's movie adaptations. I point out differences in the movies' catalogue of religious affordances compared to that of the *LR* book and formulate two hypotheses about the form movie-based Tolkien religion can be expected to take compared to religion based directly on the book version of *LR*. In the second section, I discuss how Middle-earth Pagans (especially those active in the group Middle-Earth Pagans) have actually constructed religious beliefs and practices based (largely) on Jackson's films. In the third section, I briefly discuss the three Tolkien-affirmative Elven groups, Children of the Varda, Elende, and Indigo Elves, that were formed right after the movies came out.

[397] Visit the ProBoard of Faer en Edhel Echuiad at http://shadowwolf2005.proboards.com/index.cgi [080114].

[398] The figure for Middle-Earth Pagans is per 2 March 2012.

[399] The milieu is even more interlinked than shown on the figure. To give just a few additional examples, Ravenwolf has been active also in Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion, and both Laurasia, Calantirniel and Nathan Elwin have been members of Middle-earth Reunion: The Alternative Tolkien Society (cf. ch. 16) which is not shown on the figure.

Figure 14.1. The Tolkien-Religious Online Network, March 2010



14.1. The Religious Affordances of Peter Jackson's Movie Adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings*

14.1.1. From Book to Script: Main Changes in Story and Narrative Mode

It was no easy task for Peter Jackson and his crew to condense and adapt the rich material of *LR* into a movie. Even though the extended DVD version of the movies has a total runtime of more than eleven hours, many details in Tolkien's text had to be left out. In adapting *LR* from book to script, Fran Walsh, Philippa Boyens, and Peter Jackson made four major changes to the narrative.[400] Some of these changes altered the religious affordances of the movies compared to Tolkien's book, and it is therefore worth briefly reviewing them here before moving on to catalogue the religious affordances of the movies in detail.[401]

Two of the four changes concern the mode of narration. Jackson altered Tolkien's order of narration to reorganise the scenes strictly chronologically, and he severely reduced the frame story which in the book presents the narrative world as (a feigned version of) the reader's world in the past. The first change (chronologisation) has no impact on the religious affordances of *LR*, but the second change (reduction of frame story) is significant. The movies retain some elements of the frame story, but these are confined to the narrative world itself. In both book and movies, *H* is authored by Bilbo (*FR* 2, 3, 6, 23; *RK* 76) and *LR* by Frodo (*RK* 76), but in the movies there is no present-day human narrator to claim that these manuscripts have come into his possession. Some of the material from the original prologue has survived in the scene "Concerning Hobbits" (*FR* 2), but whereas this paragraph is penned by a human compiler/narrator in the book

[400] Much more elaborate discussions of Jackson's adaptation of Tolkien's narrative can be found in Chance (2002), Croft (2005), Porter (2005), and Rosebury (2003, 210-220). Particularly interesting is the edited volume by Bogstad and Kaveny (2011) which revisits the issue with the soberness of hindsight, avoiding the kneejerk defence of Tolkien's canonical text against Jackson's maltreatment which characterised many initial responses by critics.

[401] References to the movies give the name of the movie in shorthand and the scene number of the extended DVD edition. *FR* refers to *The Fellowship of the Ring*, *TT* to *The Two Towers*, and *RK* to *The Return of the King*. The extended DVD version of *LR* is approximately two hours longer than the theatrical version. I refer to this version because it includes many new scenes that – rather than furthering the plot – add depth to the narrative universe and greatly expand the religious affordances of the movies. For example, the extended version of *FR* includes a new scene in which Frodo and his friends watch a troop of shining Elves on their way to Grey Havens (*FR* 11), a scene in which Aragorn tells Frodo about the Elfmaiden Lúthien who gave up her mortality to marry the human Beren (*FR* 17), and a scene with Elrond and Aragorn including the only reference to Númenor in the entire film corpus. The extended versions of *TT* and *RK* similarly include new scenes that add significantly to the repertoire of religious motifs, concerning Ents and living trees (*TT* 19, 61), Aragorn's Númenórean descent and the issue of higher and lower races (*TT* 17, 32; *RK* 12), funeral rituals among the Rohirrim (*TT* 21), magic (*RK* 4, 45), and dream visions (*RK* 7).

version, it is written and narrated by Bilbo in the film.[402] This has profound consequences. In the book version, the human compiler/narrator acts as a bridge between the reader's present and the narrative world and allows the latter to be playfully constructed as the world of both reader and narrator in the past. The removal of the compiler/narrator destroys this ploy of feigned history and greatly increases the distance between the filmic Middle-earth and the world of the viewer compared to the distance between the book's Middle-earth and the world of the reader. Parallel to the loss of frame narrative, the motif of 'true tales' which is so frequent in the books (cf. section 7.3.2), does not appear a single time in the movies. In short, the movies do not thematise their own veracity as possible (or feigned) history, but appear straightforwardly as fiction.

The two other main changes from book to script concern the narrate or story itself. First, the story has been slimmed in various ways. Many minor characters have been dropped (most significantly Tom Bombadil), or their plot functions have been taken over by others. It is now Arwen, for example, and not Glorfindel, who aids the Fellowship against the Black Riders at the ford; *FR* 21. Additionally, many of the scenes that do not contribute to the plot have been cut out, for example Aragorn and Éomer's discussion of morality (cf. section 7.2.2), and the feast in Rivendell where Bilbo sings a long song about Eärendil the Mariner (*LR* 233-236). This is significant, for these deleted scenes are often those which add a spiritual depth to Tolkien's narrative by providing elements of narrative religion. While the theatrical version of the movies was almost stripped of narrative religion, much of the mythic background and religious references have come back in with the extended DVD edition (cf. footnote 401 above).[403]

Finally, Jackson has developed the narrative in the direction of a blockbuster. The deletion of minor characters and slow scenes has made space for more action scenes, and for a strong emphasis on the seemingly impossible love between Arwen and Aragorn. In the book, Arwen is barely mentioned barring a section of appendix A entitled "Here follows a part of the tale of Aragorn and Arwen" (*LR* 1057-1063). Jackson incorporates this material into the main narrative and expands it. Through the focus on Arwen, the theme of human/Elven afterlife features prominently in the movies, as does the motif that the Elves are sailing to the Undying Lands in the West and leaving Middle-earth to the humans.

Already from this brief overview, it is apparent that changes in narration and story give the movies a repertoire of religious affordances that differs from those of the book.

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[402] At other points in the movies, Jackson uses the Elven Queen Galadriel as narrator rather than Tolkien's unnamed enunciative narrator/compiler. Most importantly, Galadriel is the narrator in the very first scene of *FR* that provides background information about the Ring of Power.

[403] Jackson's adaptation of *LR* was in many ways inspired by Bakshi's 1978-film, a fact that Jackson has openly acknowledged. For example, Jackson follows Bakshi in leaving out Tom Bombadil, in conflating the characters Éomer and Erkenbrand, and in including a prologue about the forging of the Rings. Furthermore, substantial parts of the dialogue are lifted (almost) unchanged from Bakshi's script to Jackson's.

Generally speaking, the movies retain most of the fantastic motifs of the book, but no longer thematise themselves as an historical tale. They have lost most of the narrative religion, except for a general belief in a supreme deity and in an afterlife. Let me now discuss the fantastic elements and the narrative religion of the movies in greater detail.

14.1.2. Fantastic Elements in Peter Jackson's Movie Adaptation

In section 7.1, I identified four fantastic motif clusters in *LR*, concerning fantastic beings and races, otherworlds, magic, and intuition as a source of knowledge. All four motif clusters are still richly represented in the movies.

Most obviously, the story continues to abound with non-human beings such as Hobbits, Elves, Dwarves, and Orcs. Among these demi-humans, the Elves are still singled out as special in various ways: they appear immortal (cf. 14.1.3 below) and sometimes shine (*FR* 11, 21). Some Elves even wield magic, and among the creatures of good their specialness is surpassed only by the wizard Gandalf. Of the Orcs, we hear that they were originally Elves who were broken by the powers of evil (*FR* 40; cf. section 9.1 above). The Ents feature prominently in the films (*TT* 13, 16, 19, 44, 48, 50, 52, 54, 56, 59, 63; *RK* 3), and so do the living trees.[404] Legolas explains that the Elves woke up the trees and that the living trees have feelings (*TT* 15); Treebeard adds that the living trees have become difficult to manage for the Ents (*TT* 19). Merry and Pippin are almost killed by an angry tree (*TT* 19),[405] and we see the trees march to Helm's Deep where they destroy the fleeing Orcs (*TT* 56, 61). Most of the monsters of the book reappear, including Shelob, the Nazgûl (esp. *FR* 16; *TT* 14), and the Balrog (*FR* 36; *TT* 1). The role of the Undead host in the mountain is greatly expanded in the movies compared to the books (*RK* 33, 35, 37, 51, 55).

Of the four motifs concerning human races in *LR* (cf. section 7.1.1) only two feature in the movies. First, the notion of higher and lower human races is retained. We hear that Aragorn is one of the Dúnedain, a descendant of the Númenóreans (*FR* 24) and blessed with long life (*TT* 32). According to Gandalf, Gondor is now ruled by "lesser men" (*RK* 12); and when Aragorn steps forth and reveals himself as the descendant of the last king, his right to the throne is self-evidently acknowledged (*FR* 24, 25, 28, 45; *RK* 69).[406] Second, it is clear that humans and Elves can interbreed and in that sense constitute a single species. Elrond foresees that Aragorn and Arwen will produce a son (*RK* 9), and Aragorn tells Frodo of Lúthien the Elfmaiden who married the human Beren (*FR* 18). Contrary to

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[404] The living trees are referred to as Huorns in the book, but this term is not used in the movies.

[405] In the book, this scene occurs in the Old Forest and Merry and Pippin are saved by Tom Bombadil (*LR* 116-120).

[406] Aragorn himself is afraid that he has inherited not only his ancestor Isildur's monarchical birth-right, but also his moral weakness (*FR* 25). The fact that he withstands the power of the Ring whereas Isildur failed shows, however, that the fate of individuals is not completely predestined by their descent.

the book (*LR* 194), the movies do not reveal that Beren and Lúthien had children and that both Aragorn and Arwen descend from them. Where Tolkien uses the story of Beren and Lúthien to give his world mythological depth, Jackson uses it only as a mirror of Aragorn and Arwen's love story. The last two race motifs of the books, 'racial memory' and 'descendants of former civilizations existing on the margins of the world', do not feature in the movies.

The second fantastic motif cluster concerns otherworlds. A main change from book to movies is that the Elven dwellings in Middle-earth have lost much of their otherworldly character. In the book, both Rivendell and Lothlórien are experienced as profoundly otherworldly by the hobbits who cannot stay awake in Rivendell, and whose perception of time is distorted in Lothlórien. In the movies, the Elven dwellings are still magnificent, but they are no longer (experienced as) ontologically different from the rest of Middle-earth. This change is significant, for the diminished difference between Middle-earth at large and the Elven dwellings within it, together with the increased distance between Middle-earth and the viewer's world (cf. section 14.1.1 above), allows Middle-earth as such (rather than the Elven realms) to be perceived as an otherworld from the perspective of the viewer. The movie universe still contains an otherworld, namely the Elven realm in the West which is referred to as "Valinor" (*FR* 41; *TT* 38) or the "Undying Lands" (*TT* 33). The significance of this place for an inhabitant in Middle-earth, however, is greatly reduced from book to movie. A reader of *LR* can deduce that the Undying Lands are the abode of both Elves and the Valar and will know that the Valar sometimes intervene in Middle-earth affairs. By contrast, the Undying Lands in the movies is just a place outside the known world to which the Elves are going, never to return (*FR* 24, 41; *TT* 33, 38; *RK* 76). Since the movies include no instances of religious communication with the inhabitants of the Undying Lands – and indeed no discussion of the Valar at all (cf. section 14.1.3 below) – the place itself loses its spiritual significance.

If the motif clusters on race and otherworlds have been somewhat diluted, the opposite is true of the motif cluster on magic and magical items. Jackson has not only retained all magical items and most scenes involving the use of magic, he has also enhanced their fabulousness with visual effects. Jackson has even included a few new scenes involving magic and added Arwen to the list of magic-wielding characters.

The Ring of Power remains the chief magical item. Galadriel even personifies it, stating that the Ring has a "will of its own" and that it "ensnared" Gollum (*FR* 1).[407] Gandalf, by contrast, does not ascribe willpower to the Ring as such, but explains its power as a function of Sauron's life force being bound to it (*FR* 10). In any case, the Ring prolongs both Gollum's life (*RK* 1) and Bilbo's (*FR* 3). It almost succeeds in overpowering

[407] She also perceives Faramir's capture of Frodo and Sam as caused by the Ring's desire to get into the hands of Men (*TT* 39).

Bilbo (*FR* 6, 23) and actually overpowers Frodo in the end (*RK* 70).[408] All other magical items from the book reappear in the movies, including the Palantír (*FR* 18; *RK* 4, 8, 60), Galadriel's mirror (*FR* 39), the phial with the light of Eärendil (*RK* 38, 43), and Elven cloaks (*TT* 18), rope (*TT* 2, 3), and lembas bread (*FR* 41). Jackson has even added a magical potion, the "Ent draft", which causes Merry and Pippin to grow taller (*TT* 19).

Like in the book, Sauron, a few of the Elves, and the Wizards Gandalf and Saruman (Radagast has been cut out) are able to wield magic. The magical power of the Wizards, much of which is bound to their staffs, is demonstrated in the fight between Saruman and Gandalf (*FR* 12). With his powerful voice (*RK* 4) Saruman furthermore controls the weather (*FR* 32) and enslaves Théoden's mind (*TT* 17). Having returned as Gandalf the White, Gandalf releases Théoden (*TT* 20), destroys Saruman's staff (*RK* 4), and repels a Nazgûl (*RK* 21). Sauron's greatest magical act is to conjure up a magical 'Mordor Darkness' to shield his Orcs from the sun (*RK* 12). Departing from the book, Jackson also lets Sauron's servant, the Witch-king of Angmar, use magic to destroy Gandalf's staff (*RK* 45).[409] The Elf Queen Galadriel has the power to communicate telepathically with others (*FR* 37, 38; *TT* 39; *RK* 38), and Elrond of Rivendell has the "gift of foresight" (*TT* 39; *RK* 9). Going beyond the book again, Jackson also lets Arwen possess magical powers. Not only has Arwen inherited her father's foresight (*RK* 9), she also commands the flood that drowns the Nazgûl's steeds at the ford (*FR* 21).[410] In the same scene, Arwen seems to be uttering a healing spell when she urges Frodo, who wounded by a Nazgûl blade is passing into the "Shadow World", to "come back to the light". Soon, however, her command turns into a prayer with the words: "What grace is given me, let it pass to him. Let him be spared. Save him" (*FR* 21). Had such a prayer been uttered by an Elf in the book, it would certainly have been directed at Elbereth; that Arwen here appeals to a diffuse and unnamed higher power is characteristic for the vagueness of the narrative religion in the movies (cf. section 14.1.3 below).

Most motifs from the cluster 'intuitions, dreams, visions, and prophecies as sources of knowledge' are retained from book to movies. The motif of the heart as a seat of intuitive and foreboding knowledge reappears several times, though sometimes in other contexts and voiced by other characters than in the book. For example, Elrond tells Aragorn that "in her heart, your mother knew you would be hunted all your life" (*FR* 28), and Gandalf's heart tells him that Gollum has some part to play yet and that there-

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[408] The Ring's power is also demonstrated by the fact that Gollum's oath to help Frodo destroy the Ring (sworn on the Ring itself, *TT* 3) actually comes true (*RK* 70) despite Gollum's treacherous intention to keep the Ring for himself.

[409] This change in the story helps explain why Gandalf does not play a more active role in the defence of Minas Tirith in the book. It is itself, however, in need of an explanation. It is not logical that Gandalf, who has just broken Saruman, should be inferior in power to the Witch-king. This scene only occurs in the extended DVD version of *RK*.

[410] In the book, Elrond commands the flood (*LR* 214, 224).

fore it was good that Bilbo did not kill him (*FR* 34). That the wisdom of the heart is greater than that of the mind is cemented in the scene in which Boromir requests Frodo to hand over the Ring. Frodo replies that it "would seem like wisdom but for the warning in my heart" (*FR* 44).[411]

Visions occur seven times. In three of these cases the visionary learns of events that have happened in the recent past. Boromir learns from a dream vision that the Ring has been found (*FR* 27), in another dream vision Frodo sees Gandalf battling the Balrog (*TT* 1), and Faramir has a vision of his dead brother (*TT* 40). Three other visions concern the future. In Fangorn Forest, Pippin dreams of finding a barrel of pipe weed (*TT* 19), a dream that soon after comes true (*TT* 63); as mentioned above Arwen has a vision of her future son with Aragorn (*RK* 9); and Frodo sees the future when looking into Galadriel's mirror (*FR* 39). History is not pre-destined, however, so visions of the future cannot give as precise knowledge as visions of the past. Galadriel explains to Frodo that visions of the future are always visions of a *possible* future. Frodo's mirror vision of an enslaved Shire is therefore not the future as it will be, but what will come to pass if the Ring is not destroyed. The final vision is Éowyn's dream of a Great Wave (*RK* 7). In the book, this is Faramir's dream and it is interpreted as an ancestral memory of the destruction of Númenor. For Éowyn, it cannot be an ancestral memory, for she does not descend from the Númenóreans. No other interpretation is offered, however, making it difficult to make any sense of the dream in the movies.[412]

14.1.3. Narrative Religion in Peter Jackson's Movie Adaptation

The movies contain considerably less narrative religion than the book version of *LR*. The movies include no explicit discussions of theology, nor any rituals explicitly directed at divine beings. Similarly, while the characters' actions indirectly express certain values, morality is no longer explicitly discussed in the movies.[413] The only religious motifs which have not been severely downplayed in the adaptation process, concern the existence of a supreme divine power and the promise of individual afterlife.

References to the Supreme Being, who in *S* is called Eru or Ilúvatar, are even more opaque in the movies than in the book. The book version of *LR* included references to "the One", but this expression is not used in the movies. The closest we come to a statement about the One is Gandalf's reassurance to Frodo that "[t]here are other forces at

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[411] A few similar references to the heart (*FR* 4; *TT* 40) or to feeling as a source of knowledge (*FR* 43) occur in the movies.

[412] The movies do not include the book's second occurrence of ancestral memory, Merry's extra-personal experience at the barrow.

[413] The movies have lost the motif of a nature-given morality, but they still contain several scenes that emphasise the individual's responsibility to choose what to fight for, scenes that inspire both the characters and the viewer to fight for the good (e.g. *FR* 34; *TT* 60; *RK* 38).

work in this world […] besides the will of evil" (*FR* 34).[414] Compensating the lack of explicit theology, it is self-evident that a divine power does exist. The Gandalf of the movies takes the existence of a benign power for granted when he, like in the book, interprets a number of fortuitous turns of events as the work of divine providence (*FR* 34; *TT* 15).[415] More importantly, when Gandalf dies, he strays "out of thought and time", but is re-awoken by some power and sent back to Earth. The veracity of this episode, and hence the factuality of the divine power, is even more strongly emphasised in the movie than in the book, for in the movie the all-knowing narrator shows us what happens to Gandalf (*TT* 15), whereas the book only includes Gandalf's *post facto* account of his experience. Weighing it all together, the movies demonstrate the existence of a supreme divine power within the fictional universe, but also present it as a distant power with which people (barring Wizards) do not communicate. This is much like the book. What is different is that the movies barely mention the Valar. The very word 'Valar' is used only a single time in the movie corpus, namely when the wounded Aragorn sees Arwen in a dream and hears her say the prayer: "May the grace of the Valar protect you" (*TT* 37). It is not explained, however, who the Valar are, and it is impossible to make sense of Arwen's prayer on the basis of the movies alone. More significantly, the movies do not include a single reference to Elbereth/Varda, the Valië who is the main Elven deity in the narrative religion of the Elves in the book version of *LR*.

The distant and unreachable character of the Supreme Being, the nebulous reference to the Valar, and the complete absence of Elbereth have important implications for the way rituals are depicted in the movies. A few rituals are included in the movie narrative, but with the exception of Arwen's prayer for the Valar's grace, there are no references to divine beings within a ritual context. In contrast to the book, the movies include no Elven songs about Elbereth, no use of her name for magical protection, and no Elven ritual calendar. The book's invocations of the Valar at Aragorn's coronation and in the Gondorians' Standing Silence ceremony have also been removed. The movies include two funerals, namely Boromir's (*FR* 45) and Théodred's (*TT* 21), the latter representing an addition to the book. Only in this scene do we have a clearly religious ceremony: clad in black, Éowyn sings a hymn in the language of Rohan (no English subtitles are provided). Even this scene, however, includes no references to divine beings. As mentioned above, Arwen's prayer at the ford similarly has no clear divine addressee.

This brings us to the motifs cluster of cosmology, eschatology, and afterlife. The movies provide some information about Middle-earth's historical past, but they do not trace it as far back as the book. In the movies, we hear of Sauron's defeat in the Ring War that ended the Second Age, but we learn nothing about the Númenórean revolt and the

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[414] It is unclear whether the expression 'the will of evil' refers to a more abstract or supreme (yet personified) evil power than that of Sauron. There is one other reference in the movies to the 'will of evil' (*TT* 5).

[415] Gandalf states that Bilbo "was meant to find the Ring" (*FR* 34) and considers it "more than mere chance" that Merry and Pippin were "brought" to Fangorn where they could enlist the help of the Ents (*TT* 15).

change this brought about in the cosmology of the world (the destruction of Númenor and the bending of the Sea; during the Second Age), nor about the events and wars of the First Age.[416] The movies include a new cosmological motif, however, namely that the world is structured by correspondences: upon seeing a red sun rising, Legolas can deduce that blood has been spilled (*TT* 11).

The book's vague references to world rebirth have not survived into the movies, but individual eschatology is often thematised. It is clear, for example, that the people of Rohan (and perhaps all humans) expect to be re-united with their ancestors in an afterlife (*RK* 54), and Gandalf endorses this belief when he tells Théoden that the spirit of his dead son Théodred "will find its way to the Halls of your Fathers" (*TT* 22). During the assault on Minas Tirith, Gandalf similarly comforts the frightened Pippin, asserting that there is life after death. According to Gandalf, "death is just another path, one that we all must take. The grey rain curtain of this world rolls back and all turns to silver glass. And then you see it. […] White shores, and beyond. A far green country under a swift sunrise" (*RK* 49).[417] Having tried to die, Gandalf speaks with some authority on this matter, and it is beyond doubt that afterlife is real within the fictional universe.[418] Elven afterlife is never thematised explicitly. They seem immortal though we understand that they will die if they do not sail to the Undying Lands. Because of love for Aragorn, Arwen chooses to stay in Middle-earth and thus gives up her immortality (*FR* 26, 41; *TT* 38; *RK* 10, 30). A viewer who knows only the movies might deduce that all Elves have this option; it takes familiarity with *S* to know that Arwen, being one of the Half-Elven, must (and can) choose between the human and the Elven doom (cf. section 9.1.6).

The changes in *LR*'s repertoire of religious affordances from book to movies can be summed up in two main points. These can in turn be developed into two hypotheses about movies-based religion. First, the references to Elbereth and to the ritual calendar of the Elves – together with almost all references to the Valar – have been cut out. In short, the narrative religion of the Elves and of the Gondorians is gone. What remains is the belief

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[416] The name Númenor occurs only once in the movie, in a conversation between Elrond and Gandalf (*FR* 24). The viewer can deduce from this scene that Aragorn is of Númenórean descent, but he learns nothing of Númenor's place in the history of Middle-earth.

[417] What Gandalf here describes is the vision of Aman which Frodo has a number of times in the book (*LR* 135, 1303; cf. section 7.1.4).

[418] A viewer who is familiar with the appendices of *LR* will feel a tension between what Gandalf explains to Pippin (an afterlife in Aman within the Created World) and what we see Gandalf experience himself (returning to the One outside of the Created World). In the light of *S*, this tension is dissolved, however, for in *S* we learn that the spirits of Men (and, we must presume, Hobbits as well) are collected in the Hall of Mandos in the Blessed Realm where they linger until the end of the world when they go to be with the One. Probably, a viewer who knows only the movies will not notice any tension between Gandalf's promise and his own experience. In any case the tension between the two afterlife visions does not disqualify the main eschatological point of the movies, namely that afterlife is real.

in a Supreme Being and in an afterlife. Both the Supreme Being and the promised afterlife are self-evidently real within the narrative world, but we learn no details about either phenomenon. There is no ritual communication with divine powers outside Middle-earth. With the One and the Valar receding into anonymity, Gandalf and the Elves, especially those Elves who wield magic (i.e., Galadriel, Elrond, and Arwen), become the only figures who can occupy the role as superhuman others from the perspective of the viewer. In earlier chapters we have seen that *LR*-inspired religion either focused on the Elves as a class of beings (ch. 8), on Elbereth as a single goddess (section 11.1), or considered the authoritative characters of the story to be representations of the divine (section 13.2). With Elbereth gone, we can assume that the movies would lead to a renewed interest in Elves in general,[419] and we can hypothesise that insofar as movie-based Tolkien religion includes rituals, these will be directed at the main authoritative characters.

The second major change is that the movies do not thematise their own veracity as history such as the book did. The idea that *H* and *LR* were authored by Bilbo and Frodo is preserved, but there is no longer a human narrator/compiler who claims to simply publish these manuscripts after they have come into his possession in the present day. The motif of 'true tales' has also disappeared. This means that Middle-earth is no longer presented as our world in prehistory, but as a fully independent fictional world. We can hypothesise, that religion based on the movies will consequently refrain from harmonising the movie narrative with mytho-history from other religious traditions. From the religious affordances offered by the movies, we must expect the narrative world to be approached either in the mytho-cosmological mode (as a spiritual world existing in another dimension) or in the mythopoeic mode (taking elements of the narrative world to represent archetypal forces).

14.2. Middle-earth Paganism

As pointed out in section 8.3.1 above, the Neo-Pagan movement transformed profoundly during the 1990s and early 2000s, experiencing explosive growth and increased individualisation. The movement at least quadrupled its membership, and among self-identified Pagans in the 21st century, almost 75% are solitaire practitioners. As the name says, the solitaires practise alone and for the most part have not been formally initiated. They are nevertheless embedded within a larger social Pagan milieu through family and friends who are also Pagans, through participation in fairs and festivals, and through membership of online communities. Most Pagans, and especially the solitaires, do not draw sharp lines between authentic and inauthentic Paganism, but are open to the use of many different sources of inspiration, including fictional sources. Both solitaires who de-

[419] We already know that this was indeed the case, cf. section 11.2.4 above.

velop their own 'path' and Pagan groups that develop their own 'tradition' tend to integrate various mythological and fictional materials into a frame of Wiccan duotheism and ritual practice (circle-casting; Wheel of the Year). Seen against this background, it is not surprising that some solitaire Pagans responded to the movie trilogy by developing Middle-earth Paganism, i.e. a form of Paganism combining Wicca with Tolkien's mythology.[420]

14.2.1. A Convergence of Movie Fandom and Eclectic Wicca: The Case of Middle-Earth Pagans

The Internet group Middle-Earth Pagans was founded by Laurasia Sluyswachter in March 2004 as a place where solitaire, eclectic Pagans could share experiences with integrating Tolkien's works into their spiritual paths. The group started as a newsgroup on Yahoo!, but finding the newsgroup format too restrictive, Laurasia supplemented it with a ProBoard discussion forum in February 2005.[421]

Like Laurasia herself, most of the members of the group had first encountered *LR* in Jackson's film adaptation. Though some of them had gone on to read both *LR* and *S*, the movies remained their main frame of reference. When I talked to Laurasia in 2009, she told me that most of the 78 members were also active on online fan forums dedicated to the movies (241109), thus implying that Middle-earth Paganism can be seen as a convergence of *LR*-fandom and Wicca.[422] That is to say, some of those who were both Ringers and Pagans went on to fuse these two engagements into a Tolkien-based spiritual path. This has not stopped them, however, from continuing to engage also in standard fan activities (i.e. approaching *LR* playfully as a fictional text; adoring the actors of the movies) and in standard Pagan activities (e.g. doing rituals with non-Tolkien deities).

Middle-earth Pagans communicate with some of Tolkien's characters in Wiccan-inspired ritual and develop ideas about the reality of his narrative world. This they share with other Tolkien-based Pagans (cf. chs. 10 and 11). Middle-earth Paganism differs from

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[420] Middle-earth Paganism should not be confused with Anglo-Saxon Paganism, a branch of the modern Pagan movement which seeks to reconstruct the pre-Christian pagan religion of England. Proponents of Anglo-Saxon Paganism are fond of pointing out that Tolkien's narratives include many loans from Anglo-Saxon mythology, most importantly the very term 'Middle-earth'. Brian Bates' and Aleric Albertsson's introductions to Anglo-Saxon Paganism, *The Real Middle Earth* (Bates 2002) and *Travels Through Middle Earth* (Albertsson 2009), are both marketed as gateways to the real religion that Tolkien's fiction only indirectly describes.

[421] The homepage of Middle-Earth Pagans is hosted at http://middleearthpagans.bravehost.com [021013]. The Yahoo! Group can be joined from http://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/Middle-Earth_Pagans/info [201013]. The group's forum is located at http://mepagans.proboards.com/ [021013]. To access the forum, one must make an account, but this is a purely technical requirement. New members gain access immediately and do not need to be authorised first by a moderator.

[422] In this respect, Middle-earth Paganism is a parallel to Jediism which can be seen as a convergence of *Star Wars* fandom and New Age (Davidsen 2011a).

these earlier forms of Tolkien-integrating Paganism, however, in its reliance on Jackson's movies, a reliance that translates into a different Tolkien pantheon and other ways of constructing the reality of Tolkien's world than Pagans drawing mainly on the book version of *LR* or on *S*.

None of the members in Middle-Earth Pagans work rituals with Eru or with the Valar, i.e. with those beings who are actually divine within the narrative world.[423] Instead, members have worked with Elves, Hobbits, and even human characters from the movies. Laurasia told me that

> some [members] connect most easily with the Divine via the world of Tolkien's Elves, Hobbits, Gondorians etc. That being the case, they often decorate their altars/sacred spaces accordingly. [...] I have used a Middle-earth pantheon at times (with lady Galadriel representing the Goddess and Mithrandir [Gandalf] as the God) (201109).

While focusing primarily on Galadriel and Gandalf, Laurasia has developed a larger 'Middle-Earth pantheon', complete with descriptions of each character's powers and functions (so one knows when to call upon them) and their corresponding elements and colours (to aid the development of personal rituals). Lord Legolas, for example, represents true friendship and courage, his elements are air and earth, and his colours are green and brown. Laurasia's Middle-Earth Pantheon includes two humans (Lord Boromir, Lord Aragorn), six Elves (Lord Legolas, Lord Haldir, Lady Galadriel, Lord Elrond, Lord Celeborn, and Lady Arwen), and the Wizard Gandalf. This list was not meant to be exclusive and other members have added Frodo Baggins and Tom Bombadil.[424]

We see here that even a fictional narrative without deities, i.e. one with fantastic elements but no narrative religion, can still be used as an authoritative, religious text. In such a case, the main characters can take on the function of supernatural communicative partners. As far as characters such as Gandalf and Galadriel goes this is not too surprising, for while these characters are not divine within the narrative world, they are still clearly superhuman. It is more unexpected that Middle-earth Pagans also give humans and Hobbits out of a fictional narrative the role of divine powers in their rituals. How can that be? Laurasia explained to me that the use of Frodo, Legolas, or indeed any *LR* character in ritual required no particular justification. That was so because "the faces of the Divine are infinite and, therefore, people can connect to it via whatever means is the most comfortable for them" (Laurasia 201109). In other words, Laurasia and her compatriots rationalise their ritual invocation of Tolkien characters by the ontology assessment that I have called theistic transformation. That is to say, in the ritual setting

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[423] There have been some discussions of working with the Valar on the Middle-Earth Pagans forum, but these discussions were initiated by people who primarily were active in other groups, such as Tië eldaliéva, and they did not change the ritual orientation of the group's core members.

[424] While ritual work with *LR* characters was the focus of Middle-Earth Pagans, some members also occasionnally worked with the Valar, especially Manwë, Varda, and Yavanna.

itself, characters from Tolkien's narrative world are called upon as if they were discrete, spiritual beings; outside of the ritual setting the same practice is rationalised as being actually ritual communication with the God or the Goddess *through* the medium of a god image which in this particular case happens to be a *LR* character. In chapter 5, I referred to this particular form of theistic transformation, in which an infinite number of gods is re-interpreted as expressions of merely two 'real' gods, as avataric duotheism. In addition, Laurasia's mention of a singular Divine power demonstrates that at least she (and perhaps other members as well) occasionally makes also the God and the Goddess subject of ontology assessment, reducing them to two complementary aspects of a single, non-personal power (avataric dynamism). These two transformative assessments of the true nature of the gods exist in tension, however, with a straightforward and literal affirmative assessment of their ontological status. Laurasia, for example, both reduces Gandalf to a personification of the masculine aspect of an impersonal divine force, and addresses him as a discrete being. Indeed, she told me that "[...] Mithrandir is my spirit guide in this incarnation, so I work with him quite often" (241109). This unresolved tension between literal affirmation and theistic/dynamistic transformation is by no means unique to Middle-earth Paganism, of course, but entirely typical for Neo-Paganism.

The members of Middle-Earth Pagans have developed different claims about the reality of Tolkien's narrative world. All of these are cosmological in character and hence fit the notion that the *LR* characters are discrete beings, while clashing with the notion that the *LR* characters are metaphorical expressions of the God and the Goddess – a view which in itself manifests a mythopoeic reading of Tolkien's narratives. Recalling discussions with other group members, Laurasia told me that

> some of the members felt that Middle-earth was within a different dimension. [...] Some of them felt that they could re-connect with the dimension that Middle-earth resides in via visiting the astral realm. Much like some Pagans do in order to visit the Summerlands or Faery realms (241009).

Laurasia herself believes that Middle-earth "was one of our own world's former incarnations" (201109).[425] This unusual interpretation shares characteristics both with a typical mytho-historical reading (Middle-earth is situated in the past) and with a typical mytho-cosmological reading (Middle-earth is constituted as a world different from our actual, physical world). Her reading must ultimately be classified as a sub-type of the mytho-cosmological rather than the mytho-historical, however, since she does not claim that the events in the Middle-earth world have left any trace in our own, present world. Both Laurasia and her fellow Middle-earth Pagans consider Middle-earth to be a world diffe-

[425] Laurasia explained this view as a Hinduism-inspired interpretation. She could have supported this view with a reference to the motif of world rebirth in Tolkien's literary mythology (*LR* 981; *S* 4; *LT I* 53, 59; cf. sections 7.2.3, 9.1.6, and 15.2.4).

rent and distanced from ours, and it matters little whether the distance between the world is conceptualised in temporal (Laurasia) or spatial terms (the standard view). Neither Laurasia, nor any other Middle-earth Pagan, claims that Tolkien's Middle-earth reflects the historical past of our own world, though they are aware that other Tolkien religionists hold such a view. It is significant that Middle-earth Pagans hold a non-historical belief in the reality of Middle-earth, as this was what would be expected in movie-based Tolkien religion given the movies' religious affordances.

The quote above reveals more than inspiration from the movies, however. It demonstrates that Middle-earth Pagans share the core belief that 'Middle-earth and its inhabitants are real', and that they have developed a range of rationalisations to support this core belief.[426] The core belief is expressed both explicitly (in discourse) and implicitly (in ritual). The reality of Middle-earth is subsequently affirmed, but in mutually exclusive ways (Middle-earth is a place on the astral plane or a previous incarnation of our present world). The reality of Tolkien's characters is also affirmed in mutually contradictory ways, with Gandalf, for example, as both a discrete being and a mere image of the God. In Laurasia's case, her rationalisations of the Middle-earth world and of its supernatural inhabitants also seem incompatible: Middle-earth is said to be our world's previous incarnation and thus not to exist anymore, but some of its spiritual inhabitants are still considered to be around. It is clear that Middle-earth Pagans have developed a repertoire of rationalisations that are not logically compatible with each other. That is not a problem, however, *for the rationalisations are not judged on their truth*. Their real function is to support and justify something much more central, namely the ritual work with the characters from *LR* which constitutes the elemental religious practice in Middle-earth Paganism. It is furthermore telling that Laurasia said that members "felt" in a certain way about the metaphysical reality of Middle-earth and did not use cognitive verbs like 'believed', 'knew' or 'argued'. Middle-earth Pagans refer to their subjective experience, both when they use past-life experiences and trance visions to prove the reality of Middle-earth (legitimisation), and when they bracket the question of ontology so that true spirituality becomes a question purely of what feels right (relativisation).

14.2.2. The Social Organisation of Middle-Earth Paganism: Reflections on the Fast Collapse of Middle-Earth Pagans

After two relatively active years as a Yahoo! Group (2004) and a ProBoard forum (2005), activity in Middle-Earth Pagans began to dwindle. By 2007 the group had practically imploded. The forum is still online at the moment of writing (late 2013), but there has been very little activity the last six years. I think there are two related reasons for that.

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[426] This is parallel to the relation between core beliefs and rationalisations in the Elven movement considered in section 11.3 above.

First, the group was quite unfocused. From the beginning, forum discussions were not restricted to Middle-earth Paganism, but included also, among many other things, past lives and near-death experiences, UFOs and spells, and such everyday topics as one's favourite actors. Members also posted poems and participated in a Harry Potter role-playing game. Of particular note, an entire part of the forum was devoted to "The Vampiric Condition". This was because Laurasia, the main moderator, was a self-identified psychic vampire (besides being a reincarnated elf), and Brandybuck, her right-hand co-moderator, was a self-identified psychic donor. Also other members identified as Vampires. In other words, the "strain to variety" which according to Colin Campbell (1972, 128) causes many cults to lose focus and collapse characterised Middle-Earth Pagans from the beginning. Members of other online groups within the spiritual Tolkien milieu have told me that they did not feel at home in Middle-Earth Pagans precisely for this reason.

Second, the members' integration of Tolkien's literary mythology with Paganism was uncoordinated. Middle-Earth Pagans never attempted a collective ritual online. Members exchanged beliefs about the reality of Middle-earth, experiences of past lives in Middle-earth, ideas on how to do Middle-earth rituals, and so on, but there was no attempt to synthesise this information into a coherent whole. In this way, Middle-Earth Pagans stands in sharp contrast to the Tribunal of the Sidhe. While both groups can be characterised as Tolkien-integrating in so far as they both integrate Tolkien elements into a Wiccan frame, they differ greatly in ambition and degree of systematisation. The Tribunal of the Sidhe draws on *LR* and *S* and other sources to construct its own stable and self-sufficient tradition, a religious *synthesis*. It may or may not have been Laurasia's original intention to construct a synthetic tradition, but that was not the course Middle-Earth Pagans actually took.[427] Tradition-building never became a collective project in the group. When I talked to Laurasia in 2009, she even told me that her patron god and goddess at the moment were Jesus Christ and Kali – though she also stressed that this did not prevent her from working with *LR* characters such as Galadriel if that felt more appropriate for a particular problem. In other words, for Laurasia and other members of her group, Middle-earth Paganism was not an independent tradition to which they belonged, but rather one element among others which they tried out – and offered other eclectic Wiccans to try out – in combination with other things. Like the Tribunal, Middle-

[427] One possible indication that Laurasia hoped to create a Tolkien-based tradition is her construction of a ritual calendar based on *LR* (the book). This calendar, which was intended to be combined with the Wiccan Wheel of the Year, included the celebration of the following days: January 3rd: Tolkien's Birthday; March 1st: Aragorn's Birthday; March 25th: The Destruction of the Ring; May 1st: Aragorn's coronation; July 4th: Boromir's journey begins; September 22nd: Frodo and Bilbo Baggins' Birthdays (Ring-day); September 23rd: Frodo's journey begins; October 6th: Frodo wounded; October 24th: Frodo recovers. Laurasia said that she considered these days to be "days of power", so that the day of Frodo's recovery would be a good day to do spell-work for healing, for example, and July 4th would be a good day to begin a new endeavour (161209). Laurasia did not observe all these days, however, and neither did other members of Middle-Earth Pagans.

Earth Pagans integrated Tolkien's mythology into a Wiccan frame, but the Tolkien elements remained optional and exchangeable add-ons. The result was an unstable and ultimately temporary *mixture*, rather than a stable and durable synthesis.

Middle-Earth Pagans were not successful as a group, but that does not mean that the phenomenon of Middle-earth Paganism is insignificant. The group's failure shows only the obvious: A group that urges its members to find their own way and lacks the ambition of building a collective identity and a shared tradition, is destined to collapse rapidly. Or, as Colin Campbell puts it, a cult which does not begin to transform into a sect by codifying its teachings and establishing formal membership and leadership institutions, will soon collapse into the cultic milieu from which it emerged (1972, 128). The members of the disintegrating cult, *in casu* Middle-Earth Pagans, fall back into the cultic pool of individual seekers, but that does not mean that they give up the beliefs and practices around which the cult revolved. Furthermore, it is quite probable that many Pagan individuals and offline groups have dappled in Middle-earth Paganism and worked rituals with Gandalf, Galadriel, and other characters, and that the size of Middle-earth Paganism is/was much larger than what happened in the group Middle-Earth Pagans. I think so especially because I have encountered Middle-earth Pagans working movie-inspired rituals in online groups other than Middle-earth Pagans, especially in Elven groups. Furthermore, many of those who used to be active in Middle-earth Pagans and similar groups have now moved on to more individualised social sites, such as LiveJournal, Tumblr, and Facebook, were they continue to identify (at least in part) as Middle-earth Pagans. It is also very possible that Pagans have done movie-inspired rituals focused on the *LR* characters in an offline without leaving any trace of that online. One might guess so much given that (a) we now that many Pagans work with fictional characters (as noted in the introduction to section 14.2), given (b) that Donaldson's *LR* Tarot deck (cf. ch. 13.2 above) provides some guidelines for doing such rituals, and given (c) that Pagans did such rituals in the 1970s inspired by the books (cf. section 8.4). This is of course just conjecture. To find out for certain whether Pagans outside explicitly Tolkien-focused groups have done Middle-earth pagan rituals it would be necessary to ask pagans about these matters in a future survey.

14.3. Tolkienesque Elven Groups

Roughly simultaneously with Middle-Earth Pagans, three other groups were founded which in different ways combined a movie-generated fascination with Middle-earth with a fascination and/or identification with elves. Two of these groups, Elende and Children of the Varda, emerged on Yahoo! Groups in 2003, already before the premiere of *RK*. Indigo Elves (or Indigo Crystals) was founded as a ProBoard discussion forum in 2005, but the group's initiator, Ravenwolf Neurion, had run the Christian-shamanic-Elven

group Elfinzone (Ravenwolf's Circle) since 2004.[428] The Elven focus of these groups is visible in the group's names. Elendë, which is properly written with a diaeresis, is a Sindarin term for Eldamar (or Elvenhome), the home of the Elves in the Blessed Realm. The name Children of the Varda refers to the Valië Varda, whose Sindarin name is Elbereth, Star-queen. The Children of the Star-queen are, of course, the Elves.[429]

14.3.1. Children of the Varda

The Yahoo! Group Children of the Varda was founded on 23 September 2003 as a group for (Pagan) Elves and Middle-earth Pagans.[430] The official group description reads:

> THIS IS NOT AN RP [role playing] GROUP!
> This is a haven for those who are Elven, or half-elven, or elves reincarnated...
> We also cater to Middle-Earth Pagans & those who are curious about these subjects.
> We will discuss elvish language, and the elvish culture. LOTR is a major topic, and most of the ideas come from there...
> NO SEXUALLY EXPLICIT STUFF. NO RPGing, and NOOOO FLAMERS!
> So, elves ((especially elves who are Pagan or Wiccan!!)) please join!

Initially, the group attracted self-identified Elves and Pagans interested in exploring Tolkien's mythology. The typical joiner was a Pagan aged 15 to 25 who, inspired by the movies, had already experimented using Arwen, Aragorn, and even such characters as Éowyn as deities. Also a few Christians found their way to the group. The Christian members emphasised that Tolkien was himself a Christian and that his narratives (and Jackson's movies) should be seen in that light. They had joined the group and could be accommodated within it, however, because they were both Tolkien fans and Elf-believers. Indeed, all members of Children of the Varda believed in Elves; many also believed to be Elves themselves, and some combined the claim to Elvishness with other Otherkin claims. The first member to join the group, Usyrna Era'tarien, for example identified as a Wood Elven Were-Panther.

Laurasia of Middle-Earth Pagans also joined. She was soon made moderator and became the *de facto* leader of the group already in early 2004, i.e. at the same time as she launched Middle-Earth Pagans.[431] Since the two groups' membership differed, however, so did the character of the two groups' discussions. In Children of the Varda, Elven topics were most prominent. During 2004, members reported on their memories of past Elven lives, discussed Elven music, and so on. These discussions were often, though not

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[428] Elfinzone can be joined here: http://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/elfinzone/info [121013].

[429] Possibly the name for this group is inspired by the Elf Queen's Daughters.

[430] The group can be joined at http://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/ Children_of_the_Varda/info [121003].

[431] The founder of Children of the Varda, Helen [pseu.], was just 15 years old. She did not do much to moderate the group and happily welcomed Laurasia as moderator.

always, linked to Middle-earth, so that people would claim, for instance, to have lived before in Tolkien's Middle-earth (either on the astral plane or in prehistory). Integrating claims of Elvishness into a Tolkienesque frame was not only tolerated, but actively encouraged, and in this respect Children of the Varda differed from the mainstream Elven groups discussed in chapter 11.

Posts in the group rarely moved beyond the level of welcoming new members, reporting the odd dream, and wishing each other happy Beltane. From time to time informal questionnaires circulated, including questions about the members' Elven nature (i.e. on being an Elf in this life, in past lives, having physical Elven features) and on their relation to *LR* (i.e. which characters they used in ritual, who their favourite actors were). Members readily filled in these questionnaires, but no deeper discussions followed from this. As a result, Children of the Varda began to disintegrate after a few years just like Middle-Earth Pagans. Pagan members lost interest in Tolkien or pursued their interests elsewhere; Tolkien-inspired Elves put their energy into more focused and better moderated groups. Children of the Varda came to suffer heavily from the "strain to variety", as posts increasingly came to concern all kinds of cultic issues such as spells, tarot, crystals, herbs, horoscopes, reiki healing, sunken Egyptian cities, goddess meditations, guardian angels, karma, the Mayan calendar, iridology, and so on. When discussions occasionally became focused on a Tolkien topic, they were typically led by members who primarily were active in other groups (besides Middle-Earth Pagans also Indigo Elves and Tië eldaliéva) and reported their views in Children of the Varda in the hope of recruiting new members for their own primary groups. Since 2006 there has hardly been any activity in the group at all.

14.3.2. Elende

The Yahoo! Group Elende was founded on 5 January 2003, originally under the name Quest for Middle-earth and the Elves. Dana's introduction text for the group goes (in part):

> I am starting this group, for everyone who believes that Middle Earth was indeed a real place and that the Elves are real. This is not intended to be a place to worship Orlando Bloom but a place for those who truly believe that the Elves like Legolas still exist. […] My dream is to begin a quest for Middle Earth and the Elves...would you like to join me? All discussions concerning this are welcome as well as any research on the subject. Remember, All roads lead to Elfin.[432]

Like Middle-Earth Pagans and Children of the Varda, the basic premises of Elende were that the Elves are real and that Middle-earth is a real place. Contrary to the two other groups, however, religious rituals directed at *LR* characters played no role, and only a

[432] Elende can be joined here: http://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/Elende/info [121013].

minority of the members believed to be Elves themselves. Since most members identified simply as humans, the Elven focus of the group was expressed in discussions of people's encounters and experiences with elves. Most members saw elves in the forest and in their gardens, but there were also more colourful reports. One female member claimed, for example, that an Elf had made her pregnant, and that her daughter thus was a half-Elf. Even though her daughter looked human (no pointy ears), the mother took her child's high intelligence and her anxious attachment to the human who was believed to be her father as proof of real Elven parentage.

Belief in the reality of Middle-earth remained less articulated in group discussions. Members generally did not believe that Tolkien had recorded actual history, nor that Middle-earth existed in another dimension exactly as he had described it. Instead, members read Tolkien's books and Jackson's movies in the binocular mode. They speculated that Tolkien might have found a doorway into another world inhabited by elves or considered it likely that he had known about the existence of real elves in our physical world. Either way, encounters with real elves should have inspired Tolkien's fiction. Put differently, in Elende Tolkien's works and Jackson's movies served mainly as sources of legitimisation for a more fundamental belief in the reality of elves.

Most of the original members were fans of the movies who wanted to believe in elves. They wanted to go on a 'quest for Middle-earth and the Elves', but after having collectively stressed this intention and worked out a way of seeing Tolkien's literary mythology as indirect proof of the existence of real elves, there was not much left to talk about. No attempts were made to structure the quest for the elves, either through study of elves in mythology or through ritual communication with elves. Following Campbell's prediction, the failure to evolve in the direction of a sect spelled the doom for Elende as a group. Activity in the group declined quickly, and since 2004 the group has been close to inactive most of the time. It continued to attract new members, however, and every two years or so these new members return to discuss the topics of Middle-earth and the reality of elves. Increasingly, these discussions became dominated by Ravenwolf (here using the alias elfinzone), a particularly interesting figure who combines Biblical literalism with belief in both the historicity of Tolkien's narratives and in the reality of physical and spiritual elves. Ravenwolf has been a more or less active member in almost all online groups that I have analysed, but has invested most time in his own group, the Indigo Elves, to which we now turn.

14.3.3. Indigo Elves

Indigo Elves (or Indigo Crystals) is a ProBoard-based discussion forum which has been active since February 2005.[433] The group is a meeting place for people who believe to be incarnated or physical Elves, and discussions focus on the nature of the Elves and their

[433] Indigo Crystals can be joined from here: http://indigocrystals.proboards.com/ [151013].

current awakening and return. Tolkien's literary mythology is an important source of legitimisation for many members, but contrary to the other groups discussed in this chapter, the Indigo Elves draw mostly on *S*. I cannot say whether Jackson's movies played a role in the awakening of some of the members, but it is clear that the group offers a safe haven for self-identified Elves who consider Tolkien's narratives important and legitimate and who risk being ridiculed for their reliance on them in more mainstream Elven groups (cf. section 11.2.4 above).

The Indigo Elves use Tolkien's literary mythology, but they do so selectively. Like in most Elven groups, Valar rituals play no role in Indigo Elves. In several posts group leader Ravenwolf actively discourages Valar-directed rituals, stressing that Tolkien considered the Valar to be angels, not gods to be worshipped. Ravenwolf equates Eru with the Christian God, but that is of little relevance to the group's discussions which focus on the nature of the Elves and leave it to the individual members to follow whatever deities they want. More than other Elven groups, the Indigos draw strongly on Laurence Gardner and Nicholas de Vere (cf. ch. 12), and a red thread in the group's discussions is the attempt to harmonise grail lore, Biblical narratives, the Atlantis myth, and Tolkien's literary mythology. This goes together with an unusually strong focus on Elven descent (as opposed to Elven incarnation) compared to contemporary Elven and Otherkin groups in general. In one post, Ravenwolf very clearly sums up the mytho-historical take on *S* that he made the foundation of Indigo Elves:

> Here's what I honestly believe. Middle-earth and the core elements of Tolkien's Legendarium happened in real time on this physical world. After the flood (Days of Noah in the Bible, fall of Atlantis or fall of Númenor – all the same) there was period of several centuries when Elves and magic still remained strong. Eventually Elves "faded" – whether we view this as "sailing west," entering Valinor the "hidden" realm, or the European mythology that says the Fae went "underground." At that point we had the full blood and half elves (Like Elrond) who entered hidden realms (but still connected to this Earth and interacting with her and her inhabitants.) We also have living people who existed through the ages right down to this present day who are of part Elf blood from people like Arwen and Aragorn's descendants and other part elves. Granted, these have the fate of mortal men (in that they die a physical death), but are still of part Elven blood.[434]

In a later post he added: "Tolkien knew he was on to something […] I do know he was aware of the fact he was writing a historical mythology. I wonder if he knew completely he had given the world its true history?"[435]

Besides Elvishness and Tolkien, other topics in the group's discussions include dream visions, alien encounters, herbal medicine, Native American meditations, and

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[434] This was posted 9 October 2005 in the Children of the Varda newsgroup around the time that Ravenwolf launched Indigo Elves. Spelling mistakes have been corrected.

[435] This was posted 19 February 2010 in the Elende newsgroup.

alternative Christianity. Most importantly, members believe to be Indigo Adults, and either equate this category with Elves, or consider the Elves to be a sub-type of Indigos.

The notion of Indigo individuals goes back to Lee Carroll and Jan Tobin's book *The Indigo Children* (1999). Carroll and Tobin describe Indigo children as being more sensitive and more spiritually developed than other children, a 'fact' demonstrated by their purple auras and which results from them being extra-terrestrial spirits incarnated in human bodies. Doreen Virtue (2003) refers to the same people as "Crystal Children", and Wendy Chapman has reasoned that also adults can be Indigos. According to Chapman, Indigo adults are typically individualistic, creative, spiritual, sensitive, and expressive. They also have psychological traits that position them somewhere on the autism spectrum.[436] The self-identification as Indigos functions as a positive identity challenging the negative stamp of a psychiatric diagnosis or deviant personality (cf. Waltz 2009; Whedon 2009: Kline 2013). The Indigo Elves/Crystals merge the notion of Indigo adults with the idea that Elves can be reincarnated and come from the stars (cf. section 11.3.1). They refer to themselves interchangeably as Indigos, Crystals, and Elves. For some members, the Indigo theory serves as a scientific justification (for it is propagated by New Age psychiatrists) for a more primary Elven identity. Other members see themselves primarily as Indigos and consider Tolkien's narratives and earlier times' myths about Elves and Changelings to refer metaphorically to the real phenomenon of Indigos.

14.4. Movie-Based Tolkien Religion: A Summary

Let me briefly sum up the findings of this chapter. We have seen that the changes to the storyline in Jackson's movie trilogy had an impact on the repertoire of religious affordances of *LR*. The films kept its fantastic elements concerning race, magic, and intuition, but strongly reduced the otherworldly character of the Elven dwellings. The Elven narrative religion centring on Elbereth was lost, together with almost all references to the Valar and the One. Furthermore, the movie narrative no longer thematises itself as history. Given these religious affordances, I hypothesised that religion based on the movies would treat Middle-earth as such (rather than the Elven dwellings) as an Otherworld, and that rituals in movies-based Tolkien religion would focus on the main authoritative figures (such as Gandalf and Galadriel). These characters may not be divine, but they are still extraordinary and superhuman within the fictional universe.

Both predictions have held up quite well. The members of Middle-Earth Pagans and the Middle-earth Pagan members of Children of the Varda considered Tolkien's Middle-earth to be a real place, but not historically so. They typically took Middle-earth to be a place in another dimension or on another plane, and Laurasia, who was the only

[436] The Indigo Elves refer to Chapman and argue that they are Indigo adults. Visit Chapman's homepage at http://www.metagifted.org/topics/metagifted/indigo/adultIndigos/areYouAnAdultIndigo.html [151013].

one to link Middle-earth in time to our present world, considered Middle-earth to be a prior incarnation of our world rather than a representation of its historical past. In other words, they approached Tolkien's narrative world in a mytho-cosmological rather than a mytho-historical way.

Furthermore, Middle-earth Pagans used Gandalf and the major Elven characters (Galadriel, Elrond, and Arwen) in their rituals just as I had expected. It was a surprise, however, to see that they also used figures such as Boromir, Legolas, Éowyn, and Frodo. In section 14.2.1 above, I mentioned that Laurasia rationalised the use of such characters by stating that all kinds of mythological and fictional characters can be used as images of the God and the Goddess, but I think that there is more at stake. It is the construction of Middle-earth as an independent, spiritual world – itself afforded by the movies – that allows Middle-earth Pagans to treat all characters, also those who are not superhuman within the narrative world, as superhuman, spiritual beings from the perspective of our world.

Contrary to Middle-Earth Pagans and Children of the Varda, the religious practice and discourse of Elende and Indigo Elves did not fit the predicted pattern for movies-based Tolkien religion. There are good reasons for this, however. To begin with, Elende is simply not a Tolkien-religious group. Members do not religionise Tolkien's narrative world in ritual practice, nor do they consider his narratives (or Jackson's movies) to be directly referential. On the contrary, Elende is a group centred on the belief in the reality of elves. Tolkien's works are read in the binocular mode and serve a role only to legitimise more general Elf beliefs. Indigo Elves does not fit the pattern for movie-based Tolkien religion because the movies are not the group's main Tolkien reference text. *S* is. As a consequence, the Indigos read Tolkien's literary mythology as more or less historically true just as all other *S*-based Tolkien groups do.

Interestingly, both Elende and Indigo Elves have many Christian members while both Middle-Earth Pagans and Children of the Varda do not. This cements the argument developed in section 13.3, that Christianity is difficult to reconcile with Tolkien-based religious practice. Elende and Indigo Elves can accommodate Christians because neither group engages in Tolkien-based rituals. Instead they use Tolkien's narratives merely to legitimise essentially non-Tolkienesque beliefs and practices, namely fairy spirituality and/or Elven self-identification. It seems that a belief in elves can be combined with Christianity, while rituals directed at a pagan pantheon cannot. An overview of the main findings of this chapter is offered in table 14.1 below.

Table 14.1. Overview of Tolkien Religion after the Movies									
	Use of the Movie Trilogy's Religious Affordances (cf. hypotheses)		**Elves**	**Religious Blending**		**Reading Modes**		**Legitimisation**	
	Reality of Middle-earth /Rationalisation	**Rituals with *LR* characters /Rationalisation**	**Elven identification /Rationalisation**	**Framing /Domains**	**Type**	**Myth**	**TLM**	**Of TLM**	**With Tolkien**
Middle-Earth Pagans	Yes /M-e = another spiritual world	Yes /Literal affirmation; Theistic transformation	No	T-integrating / R, D	Mixture	M-C	MP M-C	?	?
Children of the Varda	Yes /M-e = another spiritual world	Yes /Literal affirmation; Theistic transformation	Yes: Elven identity /Literal aff. (spiritual)	T-integrating /I, R, D	Mixture	M-C	M-C MP	?	?
Elende	No	No	No: fascination with elves; elves are real /Literal aff. (spiritual)	T-inspired	-	M-C	B (M-C)	-	Tolkien had encounters with elves
Indigo Elves (*S* main text)	Yes /M-e = our physical world	No	Yes: Elven identity /Literal aff. (genetic, spiritual)	T-integrating /I, D	Synthesis	M-H E	M-H B	-	Tolkien as scholar and historian

TLM = Tolkien's literary mythology; M-e = Middle-earth; T-integrating/inspired = Tolkien-integrating/inspired religion; I/R/D domains = identity, rituals, doctrines; M-H/M-C/B/E reading modes = mytho-historical, mytho-cosmological, binocular, euhemeristic modes (cf. section 5.2.2).

Chapter 15. The Religious Affordances of *The History of Middle-Earth* and of Tolkien's Letters and Essays

As noted earlier, there are two main forms of second wave Tolkien religion: Middle-earth Paganism and Legendarium Reconstructionism. Middle-earth Paganism, which draws primarily on Jackson's movies, was treated in the previous chapter. Legendarium Reconstructionism still has to be treated in depth.

Before we can on move to a discussion of Legendarium Reconstructionism, however, it is necessary to analyse the religious affordances of those texts upon which Legendarium Reconstructionists base themselves. This is quite a task in itself, for a defining characteristic of Legendarium Reconstructionism is that it draws on all of Tolkien's narratives as well as on his letters and other texts in which he reflects on his narratives. We need an analysis of the religious affordances of *HoMe* because Legendarium Reconstructionists consider this corpus more authoritative than *S* and *LR*. And we need to look at the religious affordances of Tolkien's letters and essays because Legendarium Reconstructionists study these texts in search of evidence that Tolkien believed his narratives to be more than fiction.

The task that lies before us is daunting. The 12 volumes of *HoMe* contain more than three times the number of words of *LR* and *S* together, and even Humphrey Carpenter's compilation of Tolkien's letters (*Letters*) is considerably longer than *S*. I draw two conclusions from the sheer size of the material. First, an independent chapter is needed on the religious affordances of *HoMe* and on Tolkien's letters and essays. As a consequence, the analysis of Legendarium Reconstructionism will be postponed to chapter 16. Even so, and second, it would be disproportional to attempt a minute analysis of *HoMe* and *Letters* in their entirety. Dispensing with the comprehensive strategy of earlier chapters and sections on religious affordances, I shall therefore here limit the analysis to the most significant narratives in *HoMe* and to a handful of key letters and essays. This approach is feasible because I can build on the work of others. In my analysis of the religious affordances of *HoMe*, I take a shortcut by concentrating on those texts which Elizabeth Whittingham (2008) has pointed out as particularly central. My analysis of Tolkien's letters and essays similarly benefits from the work of Verlyn Flieger and others who have called attention to those passages in which Tolkien reflects on the veracity of his literary mythology and on his experience of being inspired during the writing process.

The central question of this chapter is *which religious affordances do HoMe and Tolkien's letters and essays add or alter for a Tolkien religionist who is already familiar with LR and S?* The chapter falls into three sections that each provides a part of the answer. In the first section I discuss how Tolkien employs frame narratives to thematise the veracity of *HoMe*. Like *H* and *LR*, most tales in *HoMe* include a frame story, but it differs much how developed it is. It differs also whether the frame story is internal to the narrative universe or whether it anchors the world of the main narrative in the actual world, or at least in a 'frame narrator's world' that is more like the actual world than the world of the main narrative. (As the reader will remember, we have encountered both types of frame story in *LR*: The notion in *LR* that Bilbo authored *S* constitutes *LR* as a frame story for *S* within the narrative world; by contrast, the statement of the ambiguous compiler voice in the prologue to *LR* that the manuscript has been handed down through the ages and is now being published in English translation anchors the narrative world in a world much like the actual world). In terms of religious affordances, the second type of frame narratives is most interesting. In the veracity section, the analysis therefore focuses on those three texts in *HoMe* that most strongly establish a semiotic effect of anchorage, i.e. the notion that the inventories of the textual world and the actual world overlap and that the narrative is therefore a fictional story about real phenomena (or perhaps even about events in the actual world). The three main anchoring texts are *The Cottage of Lost Play* (*LT I*), the very first tale in *HoMe*, and two later and unfinished pieces, *The Lost Road* (*LROW)* and *The Notion Club Papers* (*SD*). As we shall see, these texts function as narrative bridges between the world of the reader and the rest of Tolkien's literary mythology and as such afford a reading of Tolkien's literary mythology in the mytho-cosmological or even the mytho-historical mode. In this way, the frame narratives possess substantial religious affordances of a sort which the frameless *S* lacks.

In the section on narrative religion in *HoMe*, I highlight some of the different ideas on cosmogony, theology, cosmology, and eschatology that *HoMe* includes compared to *LR* and *S*. This material is found in two types of texts: in early versions of the tales that eventually became *S* and in descriptive texts that were not included in the appendices to *LR.* To the first group belongs *The Music of the Ainur* (cosmogony), *The Coming of the Valar and the Building of Valinor* (theogony and theology), and *The Hiding of Valinor* (cosmology). All of these are found in the first volume of *HoMe*, *The Book of Lost Tales, Part One* (*LT I*). To the latter group belong *Laws and Customs among the Eldar* (eschatology; *MR*), *Quendi and Eldar* (languages, including the language of the Valar; *WJ*), and the dialogue *Athrabeth Finrod Ah Andreth* (eschatology; *MR*). These pieces stem from *Morgoth's Ring* (*MR*) and *The War of the Jewels* (*WJ*), volumes 10 and 11 of *HoMe* which include the ultimate version of the *Quenta Silmarillion* (on which the published version of *S* is based) together with much supplementary material. A full overview of the main pieces in *HoMe* and their chronology is given below:

Table 15.1. Tolkien's *History of Middle-earth* (after Whittingham 2008, 10)					
Stage	**Years**	**Volume of *HoME***		**Major Works***	**Events in Tolkien's life**
1	1914-1920	1	*The Book of Lost Tales, Part I*	**Cottage of Lost Play**, **Music of the Ainur**, [**Coming of the Valar and the Building of Valinor**], Tale of the Sun and Moon, **Hiding of Valinor**	World War I, working on Oxford English Dictionary, teaching at Leeds University
		2	*The Book of Lost Tales, Part II*	Tale of Tinúviel, Turambar, Fall of Gondolin, Tale of	
2	1920-1935	3	*The Lays of Beleriand*	Lay of the Children of Húrin, Lay of Leithian	teaching at Leeds University, teaching at Oxford University
		4	*The Shaping of Middle-earth*	Earliest Silmarillion, Quenta Noldorinwa, Ambarkanta, Earliest Annals	
3	1937-1938	5	*The Lost Road and Other Writings*	The Fall of Númenor, **The Lost Road**, Ainulindalë, **Quenta Silmarillion**, Later Annals	publication of *The Hobbit*, before writing *The Lord of the Rings*
4	1938-1948	6	*The Return of the Shadow*	*The Lord of the Rings*	World War II, writing of *The Lord of the Rings*
		7	*The Treason of Isengard*		
		8	*The War of the Rings*		
		9	*Sauron Defeated*	**The Notion Club Papers**, The Drowning of Anadûnê	
5	1948-1959	10	*Morgoth's Ring*	Ainulindalë, **The Later Quenta Silmarillion [including Laws and Customs among the Eldar]**, **Athrabeth Finrod Ah Andreth**, Annals of Aman, Myths Transformed	publication of *The Lord of the Rings*, retirement from Oxford University
		11	*The War of the Jewels*	The Grey Annals, The Later Quenta Silmarillion, Wanderings of Húrin, **Quendi and Eldar**	
		(12)	*(The Peoples of Middle-earth)*	Prologue and Appendices to *The Lord of the Rings*	
6	1960-1973	12	*The Peoples of Middle-earth*	Late Writings, Unfinished Tales	retirement

*) Boldface indicates works which are central to the analysis below. *The Coming of the Valar and the Building of Valinor* is not included in Whittingham's list of major works.

In the third section I analyse those of Tolkien's letters in which he reflects on the veracity of his narratives and professes to have felt inspired while writing them. Also a few other non-narrative texts will be drawn into the discussion. Chief among these is the famous essay *On Fairy-Stories* (*OFS*) in which Tolkien argues that true fairy-stories include some measure of divine inspiration and hence a glimpse of absolute truth. This claim is significant since Tolkien's own mythology, though not a collection of prototypical fairy tales, arguably belongs to the category of fairy-stories as Tolkien defines it in his essay. It is worth complementing the analysis of *HoMe* with one of Tolkien's letters and essays because these texts can be read as indirect reading guides to Tolkien's narratives. Significantly, the texts demonstrate that Tolkien incorporated his own religious beliefs and fascinations into his narratives, thus grounding his literary mythology in actual, personal religion. The thematic overlap between Tolkien's personal beliefs and religious motifs in his narratives allows a semiotic effect of authority and anchorage to be transferred from the former to latter, thus transforming Tolkien's narratives from merely fictional tales to fictional stories about real religious phenomena and truths. In this way, Tolkien's belief statements reinforce the religious affordances of his narratives.

15.1. Thematisation of Veracity in *The History of Middle-earth*

"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). Thus begins the published version of *S*, powerfully and right-on, with the cosmogonic myth presented as the utterance of an all-knowing narrator. Contrary to *H* and *LR*, there is no frame narrative anchoring the narrative world in the world of the reader.

Actually, it was Tolkien's intention to anchor *S* in the actual world, and *HoMe* includes several texts testifying to this fact. In these frame story sketches, Tolkien tried out two main ideas. The original idea was to present the Legendarium as a collection of stories told by the Elves to Eriol, a human traveller visiting their lands from Middle-earth. This idea frames the *Book of Lost Tales* (*LT I*; *LT II*), Tolkien's earliest versions of the tales that would become *S*. In its initial form this framing device was internal to the narrative world and accounted only for how the humans of Middle-earth had come to know of the wisdom of ancient times possessed by the Elves of Aman. Later, however, Tolkien added to this version of the frame story that the Elven tales had been handed down through the ages, from the time of the Legendarium until the present day, thus constituting the narrative world as the ancient past of the world of the reader. Tolkien's second frame story also aimed to anchor the narrative world directly in the world of the reader, but used a different mechanism to achieve the effect: 'time travel' through ancestral regression rather than a lineage of transmission. Tolkien first tried out this idea in *The Lost Road*, an unfinished story set in contemporary England in which the characters discover

a way to travel back in time and re-experience the memories of their ancestors. Tolkien planned to follow the characters all the way back to a re-experience of the destruction of Númenor. In a later and also unfinished piece, *The Notion Club Papers*, Tolkien developed the time travel motif further; in both *The Lost Road* and in *The Notion Club Papers* he sought to incorporate the Eriol saga from the *Lost Tales*. *The Notion Club Papers* is interesting, not only because it constitutes the most sophisticated (albeit aborted) frame narrative for the Legendarium, but also because it has a strong autobiographical feel to it. In what follows, I take a closer look at each of these three pieces in turn, highlighting how they in various ways thematise the veracity of the Legendarium.

15.1.1. The Initial Frame Narrative: *The Cottage of Lost Play*

The Cottage of Lost Play was written in the winter of 1916-1917, when Tolkien was 24-25 years old (*LT I* 13). It is the first chapter of *The Book of Lost Tales*, and like all other chapters *Cottage* includes both a piece of frame story and one of the Lost Tales. In *Cottage*, we hear that a human traveller, Eriol, arrives from "the Great Lands" (i.e. Middle-earth) to Tol Eresseä, the Lonely Island (*LT I* 13), which is inhabited by Elves (*LT I* 13, 15).[437] He wanders inland and arrives at the Cottage of Lost Play (Mar Vanwa Tyaliéva) where the Elves Lindo and Vairë dwell (*LT I* 14).[438] The Elves welcome Eriol as a guest, and after dinner he is invited to join his hosts at the Tale-fire (*LT I* 17). The lost tales which constitute the two volumes of *The Book of Lost Tales* (*LT I*; *LT II*) are all presented as tales told to Eriol, mostly around the Tale-fire.

Besides introducing the Eriol-frame, *The Cottage of Lost Play* includes the first Lost Tale, a tale about the Cottage itself and the many children who dwell there (*LT I* 18-20). Vairë tells Eriol that these children are human children who have wandered to the land of the fairies along the Path of Dreams, the Olórë Mallë (*LT I* 18). Some children have gone back to the lands of Men, but others have chosen to stay with the Elves. As Vairë explains, many of those children who went back became great poets among Men, working their memories of the fairy lands into tales and songs: "Of the misty aftermemories of [the returned children], of their broken tales and snatches of song, came many strange legends that delighted Men for long, and still do, it may be; for of such were the poets of the Great Lands" (*LT I* 19). In other words, human legends and poems about elves are not fictional, but reveal the reality of the elves and their world.

The Eriol frame story and tale of the human children in the fairy cottage make clear that within the narrative world Tol Eresseä is accessible from Middle-earth. The island

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[437] At this point Tolkien mostly referred to the Elves as "fairies" (cf. *LT I* 19). Christopher Tolkien points out that his father's imagined world already at this time was constituted by two main landmasses, the human lands to the East and a land to the West inhabited by Elves and Valar. In the *Lost Tales*, the human lands are never referred to as Middle-earth, however. This term only entered Tolkien's writings in the 1930s (*LT I* 21).

[438] Vairë the Elf should not be confused with the Valië Vairë, wife of Mandos.

can be reached physically (one can sail there) and by way of the Olórë Mallë whose ontological status remains unclear.[439] Although the Great Lands (Middle-earth) of the narrative world are not identified with any real places within the actual world, *The Cottage of Lost Play* thematises its own veracity, and by implication the veracity of all the lost tales, in another, indirect way. Of central importance is Vairë's reference to human poets who have visited Faery. Should this be interpreted as a subtle reference to Tolkien himself (the poet) as having had experiences of Faery which he here recounts (in the lost tales)? Not every reader will jump to such a conclusion, but the autobiographical interpretation is afforded by the text and gains credibility in the light of other of Tolkien's writings.[440] Furthermore, later versions of the *Cottage* story were anchored much more explicitly in the actual world. In one version Tol Eresseä was even equated with England (*LT I* 24), and Eriol became an Anglo-Saxon named Ælfwine (Elf-friend). Tolkien thus staged Eriol/Ælfwine as a mediator between the Elven past and our human present, i.e. as the one who recorded the ancient Elven stories which have since been handed down through time until written up by Tolkien.

Summing up, the Eriol/Ælfwine frame story includes two veracity motifs, a 'poet's vision' motif and a 'recorder and compiler' motif. Later Tolkien developed both motifs independently. As we have seen in section 7.3.1 above, Tolkien used a variation of the compiler motif when playfully claiming in the prologues to *H* and *LR* that these texts together with *S* had originally been written and compiled by others before coming into his possession. He only settled for this version of the frame story, however, after having failed to develop a satisfactory frame story based on a variant of the vision motif. *HoMe* includes two such attempts, *The Lost Road* and *The Notion Club Papers*.

15.1.2. The Unfinished Frame Narratives: *The Lost Road* and *The Notion Club Papers*

The Lost Road was written in or about 1936 (*LROW* 8-9) after Tolkien had agreed with his friend C.S. Lewis to write a time-travel story while Lewis wrote a story about space-travel (*Letters* 347; cf. *LROW* 7). Lewis' story, *Out of the Silent Planet*, was published in 1938. Tolkien's text was never finished, but a manuscript with four chapters survives. The story opens with two "English chapters" in which we follow a present-day father and a son named Alboin and Audoin. The other two – "Númenórean" – chapters were supposed to be the final chapters of the story. These chapters are set just before the destruction of Númenor, and again feature a father-son pair, Elendil and Herendil. The

[439] I return to the Olórë Mallë in the discussion of the cosmology of *HoMe* in section 15.2.3 below.

[440] Both *The Notion Club Papers* (discussed later in this section) and *Smith of Wootton Major*, one of Tolkien's later short stories (1967; cf. Flieger 2005b), have a strong autobiographical feel to them. Tolkien's letters also includes passages that can be read as conjectural evidence for Tolkien having had experiences of Faery. I return to this point in section 15.3.2 below.

names Alboin and Elendil both mean 'Elf-friend' and this is no coincidence, for Alboin is a descendant of Elendil. In the English chapters Elendil appears to Alboin and Audoin in dream visions, and it becomes clear that this is possible because of the blood bond between the characters. Moreover, Alboin and Audoin are able to travel back in time, through a form of ancestral regression, and re-experience the life of Elendil and Herendil in a shared dream vision. The English chapters break off just as Alboin and Audoin fall asleep, anticipating an ancestral regression to occur (*LROW* 53).

Apart from the finished chapters, many sketches, poems, and notes have survived from which Tolkien's intended composition of the narrative can be reconstructed. Tolkien planned to flesh out the story with a long series of regression steps. He envisioned a "Lombard story?", "a Norse story of ship-burial (Vinland)", "an English story – of the man who got onto the Straight Road?",[441] "a Tuatha-de-Danaan story, or Tir-nan-Og", a "story concerning painted caves", "the Ice age – great figures of Ice", "Before the Ice Age", "post-Beleriand", and "the Elendil and Gil-galad story of the assault on Thû [Sauron]" before arriving finally at the "the Númenor story" (*LROW* 77-78). Tolkien wanted to create a great mythological synthesis as testified especially by his inclusion of a Tuatha de Dannan story and by his explicit equation of Númenor with Atlantis and of Tol Eressëa with Avalon [spelled Avallon] (*LROW* 65).[442] He intended to link existing mythological traditions (post Ice Age) with his own narratives (pre Ice Age) and to anchor it all in a present-day world immediately recognisable to the reader. In other words, the function of *The Lost Road* was to frame a selection of his legends – and thus by implication his entire literary mythology – as the (feigned) ancient history of the actual world.

Following the success of *H* (published 1937) Tolkien started working on a sequel, *LR*. He hoped to publish *LR* together with a collection of Elven legends (*S*) and was seeking a frame story to tie the two parts together. This was perhaps why he returned, in 1945-1946, as *LR* was nearing its conclusion, to the time travel idea explored in *The Lost Road*. Rather than developing the old piece, Tolkien started afresh, composing a long, but again unfinished piece, *The Notion Club Papers*. The story consists of the fictional minutes from meetings in the Notion Club, a society for male intellectuals, not unlike the Inklings. Indeed, Tolkien establishes several links between the Inklings and the Notion Club characters. For example, he introduces a Professor Rashbold into the narrative (Rashbold

[441] This is the story of Eriol in *The Cottage of Lost Play* or of Ælfwine as this figure was called in later versions.

[442] Around the same time, in late 1934, Tolkien had begun a poem entitled "The Fall of Arthur" in which he in alluded to his Elven legends, just as he now begun using Arthurian terms (especially Avallon as an alternative name for Tol Eressëa) within the Elven tales themselves. See Tolkien (2013), in particular the chapter entitled "The Unwritten Poem and Its Relation to *The Silmarillion*" (2013, 123-168).

is a direct translation of the name Tolkien; *SD* 256, 291), and he dates the meetings of the Club to his own present.[443]

In the secretarial recordings, we read that the members of the Notion Club discuss various paranormal things during their meetings. The members clearly believe in haunted places (*SD* 180), and are convinced that disincarnate spirits exist who can communicate with humans directly through the medium of thought, rather than through language (*SD* 195, 201). The club members also discuss the truth of myths, and though no ultimate agreement is reached on this issue, two theories each receive substantial support. Wilfrid Trewin Jeremy advances a mytho-historical theory, suggesting that while fictional elements have surely been added to legends and myths over the course of time, an historical core can always be discerned. He is convinced, for example, that an historical Arthur existed (*SD* 227; cf. *LR* 1134). Furthermore, Jeremy believes that earlier times *were* more mythical, and that the outlandish tone which myths and legends have in modern ears reflects that thought, society, and the very ontology of the world was different in ancient times. As Jeremy puts it,

> [s]ometimes I have a queer feeling that, if one could go back [in time], one would find not myth dissolving into history, but rather the reverse: real history becoming more mythical – more shapely, simple, discernibly significant, even seen at close quarters. More poetical, and less prosaic, if you like (*SD* 227).

Other members advance a mytho-cosmological theory of the otherworldly kind (cf. section 5.2.2 above), proposing that myths are true because they refer truthfully to events and states of being on "secondary planes" (*SD* 228), that is in other worlds outside the ordinary world. Also these members consider myths to be true and referential, but not in the sense of referring to our world's past.

Central to the club's discussions is the question whether it is possible to travel in time and to visit other worlds through the medium of visionary "true dreams". This discussion is initiated when George Ramer, whose recent science fiction novel is the subject of the evening's conversation, claims that he has actually been to the world described in his work (*SD* 172). Ramer promises to present his views on the topic in a systematic way at the club's following meeting. A week later he reads a paper in which he argues for the reality of telepathy, precognition, and similar paranormal phenomena. He contends that "a pretty good case has been made out for the view that in dream a mind can, and some-

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[443] He does so in a complex way, for while *The Notion Club Papers* provides a frame story for Tolkien's literary mythology in general, it is itself equipped with a very sophisticated frame narrative. The Notion Club frame story is set in 2014 (the distant future from Tolkien's perspective), two years after some leaves with minutes from meetings in the Notion Club have been found. These leaves have been edited and published by a certain Howard Green who comments on them in a foreword, i.e. in a fictional, narratorial preface, of which Tolkien was so fond (cf. section 7.3 above). Green notes that while the papers are dated to 1986-1987, historians (from Green's present, anno 2014) have determined that the Notion Club is imaginary and that the papers actually stem from the 1940s, i.e. from Tolkien's own time of writing (*SD* 155-158).

times does, move in Time: I mean, can observe a time other than that occupied by the sleeping body during the dream" (*SD* 175). As Ramer explains, the idea is not that the mind (or soul) leaves the body (*SD* 181), or that the mind activates memories seated in the (racial) unconscious. Also, the mind is not making stuff up. What really happens, according to Ramer, is that the mind, through a mental faculty alike to ordinary perception, imagination, and memory, but different from all three, gains access to Other Space (other worlds) and/or Other Time (past or future) (*SD* 175-176). The special dreams that access Other Space or Other Time are referred to by Ramer as "true dreams" or "free dreams" (*SD* 177) or as "serious dreams", as opposed to the "marginal stuff" of normal dreams (*SD* 184). Ramer recounts several such dreams in which he has travelled to other worlds, including a world inhabited by the En-keladim, a kind of Elves (*SD* 206).[444] Other club members have had experiences similar to Ramer's, for example Philip Frankley who at a later meeting recites a Celtic-style poem that he did not author, but which "came to him". This poem mentions a number of motifs from Tolkien's literary mythology, including Elvenhome and the Old Road [that Straight Road to Elvenhome] (*SD* 265).

Ramer has not only travelled in Space to other worlds, but also in Time, going "backwards in the history of the universe" (*SD* 185). In particular, Ramer tells of a true dream of a huge Green Wave (*SD* 194), a dream which is later related to the downfall of Atlantis. Ramer mysteriously says that he knows Atlantis by a different name, but initially refuses to share it (*SD* 206). Later, it becomes apparent that this name is no other than Númenor, and several of the club's members receive visions and auditions of Númenor (*SD* 231-232, 249-252).

The identification of Númenor with Atlantis is significant because it links Tolkien's own literary mythology to established *ditto*. This is not a new device, of course, but merely a new take on a core idea already present in *The Lost Road*. By contrast, the inclusion of Ramer's Great Wave dream in *The Notion Club Papers* is a significant autobiographical addition to *The Lost Road*. Tolkien had dreamt of the Great Wave several times and later learned that one of his sons, Michael, had had the same dream (*Letters* 213; cf. *SD* 217).[445] Bequeathing his personal dream to Ramer, Tolkien invests this character with an autobiographical aura. This leaves the reader pondering whether Tolkien's own experiences have informed also other parts of the narrative, for example Frankley's poem audition. As the text stands, it requires little imagination to read it as a thinly

[444] In a draft of *The Drowning of Anadûne*, a Mannish version of the *Akallabêth*, Tolkien used the term Enkeladim as synonym for the Quendi, the Elves of Middle-earth. Further of interest is that Tolkien explicitly anchored *Drowning* in the actual world. One passage goes: "Men 'awoke' first in the midst of the Great Middle Earth (Europe and Asia), and Asia was first thinly inhabited, before the Dark Ages of great cold [i.e. the Ice Age] […] The Enkeladim withdrew into waste places or retreated westwards" (*SD* 398).

[445] I return to Tolkien's obsession with this dream – his "Atlantis complex" (*Letters* 213) – in section 15.3.1 below. Tolkien also built this dream into *LR*. In the book version, Faramir has it (*LR* 962); in the movies the dream is relegated to Éowyn (*RK* 7).

veiled confession of Tolkien's occult beliefs. In particular, the text affords the reading that Tolkien believed (a) in the reality of other worlds and the possibility of visiting them, and (b) in the historicity of Atlantis/Númenor. Following the logic of this interpretation one step further, this could imply that he believed his entire literary mythology to have a true core, either as the history of our world or as the description of another world. In other words, Tolkien's time travel narratives make it possible to argue that Tolkien himself viewed at least parts of his literary mythology in the mytho-historical or mytho-cosmological mode.

In the second part of *The Notion Club Papers*, Tolkien connects the time travel motif to the Eriol/Ælfwine saga from *The Book of Lost Tales*. Focus here shifts from Ramer to another member of club, Alwin [Ælfwine] Lowdham, who after having re-experienced the memories of both Anglo-Saxon and Númenórean ancestors succeeds in finding the Straight Road. In Elvenhome he gets a glimpse of the "Book of Stories" (*SD* 279), and upon returning he writes down all that he remembers. Tolkien never managed to finish *The Notion Club Papers*, but in a note on how to proceed he wrote: "Do the Atlantis story and abandon Eriol-Saga, with Lowdham, Jeremy, Guildford and Ramer taking part" (*SD* 281). This shows that Tolkien at this time still hoped to use a time travel narrative as the common frame story for *LR* and *S*. Because the time travel stories grew complicated and unwieldy, Tolkien eventually settled, as we have seen, for a *manuscrit trouvé* frame for *LR* of the same kind as he had used for *H*. Tolkien never finished a frame narrative for *S*, but *The Lost Road* and *The Notion Club Papers* demonstrate that he would have preferred such a frame story to stage the narrator as a visionary rather than as an editor.

15.1.3. Thematisation of Veracity in Tolkien's Frame Narratives: Analysis and Summary

Christopher Tolkien (e.g. *LT I* 22) and several Tolkien scholars with him (e.g. Flieger 2005a; Fisher 2006; Whittingham 2008, 34-36, 107) have pointed out that Tolkien felt that England lacked a body of myth and legend to match that of the Greeks, Celts, and Finns. Tolkien intended to make up for this by constructing a mythology for England. He knew that to achieve this goal, a literary mythology set in a secondary world would not suffice. If his literary mythology were to work as a mythology for England, it had to be connected to England. Tolkien's adoption of the Anglo-Saxon term 'Middle-earth' was part of this anchorage strategy, as were his various attempts to construct a frame narrative connecting his imagined world with the present-day world.

It is debatable whether Tolkien succeeded in creating a mythology for England, but he certainly managed to anchor his imagined world in the world of the reader. Though his frame stories were possibly meant merely as forged visions and feigned history, Tolkien's semi-autobiographical endorsement, especially in *The Notion Club Papers*, of the truth of myth and the reality of true dreams, affords a referential reading. Furthermore, the semiotic effect of anchorage established in the frame narratives spills over to the rest

of *HoMe* and even to *H*, *LR*, and *S*. For example, the *Akallabêth*, the part of *S* dealing with the downfall of Númenor, has no religious affordances of the type 'thematisation of the text's veracity'. It presents itself as a fictional narrative about the destruction of an imaginary continent. At best it indirectly establishes a connection to the actual world through its hypertextual relation to the Atlantis myth. When *Akallabêth* is read in the light of *The Notion Club Papers*, however, the veracity of the Númenor legend becomes explicitly thematised. *The Notion Club Papers* unequivocally identifies Númenor with Atlantis and affords a reading of the destruction of Númenor-Atlantis as a real historical event. This allows *Akallabêth* to be read as a detailed account, not of a fictional event, but of this historical event. This effect of anchorage, which *The Cottage of Lost Play*, *The Lost Road*, and *The Notion Club Papers* provide for the whole Legendarium, unquestionably constitutes the most significant religious affordance which *HoMe* adds to the already published parts of Tolkien's literary mythology.

Let me sum up. Together, the three frame narratives promote a repertoire of ideas, some about the ontology of the world and some about Tolkien's beliefs. Concerning the world itself, the they promote the ideas that (1) another world (Faery) or other worlds exist; (2) this world (or one of these worlds) is inhabited by fairies/Elves and Valar; (3) humans can access this world in true dreams, just as beings from this world can contact humans; (4) traces of such experiences are found in fairy-stories and myths; (5) Tolkien himself had had such special experiences; (6) his works bear marks of these experiences and therefore themselves represent a doorway to Faery; and (7) Tolkien can therefore be taken as a role model for travelling to Faery. Concerning Tolkien's beliefs, they furthermore promote the ideas that (8) Tolkien believed myths and legends to have an historical core; (9) perceived his own literary mythology as being deeply connected with other myths and legends; (10) believed in the existence of ancestral or racial memory; and (11) considered his literary mythology to be informed by such ancestral memory. From the last four propositions it can finally be inferred, with an extra interpretational leap, that (12) Tolkien's literary mythology has an historical core. Propositions 2, 5-7, and 10-12 promote a religionisation of Tolkien's imagined world; propositions 1, 3-4, and 8-9 further promote a synthesisation of Tolkien's narratives with other mythologies.

15.2. Narrative Religion in *The History of Middle-earth*

Only a handful of texts in *HoMe* have as their key purpose to thematise the truth of the Legendarium. By contrast, almost all texts include some measure of narrative religion. A different format is therefore needed for the following analysis of the narrative religion in *HoMe*. Rather than analysing a number of key texts in chronological order, the analysis below will focus on four key themes, namely cosmogony, theology, cosmology, and afterlife and eschatology. There will be no sub-section on rituals, for *HoMe* includes no

narrative rituals.[446] As I make clear in the sub-sections on theology and cosmology, however, *HoMe* provides much information on the Valar and on how to access the world of the Valar, and this information can be used as raw material from which to craft Valar-directed rituals.

This section does not aim to give an exhaustive overview of the narrative religion in *HoMe*. Doing so, would take up too much space. It is also not necessary for the simple reason that the religious affordances of *HoMe* overlap greatly with those of *LR* and *S* (cf. chs. 7 and 9). This is so, because *HoMe* is largely composed of drafts of these two works. In this section, I shall therefore restrict myself to pointing out what *HoMe* adds or alters compared to *LR* and *S*, thus skipping the steps of exhaustive analysis and of systematic comparison of *HoMe* with *LR* and *S*. I focus on the earliest versions of some central tales of *S*, namely *The Music of the Ainur* (cosmogony), *The Coming of the Valar and the Building of Valinor* (theogony and theology), and *The Hiding of Valinor* (cosmology), and on a number of descriptive pieces that were not included in *S* in any form, namely *Laws and Customs among the Eldar* (eschatology), *Quendi and Eldar* (languages), and the dialogue *Athrabeth Finrod Ah Andreth* (eschatology).

15.2.1. Cosmogony in *The History of Middle-earth*

The earliest version of Tolkien's cosmogonic myth, *The Music of the Ainur*, was written between 1918 and 1920 (*LT I* 45) and remained relatively intact as Tolkien later revised his mythology. Indeed, if one compares *The Music of the Ainur* to *Ainulindalë*, the final version of the creation story published in *S* (cf. section 9.1.1 above), the similarity between the two pieces is more striking than the differences. In both versions, the supreme god Ilúvatar creates the Ainur, a class of spiritual beings (*S* 3; *LT I* 52). Guided by the will of Ilúvatar, the Ainur thereafter sing a world into existence. This world exists only as a virtuality or potentiality, however, until it is imbued by Ilúvatar with life and reality (*S* 4-9; *LT I* 53-55). After the creation of the World, some of the Ainur descend into it as Ilúvatar's demiurgical representatives (*S* 9-10; *LT I* 57).

There are also differences between *Music* and *Ainulindalë*, and I shall point out two. First, *The Music of the Ainur* is embedded directly within the frame story established by

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[446] The closest we come are a number of short references to major Elven and Númenórean festivals. In "The Fall of Gondolin", it is mentioned that the Elves of Gondolin celebrated *Nost-na-Lothion* (Qu: Birth of Flowers) in the spring and *Tarnin Austa* (Qu: Gates of Summer) in the summer (*LT II*, 172). "Gilfanon's Tale" includes a reference to Turuhalmë (Qu: The Logdrawing), a winter festival held in the Cottage of Lost Play (*LT I*, 229-230). A slight bit of information on the Eru cult in Númenor is given in *UT*. Already from *S* we know that the Númenóreans had an Eru cult (*S* 312), but in *UT* we learn further that this cult had three major annual holidays. These were the *Erukyermë* (Qu: Prayer to Eru) in the first days of spring, the *Erulaitalë* (Qu: Praise to Eru) at midsummer, and the *Eruhantalë* (Qu: Thanksgiving to Eru) at the end of autumn. On each occasion the king would climb the sacred mountain Meneltarma with a great entourage and speak prayers to Eru on behalf of the people (*UT* 214; also 226, 236-237, 263).

The Cottage of Lost Play. This particular story is told to Eriol by Rúmil, an Elven sage and door-warden of the Cottage. In later versions of the cosmogonic myth, written in the 1930s through 1950s, the frame story is gradually diluted until Christopher Tolkien decided to remove it entirely in *S* (Whittingham 2008, 49). As Whittingham points out, the loss of frame story changes the very character of the cosmogonic myth. *Music* is a *tale* told in a context of joviality and merriment, whereas *Ainulindalë* is presented as fact (within the narrative world) and recounted in a high style reminiscent of Genesis 1 (Whittingham 2008, 54-57). Whittingham finds the *Ainulindalë* more beautiful and powerful than *Music*, but one might assume that Tolkien religionists of a Pagan bent would prefer the less Christian and more 'pagan' original. Furthermore, I am not convinced that the presence of a frame story will be experienced by all readers as a dilution of textual authority – from 'fact' to 'mere tale' – such as Whittingham suggests. It might actually be the other way around. *Ainulindalë* does not explicitly thematise its own veracity, neither within Tolkien's narrative world nor in relation to the actual world. It is merely presented as one tale among others in a collection of legends, and these legends clearly represent the Elven point of view within the narrative world, a point of view that is not guaranteed to be true. If readers experience *Ainulindalë* as having authority, it is rather because of its hypertextual dependence on Genesis 1 than by an effect of veracity generated by the text itself. By contrast, in *Music* Rúmil reassures Eriol of the legitimacy of his tale: Rúmil has it from the first Elves to whom it was told by Manwë himself (*LT I* 52; cf. *WJ* 406-407).

The second change from *Music* to *Ainulindalë*, and according to Christopher Tolkien the most important one (*LT I* 62), concerns the complexity of the creation process. *Ainulindalë* has three distinct phases. First, the Ainur sing the history of the world in a Great Music. Second, Ilúvatar shows them a Vision of what they have sung. He makes it clear that the World has not yet been created and that both the Great Music and the Vision represent only Ilúvatar's not-yet-realised plan for the World. Only in the third phase, the Creation proper, Ilúvatar gives reality to the Vision by uttering "Eä" ('Let these things Be!'; cf. section 9.1.1 above). *Music* has no Vision phase, but proceeds directly from the Great Music to the Creation. According to Whittingham, the Vision phase in *Ainulindalë* is a significant addition because it emphasises that the Ainur do not create through the Great Music and more clearly stages Ilúvatar as the sovereign creator god (2008, 60). As far as I can see, the addition of the Vision phase does not change much, for the relation between Ilúvatar and the Valar remains the same between the two versions. Already in *Music*, the Ainur, including the evil Melko [Melkor], sing nothing that Ilúvatar has not willed them to sing (*LT I* 54-55). And already in *Music*, Ilúvatar alone imbues the music of the Ainur with "Life and Reality" (*LT I* 53, 55). Furthermore, there is one change from *Music* to *Ainulindalë* that arguably diminishes the distance between Ilúvatar and the Ainur rather than expanding it: The Valar's role as demiurgical co-creators increases. Whereas the Valar in *Music* enter a world that has already been shaped, in *Ainulindalë*

they enter a bare and unfinished world which they must furnish with continents, mountains, and so on (*S* 21-22; cf. *LT I* 225).

All in all, it must be concluded that the alternative cosmogonic ideas in *HoMe* are not significantly different from what is found in *S*. If religion based on *HoMe* is different from religion based on *S*, it will not be due to different views on cosmogony. By contrast, the characterisation of the Valar is strikingly different in *HoMe* compared to *S*.

15.2.2. Theology in *The History of Middle-earth*

Throughout *HoMe*, much additional information is given on the Valar. I shall here touch upon the five most important motifs.[447] First of all, the Valar are consequently referred to as "the Gods" in *The Lost Tales* and in all of Tolkien's later texts. When Eriol, in a frame story passage connecting *Cottage* and *Music*,[448] asks the Elf Lindo "who be these Valar; are they the Gods?" his host confirms: "So be they" (*LT I* 45). This stands in contrast to *LR* and *S* in which the Valar are only rarely and reluctantly referred to as gods. An appendix to *LR* identifies the Valar as "angelic powers" (*LR* 1123), and only once in *LR* is one of the Valar, Oromë, identified as a "god of old" (*LR* 838). In the *Valaquenta* in *S*, it is stated that "The Great among these spirits [the Ainur] the Elves name the Valar, the Powers of Arda, and Men have often called them gods" (*S* 15). Here the meaning is clearly that although humans refer to them as gods, this qualification is actually a misnomer. There are only three additional references in *S* to the Valar as gods, but for instance 20 references to them as The Lords of the West.[449]

In the quote just given, we see that the *Valaquenta* draws a distinction between what Men tell of the Valar (they are gods) and what the Valar really are (they are incarnated Ainur). The stories about the Valar in *HoMe* retain a distinction between 'what is' and 'what is said', but this does not entail a disqualification of the Valar as gods. It entails only a disqualification of the portrayal of the Valar/Gods in human tales. Consider, for example, how Eriol and Lindo's dialogue about the nature of the gods continues. Lindo explains that while the Valar are truly gods, "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" (*LT I* 45). That is to say, within the narrative universe, the Valar

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[447] Most of the other information, such as the details about the dwellings of the Valar in Valmar given in *The Coming of the Valar* (*LT I* 73-77), adds little in terms of religious affordances.

[448] Christopher Tolkien refers to this passage as the *Link*.

[449] By contrast, Ilúvatar is not referred to as God in *The Lost Tales*. As Rúmil tells Eriol, Ilúvatar is not of the Gods, "for he made them." Rúmil continues, "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" (*LT I* 49). In most of his later texts, Tolkien made little fuss and referred to Ilúvatar as God and to the Valar as the Gods. In *LR* and *S*, however, Ilúvatar is not explicitly referred to as God, although Tolkien's letters make it clear that he understood Ilúvatar as the narrative counterpart of the Christian God which he believed to exist in the actual world (cf. section 15.3.1 below).

are the 'real Gods' who live in The Blessed Realm and to whom the 'narrative gods' appearing in the mythologies of Middle-earth refer only imperfectly. This motif contributes significantly to the religious affordances of *HoMe*. When combined with the anchorage of the narrative world in the actual world achieved by the frame narratives (cf. section 15.1 above), it affords a reading of Tolkien's Legendarium as the 'true story behind the legend', the 'legend' being the actual world's mythologies.

In line with the identification of the Valar as a pantheon of gods rather than as a collective of angels, many texts in *HoMe* present the Valar as highly anthropomorphic beings. It is emphasised, for example, that the Valar, as incarnated beings, possess both a *hröa* (Qu: body) and a *fëa* (Qu: soul, spirit), just like Men and Elves do (*WJ* 397). Especially *The Lost Tales*, Tolkien's earliest stories, stress the embodiment of the Valar. For example, whereas the relationships between the married Valar in *S* is platonic if not purely metaphorical, the Valar of *The Lost Tales* procreate. Manwë and Varda have two children, Fionwë-Úrion and Erinti (*LT I* 58); Aulë and Yavanna have Oromë and Nessa (*LT I* 67, 75).[450] We even hear of one third-generation Valië, Nielíqui, the daughter of Oromë and Vána (*LT I* 75, 93).[451] The Valar of the *Tales* are not only more sexual than the Valar of *S*, they are also more prone to quarrel and folly. Worst of all their imperfections is their failure to make war on Melkor after he has destroyed the Two Trees. Motivated by fear and indolence they choose instead to withdraw Valinor from the physical world (*LT I* 208-211; more on this below). In *S*, Valinor is also hidden (*S* 114), but only at a later stage after Melkor has tried to destroy the Moon. More importantly, the Valar's failure to go to war is only in the *Tales* condemned as an error and a missed chance of glory (*LT I* 213).[452] Even though the Valar in *HoMe* are in many ways more human than the Valar in *S*, they are not given the individuality that the gods of the classical pantheons possess. Like the Valar in *S*, the Valar in *HoMe* are primarily demiurges, who build mansions for themselves, fashion celestial bodies, and so on. They do not cheat on their wives like Zeus or go fishing like Þórr. They remain flat characters – less licentious and conniving than the Olympians and less resourceful than the Æsir.

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[450] It is not stated explicitly that Nessa is the daughter of Aulë and Yavanna, but this can be inferred from the fact that she is Oromë's sister (*LT I* 75).

[451] It is unclear exactly how the notion of Valar children should be understood. Oromë is said to be the son of Aulë and Yavanna, but he is also described as an Ainu descending into Eä. This implies that Oromë was in some way begotten before the creation of the world. His daughter Nielíqui, by contrast, who is mentioned for the first time in the description of the Valar's mansions, must have been conceived within the world. *The Lost Tales* include references to two other Valar children, Telimektar, son of Tulkas (e.g. *LT I* 101), and Kosomot, son of Melkor (*LT I* 93).

[452] In *S*, the Valar are later persuaded by Eärendel to make war and they ultimately overthrow Melkor and bind him in the Void (*S* 306). No such tale is included in *The Lost Tales*, though an outline of *The Tale of Eärendel* shows that Tolkien planned to include a tale resulting in the "[b]inding of Melko" (*LT II* 253).

As embodied beings, the Valar communicate through speech (*WJ* 397), and *HoMe* gives much information on Valarin, the Valar's own language.[453] Already in *The Music of the Ainur* (*LT I* 48), Rúmil tells Eriol that the Valar possess a language of their own and that only few among the Elves know it. More is said in *The Lhammas* (No: Account of Tongues),[454] a piece 'authored' by Pengoloð of Gondolin and allegedly based on the "work of Rúmil" (*LROW* 167). Pengoloð here develops a linguistic pedigree that traces all the languages of Middle-earth back to Valarin (or Valinorian).[455] While *The Lhammas* tells us nothing of the grammar and vocabulary of Valarin, a selection of Valarin words are given in a later "Note on the 'Language of the Valar'" (*WJ* 397-407).[456] The "Note" includes several Valarin terms, especially referring to cosmological entities and concepts. It also includes some names of the Valar in their own tongue.[457] A selection of these Valarin names and terms are given in table 15.2 below.

Table 15.2. Valarin Names and Terms (*WJ* 399-401)

Quenya	**Valarin**	**Quenya**	**Valarin**
Ainu	Ayanū	Arda	Aþāraphelūn *(appointed dwelling)*
Aulë	Aƹūlēz	Arda Unmarred	Aþāraphelūn Dušamanūðān
Manwë	Mānawenūz *(Blessed One)*	Arda Marred	Aþāraphelūn Amanaišal
Oromë	Arǭmēz	Telperion	Ibrīniðilpathānezel
Tulkas	Tulukhastāz *(the Golden-haired)*	Laurelin	Tulukhedelgorūs
Ulmo	Ul(l)ubōz	Ithil *(Moon)*	Phanaikelūth *(bright mirror)*
Aratar *(the Supreme)*	māχanumāz	Anar *(Sun)*	Aþâraigas *(appointed heat)*

[453] The existence of a Valar speech, Valinorean, is mentioned once in *LR* (864), but not at all in *S*.

[454] 'No' is short of Noldorin, the language of the Noldor. Noldorin was an early from of Sindarin.

[455] *The Lhammas*, of which three versions survive, was written *circa* 1937-1938.

[456] The "Note" is an appendix to *Quendi and Eldar*, a piece devoted primarily to the etymology of words in different forms of Elvish. Embedding itself within Tolkien's frame story, *Quendi and Eldar* is presented as excerpts and summaries of Pengoloð's *Lhammas* (*WJ* 393, 397); the "Note" is furthermore said to be derived from "the sayings of Rúmil" (*WJ* 397-398).

[457] Strictly speaking, the Valarin names given are titles. With the exception of Oromë's name, the true Valarin names of the Valar remained unknown to the Elves (*WJ* 400-401). Furthermore, the compiler of *Quendi and Eldar* warns the reader that the Valarin forms given in his word list are probably not completely accurate (*WJ* 398).

In section 13.1 above we saw that the Fifth Way Mystery School used Quenyan phrases in their ritual, partly in imitation of the Elves and partly to invest their ritual with that magical aura which ancient and incomprehensible languages possess. We can hypothesise that those Tolkien religionists who base themselves on *HoMe* will consider Valarin, the language of the Gods, even more powerful and suitable for ritual use than Quenya. In other words, the parts of *HoMe* concerned with Valarin contribute to the religious affordances of Tolkien's literary mythology by supplying pieces of a language exceptionally fit for theurgy.

The last noteworthy theological motif that *HoMe* adds to *LR* and *S* is the notion that the Valar entered Eä with a "vassalage", a "great host of fair spirits" (*LT I* 59, 58).[458] Already in *S*, it is mentioned that some spirits of lesser stature than the Maiar entered Eä (*S* 4; 11), but no information is given about them and they do not appear in later tales. In *The Coming of the Valar*, these 'sub-Maian' spirits are divided into nine classes. Three of these classes are particularly important. These are the Oarni, spirits of the sea and helpers of Ulmo, and the the Mánir and the Súruli, "the sylphs of the airs and of the winds" (*LT I* 66) who accompany Manwë and Varda. Only these three classes of spirits play a role also in other *Tales*.[459] Two other groups of sea-dwelling spirits, the Falmaríni and the Wingildi, are mentioned only in *Coming* (*LT I* 66),[460] as are four kinds of nature-spirits who accompany Aulë and Yavanna. These are "the Nermir […] Tavari, Nandini and Orossi, brownies, fays, pixies, leprawns, and what else are they not called, for their number is very great" (*LT I* 66).[461] In *The Lost Tales*, Manwë, Ulmo, Aulë, and Melko are referred to as the "four great ones" among the Valar (*LT I* 58). Each is associated with one of the elements, and these associations are made explicit by their spiritual entourages. Manwë and his spirits are associated with the element Air, Ulmo with Water, Aulë with Earth, and Melko with Fire. *Coming* does not mention any fire spirits aligned with Melko, but from other *Lost Tales* and from *LR* we know that Melko has indeed fire spirits in his service, the chief of them being the Balrogs.

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[458] In *LT I*, Tolkien referred to these lesser spirits as the "lesser Vali" (*LT I* 65), indicating that the term Valar could be used in an expanded sense to refer to all the Ainur, great and small, who entered the World.

[459] The Oarni play an important role in *The Coming of the Elves* and in *The Tale of Eärendel*. The Mánir and the Súruli appear in *The Theft of Melko* and in the *Tale of the Sun and the Moon*. In the latter story they guide the Sun and the Moon in their course.

[460] A further kind of sea-dwelling spirits are the Oaritsi. The Oaritsi are not mentioned in *Coming*, but are hinted at in *The Hiding of Valinor* (*LT I* 227).

[461] The lesser spirits disappeared as *The Lost Tales* were developed into *S*. One possible reason was that Tolkien, to make room for a transformation of the Valar into angelic beings, wished to eliminate the lesser spirits, such as the Mánir and the Súruli, which he initially portrayed much like choirs of angels (e.g. *LT I* 181).

15.2.3. Cosmology in *The History of Middle-earth*

Most of the cosmological motifs in *S* are present already in *The Lost Tales*. For example, the World is constituted by two great land masses, the Outer Lands [Aman] in the East and the Great Lands [Middle-earth] in the West (*LT I* 68). Also, the Valar consecutively create three pairs of light sources, the Two Lamps which are destroyed by Melko, the Two Trees which are also destroyed, and the Sun and the Moon (*LT I* 68-73, 153, 179-195). A major difference between *S* and the *Tales*, is that Númenor is absent from Tolkien's initial cosmology. This means that there is also no Númenórean revolt against the Valar and no destruction of Númenor and no rounding of the world as a result of this revolt. As a consequence, all cosmological information in the *Tales* is about a flat world. Horizontally, the world is said to be surrounded by Vai, the Outer Sea (*LT I* 68, 214). Vai, in turn, is fenced in by the Wall of Things (*LT I* 214). Outside of this Wall lies the Void. The World is also surrounded by Vai in the vertical dimension. Beneath the World, Vai is an ocean on which the World floats; above the World, Vai is thinner and becomes Vaitya, the outermost 'air' (*LT I* 86). When not visible on the firmament, the Moon is said to travel through Vai beneath the World. At night, the Sun leaves the World through the "Door of Night" in the Wall of Things and re-enters the World each morning through the "Gates of Morn" (*LT I* 216). Between the surface of the earth and Vaitya are two other 'airs', Ilwë which "is blue and clear and flows among the stars", and Vilna which is closest to the surface and in which "the birds fly safely" (*LT I* 65).

In terms of religious affordances, the most important cosmological idea that *HoMe* adds to *S* and *LR* is that humans can still reach Valinor after it has been withdrawn from the physical world. No less than three roads lead from the human lands to The Blessed Realm. In *The Hiding of Valinor* we hear that two of these roads were fashioned on Manwë's initiative because he considered the Valar's withdrawal of Valinor to be a mistake and wanted to remedy it (*LT I* 211). With these two roads, the Olórë Mallë and the Ilweran, Manwë wanted to reconnect, so to speak, Valinor with the world of Men. In *Hiding* it is described that Irmo wove the first road, the Olórë Mallë or Path of Dreams, by "delicate magic" (*LT I* 211). It was by this road that the human children in the Cottage of Lost Play had come (*LT I* 18, 212). The second road was crafted by Oromë out of the golden hairs of his wife Vána. It is the Ilweran, the Rainbow or the Bridge of Heaven. By this road the Valar can visit Middle-earth, but Men cannot tread upon it (*LT I* 212-213). The third road has been in place since the creation of the World. It is the Qalvanda, the Road of Death, by which both Men and Elves go to the Halls of Mandos upon death (*LT I* 213).[462]

[462] Before the hiding of Valinor one could sail directly from Middle-earth to Valinor by the Straight Road. After the hiding of Valinor, this remains possible, but much more difficult (*LT I* 210-211). From *LR* we know that the Straight Road remained open for the Elves travelling from Middle-earth to Aman, but that it was closed for good after the last Elves had left Middle-earth.

The notion of the Olórë Mallë adds a significant religious affordance to Tolkien's mythology, for by this way living humans are said to be able to visit the land of the Valar. The significance of the Olórë Mallë increases further if one delves deeper into the meaning of the term *olor*. In *Hiding*, *olor* seems to refer simply to the dreams of night. This is the case, at least, when Vairë, the narrator of this particular tale, states that "no Man's eye beheld [the Olórë Mallë] save in sweet slumbers in their heart's youth" (*LT I* 211). In the *Unfinished Tales*, however, Tolkien says the following about the word:

> *Olor* is a word often translated 'dream', but that does not refer to (most) human 'dreams', certainly not the dreams of sleep. To the Eldar it included the vivid contents of their *memory*, as of their *imagination*: it referred in fact to *clear vision*, in the mind, of things not physically present at the body's situation. But not only to an idea, but to the full clothing of this in particular form and detail (*UT* 512-513; original emphasis).[463]

If *olor* can mean a "clear vision", then the Olórë Mallë becomes the 'Path of Visions' rather than the 'Path of Night Dreams'. It seems thus that this 'path' must be interpreted metaphorically, not as a physical road, but as a visionary pathway that allows one to see The Blessed Realm clearly in a vision of the imagination.[464] In other words, *HoMe* and *UT* present half a model for ritual interaction with Tolkien's narrative universe. They state *that* humans can have clear visions of Valinor, but reveal nothing about *how* a state of *olor* can be induced.

15.2.4. Afterlife and Eschatology in *The History of Middle-earth*

Let me finally touch upon the ideas which *HoMe* adds to *LR* and *S* concerning human and Elven afterlife and the end of the World.[465] As the Legendarium evolved, Tolkien remained quite consistent in his view on human afterlife. The core idea remained throughout that the human soul or spirit (*fëa*) leaves the body (*hröa*) after death and goes to the Halls of Mandos. There it waits until the Great End when it will be reunited with

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[463] The passage is part of an essay on the Istari. The meaning of *olor* is discussed in this context because Gandalf's name in Valinor, Olórin, is derived from it.

[464] The interpretation of the Olórë Mallë as a pathway of the imagination is disharmonious with the quite physical conception of the road in *The Cottage of Lost Play*. That does not make this interpretation invalid, however, for Tolkien soon abandoned the idea of a Cottage in Aman full of human children. By contrast, he continued to be fascinated with dream visions and built them into *LR* (cf. sections 7.1.4 and 14.1.2) and into the later frame stories discussed in section 15.1.2 above. The dream visions experienced by Alboin and Audoin in *The Lost Road* and by Ramer and Lowdham in *The Notion Club Papers* are quite similar to travelling the Olórë Mallë. What is different, though, is that these characters have visions of Númenor rather than Valinor, and that their visions are of Other Time, to speak with Ramer, rather than of Other Space.

[465] These are themes which kept returning in Tolkien's texts. For a fuller discussion of afterlife ideas in *HoMe*, I refer the reader to Whittingham (2008, ch. 5) and to Testi (2012). On eschatology, see Whittingham (2008, ch. 6).

Ilúvatar.[466] Because of the prospect of ultimate reunion with Ilúvatar, the human doom is referred to as a "gift" already in *The Music of the Ainur* (*LT I* 59; cf. *LR* 1035, 1063; *S* 316). In *The Drowning of Anadûnê* (*SD* 401), Tolkien introduced an additional soteriological motif. In this text humans express the belief that it was Ilúvatar's original intention that humans should be immortal and become like the Valar. Only the malevolent intervention of Melekō [Melkor] caused a Fall and the allotment of mortality to humans. Tolkien developed this idea in *Athrabeth Finrod Ah Andreth* (*MR* 309-311; cf. Whittingham 2008, 140, 145, 154-155).

Several texts in *HoMe* include interesting reflections on the afterlife of the Elves. Also in this case, certain core ideas remained unaltered throughout. From *The Lost Tales* through to *S*, it is clear that (a) Elves can only die "if they be slain or waste in grief" (*LT I* 59), and that (b) all Elves fade, but the Elves in Middle-earth fade faster than those in Valinor (*LT I* 166, 172-173; cf. Whittingham 2008, 133).[467] Tolkien was in many minds, however, about what happened to Elven souls after death. The original idea in *The Lost Tales* was that the Elven souls wait in Mandos until they are "reborn into their children" (e.g. *LT I* 59). This is a rather conventional form of reincarnation in which the soul survives death and migrates into a new body upon conception. In the early *Quenta Silmarillion*, the option of being reborn in this way is retained, but the dead Elven souls are given a choice between reincarnation and a purely spiritual existence. If they take the latter option they become "as spirits, taking form according to their own thought, as the lesser folk of the divine race" (*LROW* 247; cf. Whittingham 2008, 139).

Both motifs, reincarnation and spiritual existence, are developed in later writings. In *The Laws and Customs among the Eldar*, Tolkien adds that re-born Elves gradually regain the memory of their former lives as they grow up (*MR* 221). In a later piece, the *Converse between Manwë and Eru*, an entirely new 'technique' of reincarnation is introduced. Besides reincarnation through re-birth, Elves can be "re-housed" to a new body created by Manwë (*MR* 362; cf. Testi 2012, 55).[468] We might say that Tolkien's original idea of (a) reincarnation into the children without memory of one's former life gradually gives way via (b) reincarnation with eventual memory retrieval to (c) transcarnation with intact memory and personality.

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[466] A more complex eschatology is developed in *The Coming of the Valar*. In this text, Tolkien distinguishes between four temporary dooms for human souls awaiting the Great End. Some stay in Mandos and some are handed over to Melko who takes them to Angamandi, the Hells of Iron. Most souls are shipped to the plains of Arvalin where they "wander in the dusk". Only a happy few are invited to dwell and feast with the Valar in their capital Valmar (*LT I* 77). This idea of the four dooms was soon abandoned, however.

[467] In *The Lost Tales*, the difference in fading pace is partly explained as a result of the Elves in Valinor drinking *limpë*, a source of sustenance inspired by ambrosia. As the "wine of song" (*LT I* 97), *limpë* is also reminiscent of Bragir's mead of poetry from Norse mythology.

[468] Glorfindel is the only Elf in Tolkien's literary mythology who has been rehoused (or transcarnated) in this way (*PM* 377-378).

Many later texts operate with the option of a purely spiritual existence, although the conception differs from that in the early *Quenta Silmarillion*. Only in that particular text can Elves, after having gone to the Halls of Mandos, choose a spiritual existence. Tolkien immediately abandoned this idea, but introduced a somewhat similar form of afterlife in *Laws and Customs*. This text mentions that Elves who are slain or die of grief sometimes refuse to go to Mandos. These so-called "Houseless" Elves can live on as pure spirits (*MR* 233). In *Laws and Customs* it is further explained that Elven souls can lose their bodies also in another way, namely as a result of fading. Elves who do not leave for Valinor in time, but stay and fade in Middle-earth, will ultimately become spirits (*MR* 212; also *MR* 342-343). These so-called "Lingerers" (*MR* 224-225) will dwell in Middle-earth until the end. The Houseless and the Lingerers are described as being "invisible to mortal eyes, unless they will to be seen by some among Men into whose minds they may enter directly" (*MR* 212).

In *Laws and Customs* it is furthermore stated that many Elves believe that their spirits, like those of the Ainur and of Men, originate from outside Eä, and that they will therefore return to Ilúvatar at the end of the world (*MR* 220). According to this view, Men and Elves have the same ultimate doom. This stands in contrast, however, to most of Tolkien's other writings, in which the Elves are (near) immortal but bound to the world, while humans are mortal, but may look forward to escape the world at the Great End.

The notions of Elven afterlife sketched here offer interesting religious affordances. The notion that Elves, either by choice or by fading, can become spirits and appear to humans diminishes the difference between the Ainur (Valar, Maiar, minor spirits) on the one hand, and the Elves on the other. At the same time it increases the difference between humans, who are bound to a physical existence in this world, and Elves who either enjoy a spiritual existence in the physical world or a physical existence in the spiritual world (the Blessed Realm). As a result, a new conceptualisation of the Elves becomes possible. Where the Elves in *LR* and *S* are presented as 'perfect humans', they can now be seen also as a collective of lesser deities. Hence, we can expect *HoMe*-based religion to count on the existence of Elven spirit guides and to involve ritual communication with Elves as well as with Valar (and Maiar). At the same time, the difference between humans and Elves is diminished on another dimension, namely by the Elven belief that Elves and humans have similar souls with similar dooms, and by the human belief that humans were originally destined to immortality. Taken together with the developed conceptualisation of Elven reincarnation, this stress on the similarity of Elven and human souls provides some textual basis for the belief, encountered in earlier chapters, that Elven souls sometimes reincarnate in human bodies. While Tolkien nowhere explicitly mentions the possibility of such trans-species soul transfers, *HoMe* provides all the building-blocks needed to construct the notion.

As we have seen, Tolkien's ideas about individual afterlife grew in complexity over time. His eschatological ideas about the Great End of his narrative world changed also, although this change was rather one of style than one of scope. More than other aspects of his literary mythology, Tolkien's eschatological vision changed in character from pagan to Christian. In *The Lost Tales*, several tellers foresee a "Great End" involving the destruction of the Sun and the slaying of Melko in the last Great Battle (*LT I* 219). This cataclysm is followed by a Second Music in which the Sons of Men will join the Ainur (*LT I* 53, 59) and a perfect world will be made. This tale of world-destruction and world-rebirth, which is alluded to also in *LR* (981) and *S* (4), seems modelled on the Ragnarǫk myth of Snorri's Prose Edda. By contrast, the patently Christian notion of "the Old Hope" appears in the dialogue *Athrabeth Finrod Ah Andreth*. Andreth tells the Elf Finrod that some Men believe that "the One will himself enter into Arda, and heal Men and all the Marring from the beginning to the end" (*MR* 321; cf. Whittingham 2008, 157). In this version of the story no great destruction preludes re-creation. It is not up to the Valar and their entourage to defeat Melkor in the final battle; Melkor's Marring of Arda will be undone by Ilúvatar himself in his sovereignty. In this version, the eschatological events are not only bound to happen given the constitution of the world, but much more manifestly become part of Ilúvatar's soteriological plan.

15.2.5. Narrative Religion in *The History of Middle-earth*: A Summary

Concluding this section on narrative religion, we can say that *HoMe* adds additional religious affordances to *LR* and *S* in four significant ways. First, the Valar in *HoMe* are represented as more suitable partners for ritual interaction than their counterparts in *LR* and *S*. In *HoMe*, the Valar are no mere angels, but are identified as gods. They are even the 'real Gods' to whom the gods of human myth imperfectly refer. Second, while *HoMe* – like *LR* and *S* – includes no narrative rituals in which Elves or humans invoke the Valar, it offers some useful building-blocks for the creation of Valar-directed rituals. Most important is the notion of the Olórë Mallë, the pathway through which humans can 'visit' The Blessed Realm in visions. Of secondary importance are the words in Valarin which can be used to address the Valar in their own language. Third, *HoMe* affords ritual interaction with other spiritual beings besides the Valar. Besides the Valar who inhabit The Blessed Realm where they must be visited (or from which they must be invoked), *HoMe* counts on two classes of minor spiritual beings inhabiting the physical world. These are the collectives of lesser Ainur (sylphs, brownies, pixies, etc.) and those Elves who dwell in Middle-earth without a body (the Houseless and the Lingerers). These beings inhabit the physical world and sometimes let themselves be seen by humans. Hence, their inclusion in *HoMe* affords a belief in Elf/fay apparitions, in the existence of Elf/fay spirit guides, and so on. Finally, the diminished difference between Elven and human souls and the more developed conceptualisation of Elven reincarnation provides some textual legitimisation for the belief that some humans possess Elven souls.

15.3. The Religious Affordances of Tolkien's Letters and Essays

In this section, I analyse a selection of those non-narrative texts in which Tolkien reflects on the nature and possible truth of his literary mythology. I focus primarily on Tolkien's letters, a collection of which was edited and published in 1981 by Tolkien's biographer Humphrey Carpenter (*Letters*). These letters, written to fans, critics, publishers, friends, and family, concern *LR* and the yet unpublished *S*, and show how Tolkien thought about this literary mythology and how he experienced the writing process. The analysis of Tolkien's letters will be supplemented with a number of other sources. One of these is the essay *On Fairy-Stories* (*OFS*) which was presented in its original form as the Andrew Lang Lecture in 1938, but not published until 1947 in *Tree and Leaf* (*TL*). Another is an essay accompanying the short story *Smith of Wootton Major*. *Smith* was published in 1967, but the reflective essay was not published until 2005 (Tolkien 2005). It is worth considering Tolkien's reflective texts at this point because those Tolkien religionists who base themselves on *HoMe* are also interested in Tolkien as an author and hence in Tolkien's commentary on his narratives. What matters to these Legendarium Reconstructionists is the total sum of religious affordances possessed by the narrative corpus as a whole (*H*, *LR*, *S*, and *HoMe*) together with those religious affordances ascribed to this corpus by Tolkien's letters and essays.

The reflective texts considered here function as a kind of authorial prefaces to Tolkien's literary mythology, though they do not strictly speaking belong to that category. Real authorial prefaces, such as Tolkien's prefaces to *H* and *LR*, are published together with a main text to which it stands in a *paratextual* relation (cf. section 7.3.3). Tolkien's letters, by contrast, comment on his narratives but have not been published with them. For this reason they stand in another intertextual relation to the narratives which Genette terms *metatextual* (1997a, 4). The *Smith* essay likewise stands in a metatextual relation to the *Smith* short story. The essay stands in a more distanced relation to Tolkien's literary mythology, for though *Smith of Wootton Mayor* shares author and theme with the narratives about Middle-earth, it is set in a different fictional world and hence no part of the Middle-earth text corpus. *OFS* is also a metatext because it comments on other texts, but it is a metatext of a different kind than *Letters* and the *Smith* essay, because the subject is fairy-stories in general, rather than Tolkien's own particular tales. We can thus say that *Letters*, the *Smith* essay and *OFS* all stand in a metatextual rather than a paratextual relation to Tolkien's literary mythology, but that the intertextual distance is smaller between *Letters* and the narratives than between *OFS* and the narratives. Even so, all of these texts shed some light on how Tolkien thought about his own narratives, and they thus function, at least to some extent, in the same way as paratextual, au-

thorial prefaces.[469] That is to say, these texts are capable of ascribing religious affordances to Tolkien's literary mythology and to argument religious affordances already present.

Two different kinds of passages in Tolkien's letters and essays attribute religious affordances to his narratives. In the first kind Tolkien expresses a belief in – or at least a considerable fascination with – the religious motifs and paranormal phenomena occurring in his narratives. While Tolkien rarely engages in an explicit discussion of the veracity of his narratives, the very similarity between his personal beliefs and certain religious motifs in his narratives causes a semiotic quality of veracity to spill over from his reflective texts to the narratives. For example, Tolkien seriously seems to consider the possibility that a Faery Otherworld exists within the actual world, so even though he nowhere explicitly claims that the Otherworld in his narratives (The Blessed Realm) is a representation of the real Otherworld, it is easy to think that this was indeed was he believed.

The second type of religious affordances which the letters attribute to Tolkien's literary mythology concern reports of Tolkien's writing experience. In numerous letters, Tolkien expresses the belief that he was not the sole author of his literary mythology, but that parts of it were revealed to him. The accounts of Tolkien's *experience* of being inspired afford the interpretation that Tolkien *was indeed* inspired and that his narratives therefore include divinely sanctioned truth. Also here a semiotic effect of veracity is attributed to the Tolkien's literary mythology.

15.3.1. Thematisation of Veracity: Religious Affordances Attributed to Tolkien's Literary Mythology by Tolkien's Personal Beliefs

Tolkien was a Christian. Indeed, his friend George Sayer described Tolkien as "a devout and strict old-fashioned Catholic" (Birzer 1999, 46). More than that, Tolkien's Catholic convictions are apparent in his letters and other writings. In *OFS*, for example, Tolkien described the Christian Gospel as the ultimate fairy-story. It is a fairy-story because it offers hope and joy, and the ultimate fairy-story because, in contrast to normal fairy-stories, it is historically true (*TL* 62-63). Just as Tolkien was convinced that the Gospels' account of the Redemption was historical, he also believed that the Fall narrative in Genesis 3 had an historical core. As he writes in one letter, there "certainly was an Eden on this very unhappy earth" (*Letters* 110).

Tolkien described God as the "Author of Reality" and believed that he had a hand in the unfolding of history. Furthermore, Tolkien explicitly wanted to express this belief in his narratives. This intention becomes clear in a letter in which Tolkien discusses the

[469] This effect has been increased in two cases where Tolkien's metatexts have been published together with the narratives they comment on in later editions of those works. The 1999 edition of *S* includes a letter by Tolkien to his publisher Milton Waldman, and in 2005, Verlyn Flieger published the *Smith* essay (Tolkien 2005) together with the original short story and additional material (Flieger 2005b). In both cases Tolkien's metatexts were transformed into paratexts.

destruction of the Ring of Power. The reader will remember that Frodo, after having carried the Ring to Mount Doom, gives in to its power. He cannot destroy the Ring, but claims it for himself. At this point Gollum wrests the Ring from Frodo, but slips and falls into the crack. Unwittingly, Gollum secures the Ring's destruction (*LR* 946). On this scene, Tolkien writes: "the Other Power then [after Frodo's failure] took over: the Writer of the Story (by which I do not mean myself), 'that one ever-present Person who is never absent and never named'" (*Letters* 253).[470] While it is Gollum who wrestles the Ring from Frodo, we understand that Gollum is only God's instrument. Gandalf expresses faith in a supreme power at work in the world and he foresees that Gollum has a destiny (cf. section 7.2.1). It is only Tolkien's letter, however, that makes it clear that Gandalf's theology of Providence intentionally mirrored Tolkien's own faith in divine Providence in the actual world.[471]

Most of the supernatural elements in Tolkien's narratives (such as the Valar, magic, dream vision, and otherworlds) are not Christian in nature. It is more contested whether Tolkien believed that also some of these phenomena existed in the actual world. Providing a counterweight to the theological commentary on Tolkien's oeuvre, Verlyn Flieger, the *grande dame* of Tolkien Studies, argues that Tolkien probably (though not certainly) believed in the existence of Elves, hereditary memory, and a Faery Otherworld, just as he believed in God.[472] For our purposes, it is ultimately unimportant whether Tolkien really believed in these things or not. What matters is that passages in his writings afford the interpretation that he did and thus bestow a semiotic effect of veracity on the occult elements in Tolkien's literary mythology.

Let me start by considering Tolkien's possible belief in Faery. In *OFS*, Tolkien describes Faery (which he here spells "Faërie") as "the realm or state in which fairies have their being" and defines a fairy-story as "one which touches on or uses Faërie" (*TL* 15, 16).[473] Tolkien continues:

> Most good 'fairy-stories' are about the *aventures* of men in the Perilous Realm […] Naturally so; for if elves are true and really exist independently of our tales about them, then this also is certainly true: elves are not primarily concerned with us, nor we with them. Our fates are sundered, and our paths seldom meet (*TL* 16).

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[470] This scene is discussed in a similar way in letter no. 246 (*Letters* 326). In several other letters Tolkien refers to God as the Author of Reality (*Letters* 100-101, 215, 252).

[471] On fate and Providence in *LR*, see also Davenport (2003) and Hibbs (2003).

[472] The demonstration of Tolkien's occult fascinations runs as a red thread through Flieger's Tolkien scholarship (1997; 2002; 2005a; 2006; 2007; Flieger and Anderson 2008).

[473] Tolkien used the spellings Faërie, Faery, and Fayery interchangeably (Flieger 2005b, 85). In *OFS*, he also used a number of synonyms for Faery, namely Elfland (e.g. *TL* 13, 15), the Perilous Realm (e.g. *TL* 11, 16), and fairyland (e.g. *TL* 21).

All discussions of Tolkien's possible belief in Faery take off from these statements. Of course, *OFS* is generally concerned with the form and function of fairy-stories as a literary genre, not with the possible existence of Faery or elves in the actual world. It is therefore fully justifiable to assume that Tolkien here is speaking about Faery and elves as narrative phenomena that can be encountered *within* fairy-stories. The passages are sufficiently unclear, however, to afford also the reading that Tolkien is speaking about the actual world. Flieger, who approaches Tolkien's work with a baggage of Jungian-Campbellian myth theory, can therefore argue that Tolkien here sees Faery as "an altered state of consciousness" (2006, 183) that can be experienced by people in the actual world.

The second significant piece of writing in which Tolkien discusses the nature of Faery is the essay accompanying his fairy-story *Smith of Wootton Major*. Tolkien here reflects on the ontology of the fictional world of *Smith*. This world is two-tiered, consisting of World and Faery. The two are connected in such a way that elves can enter World whenever they desire, while only specially gifted humans are allowed entry into Faery (Tolkien 2005, 85). Like Tolkien's remarks on Faery and elves in *OFS*, his reflections in the *Smith* essay afford two readings. The mundane reading is that Tolkien simply reflects on matters within the fictional world and that these have nothing to do with the actual world. The alternative reading sees *Smith* as Tolkien's attempt to clarify for himself how he believed the real Faery in the actual world to be. Flieger adopts this alternative reading. Convinced by *OFS* that Tolkien believed in Faery but was unsure how to understand it, she interprets *Smith* as Tolkien taking "what was for a man of the rational twentieth century the far riskier position [riskier than seeing Faery as an ASC] that Faërie is or could be an actuality" (Flieger 2006, 183).[474] We can hypothesise that Tolkien religionists, who like Flieger bring inspiration from Jung and Campbell to bear on Tolkien's narratives, will also read *OFS* and *Smith* as evidence for Tolkien's belief in Faery, especially if they are familiar with Flieger's work. This might lead them to go one step further than Flieger and to straight-out equate Faery with the narrative world of Tolkien's literary mythology, thus taking Tolkien's (alleged) profession to believe in Faery as his profession to believe that his narrative world (or the Otherworld included within it) is also real, either as an expression of some altered state of mind or as an independently existing alternate world.

In *OFS*, Tolkien not only talked about Faery and elves. He also wrote that "[i]n dream strange powers of the mind may be unlocked" (*TL* 19). This statement can be read as Tolkien's testimony that true dream visions, such as those experienced by Frodo and

[474] In their critical edition of *OFS*, Flieger and Donaldson write about the term 'Faërie' that it is "possibly the single most important term in Tolkien's critical lexicon, with a complex of referents. He used it to mean the Otherworld beyond the five senses – a parallel reality tangential in time and space to the ordinary world; he used it to mean the practice of enchantment and magic, especially through the use of words, for example spells or charms; and he used it to mean the altered mental or psychological state brought about by such practice" (2008, 85).

Merry in *LR* (cf. section 7.1.4 above) and by Ramer and Lowdham in *The Notion Club Papers* (cf. section 15.1.2 above), can really take place. This interpretation gains credibility when read together with Tolkien's account of a recurrent and strange dream of his, the dream of the Great Green Wave which he continuously built into his stories. In a letter to W.H. Auden, Tolkien writes:

> I have what some might call an Atlantis complex. Possibly inherited, though my parents died too young for me to know such things about them, and too young to transfer such things by words. Inherited from me (I suppose) by one only of my children, though I did not know that about my son [Michael] until recently, and he did not know it about me. I mean the terrible recurrent dream (beginning with memory) of the Great Wave, towering up, and coming in ineluctably over the trees and green fields (*Letters* 213).

In another letter, Tolkien describes his "Atlantis-haunting" as a "legend or myth or *dim memory of some ancient history*" that keeps troubling him (*Letters* 347; emphasis added). As these passages show, Tolkien believed that some dreams are out of the ordinary and that his Great Wave dream was one of them. More than that, he seemed to believe that in this dream he was re-experiencing an inherited memory.

Immediately following the passage on the 'Atlantis complex', Tolkien continues his letter to Auden with another experience of hereditary memory. He writes, "I am a West-midlander by blood (and took to early West-midland Middle English as a known language as soon as I set eyes on it)" (*Letters* 213). Does this passage mean that Tolkien believed that his ability to learn rapidly the language of his mother's West-midland ancestors was due to him possessing some inherited memory of that language? Perhaps Tolkien believed; perhaps he just played with the ideas. In any case these passages afford a reading that Tolkien believed that 'strange powers' can indeed be unlocked in dreams, and that one of these powers is the ability to access the memory of one's ancestors.[475]

As we have seen in section 15.1.2 above, Tolkien built a hereditary memory motif into *The Lost Road* and *The Notion Club Papers*. Now, *OFS* and the letters show that Tolkien probably considered these pieces to be fictional narratives *about a real paranormal phenomenon*.[476] Since Tolkien worked his own dream into his stories, the letters also af-

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[475] It might strike a contemporary reader as odd that Tolkien, a respectable scholar and devout Catholic, possibly believed in hereditary memory. As Flieger (2007) convincingly argues, however, Tolkien was simply influenced by the ideas of his time. First of all, J.W. Dunne's theory of "serial memory", advanced in *An Experiment with Time* (1927), likely inspired *The Lost Road*. Briefly stated, Dunne assumed that 'time travel' is possible because everything takes place at the same time. Flieger further suggests that Tolkien may have been influenced by Jung's notion of the collective unconscious and convincingly argues that he must have been familiar with other fiction writers exploring the theme hereditary memory in the 1920s and 1930s (2007, 104).

[476] Flieger is convinced that the strange powers which Tolkien refers to in *OFS* "are powers of recall by the unconscious mind capable of taking memory beyond personal experience and history into a realm which Tolkien clearly saw as metaphysical, and just as clearly believed to be possible" (2007, 106).

ford the more far-going reading that parts of Tolkien's narratives, at least the part about the destruction of Númenor-Atlantis, are descriptions of historical events which Tolkien's ancestors had experienced and which Tolkien himself had re-experienced in dream visions. In other words, Tolkien's discussion of his Atlantis complex not only affords the interpretation that Tolkien took his stories to be fictional narratives about real paranormal phenomena, but also affords the interpretation that Tolkien considered his stories to have a true core that is at the same time revealed and historically true.

Tolkien discusses the relation between his literary mythology and actual history in several other letters. For example, he writes the following about the truth of his own mythology in a letter to Milton Waldman from 1951:

> These tales are 'new', they are not directly derived from any other myths and legends, but they must inevitably contain a large measure of ancient wide-spread motives or elements. After all, I believe that legends and myths are largely made up of 'truth', and indeed present aspects of it that can only be received in this mode; and long ago certain truths and modes of this kind were discovered and must always reappear (*Letters* 147).[477]

Tolkien here says that myths and legends, *including his own*, contain a large amount of truth. It is not immediately clear what Tolkien means by 'truth', however, and therefore also this passage affords two readings: Either Tolkien considered myths and legends (and his own mythology) to include historical truths, or he considered them to include truths of an ahistorical character. The first reading is possible in the light of the Númenor-Atlantis letters discussed above, but context shows that the second reading must be the intended one. Earlier in the same letter Tolkien explains that "[m]yth and fairy-story must, as all art, reflect and contain in solution elements of moral and religious truth (or error), but not explicit, not in the known form of the primary 'real' world" (*Letters* 144). It is furthermore clear from the letter that Tolkien considered his own stories to thematise moral truths (and errors) through the actions and choices of the characters, and that the religious truths expressed concerned such themes as God, Fall, and Mortality (*Letters* 145).

Even if Tolkien did not intended his narratives to be read as history, he certainly worked tirelessly to constitute them as plausible 'feigned history' (cf. sections 7.3.1 and 15.1 above). In another letter to Auden he comments on the feigned history ploy, writing: "I am historically minded. Middle-earth is not an imaginary world. [...] The theatre of my tale is this earth, the one in which we now live, *but the historical period is imaginary*" (*Letters* 239; emphasis added). In a later letter to Rhona Beare, Tolkien reflects at greater length on the relation between his mythology and the historical record:

> [I]f it [Tolkien's literary mythology] were 'history', it would be difficult to fit the lands and events (or 'cultures') into such evidence as we possess, archae-

[477] The letter was an unsuccessful attempt to persuade Waldman to publish *S* together with *LR* as one narrative whole.

> ological or geological, concerning the nearer or remoter part of what is now called Europe; though the Shire, for instance, is expressly stated to have been in this region […]. I could have fitted things in with greater verisimilitude, if the story had not become too far developed, before the questions ever occurred to me. I doubt if there would have been much to gain; and I hope the, evidently long but undefined, gap in time between the Fall of Barad-dûr [the destruction of the Ring] and our Days is sufficient for 'literary credibility', even for readers acquainted with what is known or surmised of 'pre-history'. I have, I suppose, constructed an imaginary *time*, but kept my feet on my own mother-earth for *place* (*Letters* 283; original emphasis).

In this passage, Tolkien makes clear that his stories are fictional and that the aim of anchoring them in the actual world is not to achieve *literal credibility*, but *literary credibility*. He wanted to create what he in *OFS* calls a "Secondary World", that is a fictional world so consistent and deep that a reader will accept it as real while reading (*LT* 36). Samuel Coleridge classically referred to this acceptance as the reader's "willing suspension of disbelief". Tolkien finds that expression misleading, however, because Coleridge seems to suggest that readers believe in the fictional tale in the same way as they believe in facts within the actual world. That is not the case. As Tolkien puts it, successful fairy-stories and other pieces of literature produce "literary belief" (*LT* 36) or "Secondary Belief" (*LT* 45), i.e. the belief that what the narrator says is true *within the fictional world*. Such secondary belief is different both from disbelief and from "Primary Belief" in the sense of belief that something is true of the primary world (or the actual world).[478]

To sum up this section, Tolkien's letters and essays show that Tolkien did not wholeheartedly promote a referential reading of his narratives. Nowhere does he clearly claim that his literary mythology has an historical core. With the exception of his equation of Ilúvatar with God, he also does not promote his stories as fictional stories about real supernatural entities. In other words, Tolkien does not explicitly promote a mytho-historical or a mytho-cosmological reading of his narratives. Even so, there are several passages that afford a reading that Tolkien believed his tales to possess some measure of cosmological and historical factuality. Tolkien's probable belief in hereditary memory and his possible belief in Faery and elves, together with the fact that these three phenomena are built into Tolkien's narratives, indirectly afford a mytho-cosmological approach to the entire literary mythology. For if there is an overlap between narrative motifs and Tolkien's beliefs on these three points, then the same might go for other parts of the narrative world's inventory (such as the Valar). Furthermore, Tolkien's discussion of his inherited dream of the destruction of Númenor-Atlantis suggests that his literary mythology tells at least partially of events that have taken place in the actual world. The

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[478] Tolkien's distinction between primary belief and secondary belief is synonymous with Michael Saler's distinction between naïve belief and ironic belief discussed in section 2.3 above.

passages on the Atlantis haunting hence indirectly afford a mytho-historical reading of Tolkien's literary mythology.

15.3.2. Divine Inspiration: Religious Affordances Attributed to Tolkien's Literary Mythology by Tolkien's Experience of Revelation

Tolkien often had the feeling that he was not in control over the writing process, but that ideas, characters, and sometimes entire stories 'came through' to him from another source. Consider as an example a passage from a letter that Tolkien wrote to his son Christopher in 1944. Tolkien was at that time working on *The Two Towers*, and of the chapter "Treebeard" he writes: "What happens to the Ents I don't yet know. […] [T]he thing [*LR*] seems to write itself once I get going, *as if the truth comes out then*, only imperfectly glimpsed in the preliminary sketch" (*Letters* 104; emphasis added). Reflecting on his Ent chapter 11 years later, Tolkien expresses the same feeling that this part of *LR* developed beyond his conscious control. To W.H. Auden he writes:

> Take the Ents, for instance. I did not consciously invent them at all. […] I like Ents now because they do not seem to have anything to do with me. I daresay something had been going on in the 'unconscious' for some time, and that accounts for my feeling throughout, especially when stuck, that I was not inventing but reporting (imperfectly) and had at times to wait till 'what really happened' came through (*Letters* 211-212).

These Ent passages constitute only two examples among many in which Tolkien expresses a sense of "reporting" (or "recording") rather than "inventing". Consider another example, again from a letter to Christopher. "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. […] Faramir, the brother of Boromir" (*Letters* 79; emphasis added). In another letter Tolkien says about *LR* in general that "parts seem (to me) rather revealed through me than by me" (*Letters* 189); and in yet another he confesses: "I have long ceased to *invent* […] I wait till I seem to know what really happened. Or till it writes itself" (*Letters* 231; original emphasis). "[O]n the matter of the Third Age", writes Tolkien, "I regard myself as a 'recorder' only" (*Letters* 289).

Tolkien not only felt to be recording *LR*; he had the same feeling about the tales comprising *S*. To Milton Waldman he explained that these tales "*arose in my mind as 'given' things*. [… A]lways I had the sense of recording what was already 'there', somewhere: not of 'inventing'" (*Letters* 145; emphasis added). Also his short story *Leaf by Niggle* arose as a given thing. To Stanley Unwin – who later published *Leaf* together with *OFS* in *Tree and Leaf* (*TL*) – Tolkien explained, "I woke up one morning (more than 2 years ago) with that odd thing [*Leaf*] virtually complete in my head. It took only a few hours to get it down, and then copy out. I am not aware of ever 'thinking' of the story or composing it in the ordinary sense" (*Letters* 113).

Tolkien's experience of reporting, recording, or revealing – rather than inventing – his stories affords three interpretations. The straightforward interpretation is that there is nothing special about it and that Tolkien was well aware of that. All writers know the feeling that ideas 'come to them', but this can be accounted for simply as unconscious material entering consciousness. According to this naturalistic interpretation Tolkien did not believe his ideas to stem from a source outside himself. That this was indeed Tolkien's view is supported especially by the letter to Auden in which Tolkien seems to consider the emergence of the Ents a result of a stirring in his 'unconscious'.

A second possible interpretation is that Tolkien believed to be inspired by God. Support for this interpretation can be found in *OFS* where Tolkien discusses the category of "true fairy-stories (or romances)". These stories are not pure *inventions*, but also include some measure of *inspiration* (*TL* 62n1) which allows them to offer a "sudden glimpse of the underlying reality or truth" (*TL* 61-62). This truth was for Tolkien a very particular one: the Christian *evangelium* (*TL* 62-63). When authors of fairy-stories succeed in conveying a glimpse of this truth, the inspiratory source is the Christian God. As we saw in the previous sub-section, Tolkien seems in some letters to consider his literary mythology to be a collection of such 'true fairy-stories'. This could imply that he believed his source of inspiration to be the Christian God. That this may have been Tolkien's conviction is most clear in a late letter from 1971 in which he describes himself as a "chosen instrument" (*Letters* 413). It seems, however, that Tolkien was afraid that an overly explicit assertion of his belief to be a chosen instrument might come across as improper and arrogant, for he surrounds the term with scare quotes and states that one should not "puff up" chosen instruments, but remember their "imperfections" and their sometimes "lamentable unfitness for the purpose" (*Letters* 413).

A third interpretation is that Tolkien believed to draw inspiration from a source outside himself other than the Christian God. Taken together with his general fascination of dream visions and other transpersonal phenomena, Tolkien's feeling of inspiration can be read as the experience of breaking through to another reality – to the collective unconscious, perhaps, or to Faery. Flieger holds this interpretation and backs it up with an anecdote told by Simonne d'Ardenne, a close friend of the Tolkiens, in the memorial volume *J.R.R. Tolkien: Scholar and Storyteller* (Salu and Farrell 1979). As Flieger tells the story, d'Ardenne "recalled saying to [Tolkien] once, à propos his work: "You broke the veil, didn't you, and passed through?" […] [D'Ardenne] adds he "readily admitted" that he had done so" (Flieger 2002, 9; inner quotes d'Ardenne 1979, 34). Flieger interprets this as Tolkien's confirmation that he believed to have penetrated "beyond normal perception into another reality, one always present but not readily accessible" (2002, 9).

For the purpose of this book it matters not what Tolkien really believed. What matters are the textual affordances of his letters and essays. In earlier chapters we have seen that Tolkien's fictional narratives afford two readings. The dominant fictional affordances invite the reader to take the texts as mere fiction, but the narratives at the same time include sufficient religious affordances to be read alternatively as fiction about real

supernatural entities. Also Tolkien's letters and essays include different sets of textual affordances. Roughly speaking, we can distinguish between two sets. Contrary to the textual affordances of the narratives, however, both sets of textual affordances possessed by the reflective texts invite the reader to approach the narratives as having some supernatural referents. The first and dominant set of textual affordances presents a Tolkien who considers his narratives to include references to the Christian God and to Christian truths and who possibly also believed to be God's chosen instrument. The reflective texts afford also another, sub-dominant set of textual affordances. These textual affordances promote the reading that Tolkien believed to have broken through to another reality and that he built his own transpersonal experiences into his narratives for others to emulate. This second reading, which Flieger adopts, goes together with and reinforces a reading of the narratives as referring to real otherworlds, spiritual beings, and paranormal phenomena. According to this line of reasoning, Tolkien's reflective texts include the implicit proposition that his narratives reveal aspects of another world – Faery or a part of Faery – and that some of the characters of his stories (besides God) really exist within that alternate world. In other words, Tolkien's essays and letters can be read as metatexts prescribing a mytho-cosmological approach to his literary mythology, either of a Christian or of a Pagan/occult kind.

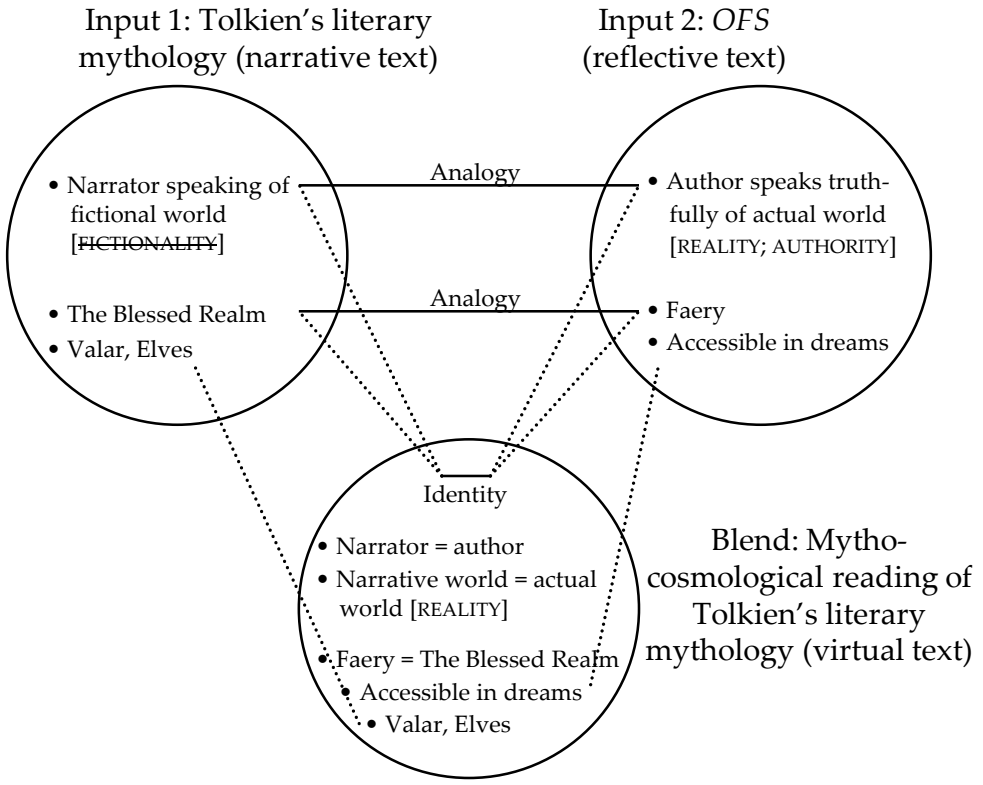
15.3.3. The Veracity Spill-Over Effect as Conceptual Blending

In the preceding two sub-sections we have seen that Tolkien's letters and essays contain passages suggesting that Tolkien himself believed in some of the supernatural phenomena that appear in his literary mythology, and other passages that demonstrate that Tolkien felt inspired during the writing process. Both kinds of passages ascribe an effect of veracity to Tolkien's narratives. I have so far not systematically discussed how this effect is achieved semiotically. Let me therefore now consider the 'veracity spill-over effect' as a case of conceptual blending.

As the reader will remember from chapters 4 and 10, conceptual blending refers to a semiotic and cognitive process in which a blended space is created out of information from two (or more) input spaces through processes such as selective projection and the compression of Vital Relations. When Tolkien's narrative texts (input 1) are read in the light of his reflective texts (input 2), a blended space arises constituted by a new interpretation of the narrative texts. This blended space includes semiotic representations and meta-representations projected from both input spaces. In figure 15.1 below, I have illustrated how this can lead to veracity spill-over so that Tolkien's narratives are interpreted as referring to real supernatural entities in the actual world. Please note that the model is simplified, as it does not take the different readings afforded by both narratives and reflective texts into account. It represents only the dominant reading afforded by the narratives, namely that they are entirely fictional, and only one of the possible readings affor-

ded by the reflective texts, namely that Tolkien did indeed believe in paranormal phenomena, such as the existence of Faery.

Figure 15.1. Example of Veracity Spill-Over from Reflective to Narrative Texts

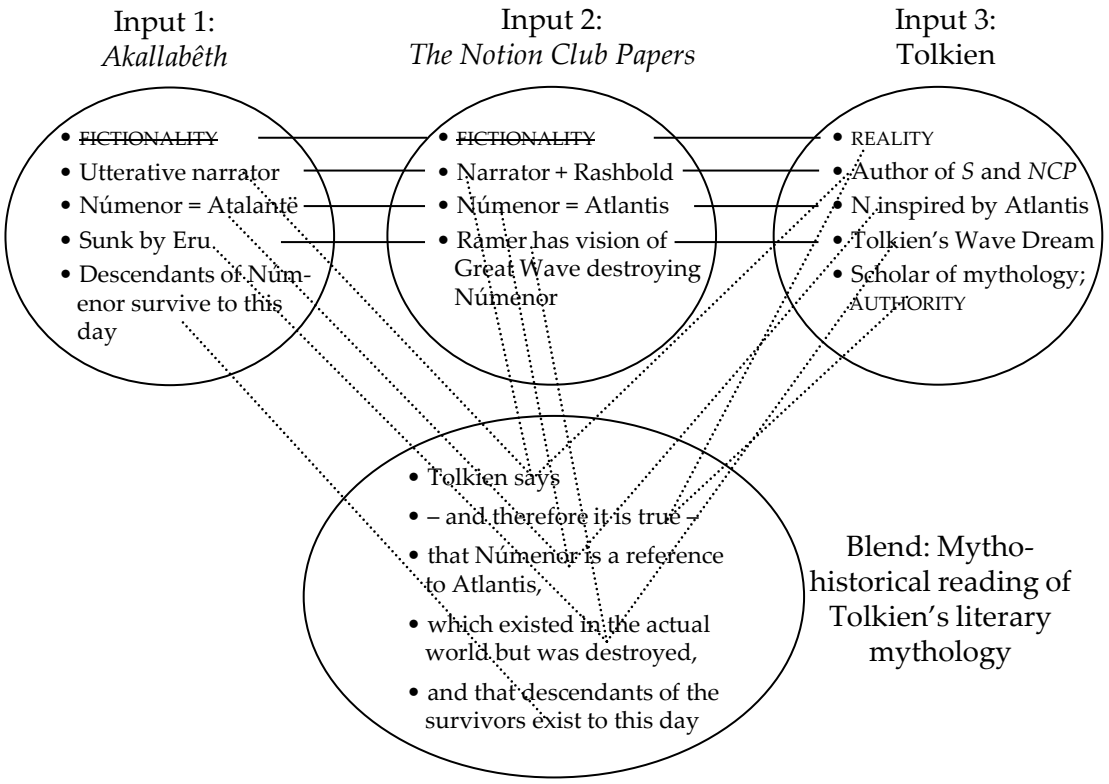


As the figure shows, the veracity spill-over effect includes both compression of Vital Relations and selective projection. Most importantly, the narrator of Tolkien's literary mythology (Input 1) and Tolkien the author (Input 2) are identified with each other. This has the effect of changing the textual reference world of the narratives. The narratives are no longer seen as a narrator's discourse about a fictional world, but as Tolkien's discourse about the actual world. In other words, a semiotic effect of REALITY is projected into the blend from Input 2. Hereby, an overlap is claimed to exist between the inventory of the textual actual world and that of the actual world itself. In our example that means that the reader accepts the postulate afforded by the reflective text, that the actual world includes a Faery Otherworld as part of its inventory. This effect of anchorage is dependent upon, or at least reinforced by, another meta-representation of AUTHORITY, i.e. the notion that Tolkien is not mistaken and does not lie, but gives accurate information. Not only is the Otherworld believed to be real, it is also believed that it was Tolkien's intention *as author* to convey real truths about it.

The identification of the actual world as the narratives' reference world allows a second compression of Vital Relations to take place, namely between the Blessed Realm

and Faery. In the blend, the Blessed Realm is identified as Faery.[479] This operation, in turn, allows further representations in the input fields connected either to the Blessed Realm or to Faery to be co-projected into the blended space. As shown in the figure, the Valar and Elves (inhabitants of the Blessed Realm in Input 1) can thus be projected into the blended space and become conceptualised as inhabitants of Faery. Similarly, the notion that Faery can be accessed in dream visions can be projected into the blended space to produce the notion that one can interact with the Valar when having visions of Faery/the Blessed Realm. All in all, the figure shows an example of how Tolkien's reflective texts can reinforce already present religious affordances in the narratives to produce a mytho-cosmological reading of Tolkien's narrative mythology.

Figure 15.2. Mytho-historical Reading Afforded by Frame Story and Letters



As pointed out in section 15.1 above, the frame stories in *HoMe* can reinforce the religious affordances of the rest of Tolkien's literary mythology in much the same way as Tolkien's letters and essays. The strongest effect is achieved when frame stories and reflective texts work together. Towards the end of section 15.1.3, I analysed how *The Notion Club Papers* and the *Akallabêth* – when read together and with Tolkien's letters – afford a

[479] It should be mentioned that Tolkien himself came close to identify these two places with each other. In a draft to one of his early tales, Tolkien referred to Elvenhome as "Fairyland" (*LT I* 110). In *H*, Elvenhome is referred to as "Faerie in the West" (*H* 194).

mytho-historical reading of Tolkien's literary mythology. Let me here offer a graphic depiction of that analysis conceived in terms of conceptual blending.

15.4. The Religious Affordances of *The History of Middle-earth* and Tolkien's Letters and Essays: A Summary

Let me round off this chapter by formulating four hypotheses about the form that religion based on *HoMe* and Tolkien's reflective texts can be expected to take given the religious affordances of these texts. First of all, we must hypothesise that *HoMe*-based religion will be focused on the Valar and treat them as a full-fledged pantheon. This hypothesis follows directly from the clear identification of the Valar as Gods, the additional information given about them, the notion that they are the 'real Gods' to which human myths refer, and the idea that their abode, The Blessed Realm, can be visited or perceived in visions. By contrast, *HoMe* does not afford the veneration of the Elves as deities or even as expressions of archetypal powers. Based on differences in religious affordances, a maximal difference on the issue of deities can thus be expected between Tolkien religion based on *LR* and Tolkien religion based on *HoMe*. It is possible that the Elves will also play a role in *HoMe*-based religion other than as deities, for also the Elves can be visited in The Blessed Realm and according to *HoMe* some of the Elves linger as spirits in the physical world where they sometimes show themselves to humans.

Second, it can be hypothesised that Tolkien religion based on *HoMe* and on Tolkien's letters and essays will approach Tolkien's literary mythology in a mytho-cosmological mode (or possibly even in a mytho-historical mode). This follows from the fact that the frame narratives in *HoMe* and Tolkien's reflective texts provide much stronger support than *LR* and *S* for the position that Tolkien himself considered his narratives to be fictional tales about real supernatural phenomena, such as elves, a Faery Otherworld, and hereditary memory. Already in earlier chapters we have encountered a mytho-cosmological approach to Tolkien's literary mythology, but there is reason to believe that *HoMe*-based religion will be different. The mytho-cosmological approach that we have seen so far considers Tolkien's entire world, including Middle-earth, to be situated on another plane. By contrast, and assuming that *HoMe*-based religion will indeed be focused on the Valar, this must be hypothesised to go together with a two-tiered cosmology that identifies Middle-earth with our physical world and stages The Blessed Realm as (part of) the actual world's Otherworld.

Third, and in contrast to *S*-based religion, religion based on *HoMe* cannot be expected to necessarily involve a self-identification as Elves. This is not because the representation of the Elves is different, for also *HoMe* presents the Elves as wiser and in other ways superior to humans. The significant difference is that where *S* is presented from an Elven perspective (and *H* and *LR* from a Hobbit point of view), most of the significant texts in *HoMe* are "Mannish" (as Tolkien put it). For example, while the *Lost*

Tales are recounted by Elves, they are told to Eriol and it is this human traveller with whom the reader is invited to identify. Also the two time travel frame narratives anchor Tolkien's literary mythology in an explicitly human (and contemporary) world much more forcefully than does the human compiler-narrator in *LR*. Furthermore, some stories in *HoMe* come in both Elven and Mannish versions; and *Athrabeth Finrod Ah Andreth* even has a human and an Elf discuss an issue from the perspective of their respective races. In short, *HoMe* includes both Elven and Mannish viewpoints, and that makes it impossible to predict whether *HoMe*-based religion will go together with Elven self-identification or not.

Fourth, it can be hypothesised that religion based on *HoMe* and Tolkien's reflective texts will take Tolkien as a spiritual role model. We may expect this given Tolkien's discussion of his inspiration experiences and of his Great Wave dream. If Tolkien is here saying that he received insights, through various transpersonal means, about the Otherworld and about the distant history of this world, then we may assume that *HoMe*-based religionists will wish to emulate him. However, since neither *HoMe* nor Tolkien's reflective texts reveal whether or how Tolkien actively induced his transpersonal experiences, we cannot predict how *HoMe*-based religion will take shape ritually. Given the notion of the Olórë Mallë, however, we may hypothesise that the induction of visionary trance will play a role.

Finally, let me formulate a fifth meta-hypothesis, namely that the nature of *HoMe*-based religion will be easier to predict than was the case with *LR*-based, *S*-based and movies-based Tolkien religion. I think so simply because *HoMe* includes many more religious affordances than the other texts, thus leaving fewer empty slots that must necessarily be filled with material from other-than-Tolkien sources.

Chapter 16. Legendarium Reconstructionism: A Case Study of Tolkien-based Religion

In the previous chapters of part II we have seen how elements from Tolkien's literary mythology have been integrated into existing traditions of fairy spirituality and Neo-Paganism in many different ways. This chapter explores how some Tolkien religionists go one step further, seeking to construct a spiritual tradition focused exclusively, or at least primarily, on Tolkien's Legendarium. The discussion focuses on two groups in particular, Tië eldaliéva (Qu: The Elven Path; founded 2005) and Ilsaluntë Valion (Qe: The Silver Ship of the Valar; founded 2007). The two groups emerged online in the years after Peter Jackson's *LR* movies, but do not draw much on the movies for inspiration. Instead, they draw extensively on *HoMe* and *S*, supplemented with Tolkien's letters and essays, the appendices to the book version of *LR*, and minor pieces of Tolkien's that were not included in *HoMe*, but have been published elsewhere.

Ilsaluntë Valion hived off from Tië eldaliéva in 2007, but the two groups continue to work closely together. Since their inception, the two groups combined have had a core membership of 7-9 individuals who have contributed substantially to the development of the groups' rituals and spirituality. There has been little turnover in this core group. The two groups have also had a stable amount of peripheral members who read the forum and perhaps use the groups' rituals, but who contribute little to the development of the groups. The number of peripheral members has stayed within the 10-20 range, but in this group the turnover has been significantly higher than in the core group.

One fundamental principle underlies the religious practice of Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion: Tolkien's Legendarium sets the borders for the groups' collective spiritual project. That is to say, the groups' rituals are designed to explore the Legendarium and the Legendarium alone, though forum discussions can involve a comparison of Tolkien's literary mythology with other mythologies. In contrast to the Tribunal of the Sidhe, for example, rituals in Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion are always aimed at communicating with the Valar and the Quendi; members never address deities from other pantheons. The two groups' ideal is to avoid religious blending and the members of Ilsaluntë Valion stress this by distancing themselves from "syncretic" uses of Tolkien's texts in their Charter. The ambition has instead been to construct a full-fledged and independent tradition by systematising the scattered information on narrative religion in *HoMe* and by adding 'Tolkien-true' inventions by the members to fill out the gaps where needed. In practice, some degree of religious blending has proved unavoidable, but loans from

other religious traditions have been restricted to ritual techniques and to strategies for rationalisation and justification. Furthermore, such loans have been adapted and 'Tolkienised' through a process of inward acculturation so that members no longer experience them as foreign to the Legendarium. For these reasons, the Tolkien spirituality of Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion must be categorised as fiction-based (and Tolkien-based) in the strict sense of the word, i.e. as 'religion that takes fictional texts as its very foundation'. It is not merely fiction/Tolkien-integrating religion, i.e. 'religion integrating belief elements from fiction, re-enacting fictional rituals, and/or adapting identities from fiction' (cf. chapter 2).

For lack of a better term, I refer to the religionising style of Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion as 'Legendarium Reconstructionism'. I do so because the two groups' approach to Tolkien's literary mythology to a large extent mirrors how Reconstructionist Pagans approach pre-Christian mythologies. It is furthermore similar to how the so-called Reconstructionist wing of the Tolkien language community uses Tolkien's Elvish languages.

Reconstructionist Pagans are characterised by three things. First, they concentrate on one particular mythological corpus, such as Celtic or Greek mythology. In this respect they differ from 'eclectic Pagans' who freely combine across traditions. Second, Reconstructionist Pagans, as the name suggests, seek to reconstruct the ancient religion to which their mythology belongs. In principle, they have a *Sola Scriptura* approach that takes the written sources to be the ultimate arbiters of which beliefs and practices can be considered legitimate within the tradition. This approach entails a problem, however, for often the sources include myths only, but no descriptions of how to perform rituals. In practice therefore, the sources can be supplemented with new material in two ways – and that is the third characteristic of Reconstructionist Paganism. Reconstructionist Pagans adopt modern rituals from established branches of Neo-Paganism, especially Wicca, and have developed sophisticated divinatory and interpretive procedures to achieve knowledge ("gnosis") of cosmological, theological, and other matters on which the mythological sources are silent.

In the Elvish language community, the term Reconstructionism carries a slightly different meaning than in modern Paganism. Traditionally, the Elvish language community simply studied Tolkien's own writings in Quenya and Sindarin together with his writings about these languages (e.g. on phonology and etymology), but during the so-called ELF-conners controversy in the early 1990s a Reconstructionism faction began to challenge this emphasis on Tolkien's own use of the Elvish languages. The Reconstructionists wanted to go beyond Tolkien's texts to 'recreate' a canon of standard Elvish by (re)constructing new words based on the known Elvish vocabulary, using the same techniques as linguists employ when reconstructing lost word forms in dead languages.[480] They also used Tolkien's languages creatively, for instance for the composition of

[480] The most important product of this endeavour is David Salo's *Gateway to Sindarin* (2004).

poetry. The Reconstructionists were opposed by the so-called ELF-conners, the editorial team in charge of publishing Tolkien's linguistic material on behalf of the Tolkien Estate. Led by *Vinyar Tengwar*[481] editor Carl F. Hostetter, the ELF-conners defended the status quo of 'studying but not using' Tolkien's languages and suggested that the dictionaries, grammars, and poetry produced by the Reconstructionists infringed the copyright held by the Tolkien Estate. As a result of the ELF-conners controversy, in the Elvish language community Reconstructionism has come to connote a relatively free *use* of Tolkien's languages as opposed to the mere *study* of them. In their own self-understanding, the Reconstructionists are the truer heirs to Tolkien's languages as they aim to emulate Tolkien's creative spirit. The Elvish Reconstructionists received a gigantic boost when their leader, David Salo, was asked to write the Elvish dialogue for the *LR* movies.

The Legendarium Reconstructionists of Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion approach Tolkien's literary mythology in much the same way as Pagan and Elvish Reconstructionists. Most importantly, they have adopted Tolkien's pantheon (the Valar) and creatively reconstructed an Elven ritual calendar. They also explore Tolkien's mythological world to achieve gnosis that can shed light on aspects of this world that are not described in detail in the written 'lore'. Furthermore, the two founders of Tië eldaliéva answered affirmatively when asked in a radio interview in August 2007 on Eclectic Pagan Podcasts whether their path could be characterised as Reconstructionist.[482] They confirmed that their path was Reconstructionist in character because it "stays true to the Legendarium". They also emphasised, however, that they did not use this designation themselves because they felt it to give the wrong impression that they were recreating the religion "of the Elves 5000 years ago or something" when in fact they were constructing a path that was "useful for humans today". This does not make their practice different from Pagan Reconstructionism, however, for also Pagan Reconstructionists ultimately create new traditions for the present time rather than aiming to revive ancient cultures precisely. Norse Reconstructionists or Heathens, for instance, sacrifice fewer horses and meditate more than did the Vikings.

Since Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion are intimately connected, it makes the most sense to discuss them together. In this chapter, I will therefore draw on material from both groups to analyse Legendarium Reconstructionism as a mode of Tolkien religion. The chapter builds on very extensive communication with Calantirniel (Lisa Allen) and Nathan Elwin, the two co-founders of Tië eldaliéva, and with Gwineth and Eruannlass,

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[481] *Vinyar Tengwar* (Qu: Newsletters) is a journal published by the Elvish Linguistic Fellowship (E.L.F.). The fellowship's homepage can be found at http://www.elvish.org/VT/ [140114]. The Elvish Linguistic Fellowship hosted four E.L.F. cons between 1991 and 1994. Bill Welden, who organised most of the E.L.F. cons, still regularly organises conventions about Tolkien's invented languages, now under the name Omentielva. See http://www.omentielva.com/index.htm [090214].

[482] The podcast can be downloaded from http://eclecticpagan.libsyn.com/webpage/epp-26-the-elven-path [300712]. The discussion of the term Reconstructionism can be found around the 40th-43rd minutes of the interview.

who both have later served as 'Captains' (or main moderators) in Ilsaluntë Valion. The discussion is based also on additional interviews with Llefyn Mallwen (T-e) and with Ellenar, Lomelindo, Turwaithian, Elfwillow, and Sinziana (IV), and on analyses of the homepage of Tië eldaliéva (at various points in time) and of the public section of Ilsaluntë Valion's forum. Additionally, I draw on a large body of information on rituals, including 79 written formats and 14 recordings of Skype rituals. I participated in one of these Skype rituals myself in September 2009 with members of Tië eldaliéva. For this chapter, I have also used a 2007 podcast interview from Eclectic Pagan Podcasts with Calantirniel and Elwin and a number of published, written sources, namely two interviews with Calantirniel about Tië eldaliéva (Giles 2009; Carding 2012, 257-260) and a few short pieces written by Calantirniel herself (2008a; 2008b).[483] Finally, I have met in person several times with Gwineth of Ilsaluntë Valion. Gwineth and Elwin of Ilsaluntë Valion, and Calantirniel and Alyras of Tië eldaliéva, have kindly commented on a draft of this chapter.

The chapter falls into four sections. In the first section, I sketch the history and social organisation of Legendarium Reconstructionism online. As I will demonstrate, Tië eldaliéva did not emerge out of thin air, but was preceded by other groups and swallowed up a few of these. Measured in membership and activity level, Tië eldaliéva peaked during the years 2006-2007, but the group increasingly struggled with differences of opinion on how to approach the Legendarium most properly. This resulted in the hive-off of Ilsaluntë Valion in late 2007. Yet, this was as much a re-start of the group as a schism, for most members joined Ilsaluntë Valion, and even those who continued to identify with Tië eldaliéva were allowed to join the new Ilsaluntë Valion forum with the status of 'Honored Guests'. On some occasions in 2008, the two groups even did Skype rituals together, and some members hope to revive this practice in the future. Going into the background of the members of Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion, I show that the core members were engaged in Neo-Paganism, Tolkienology (i.e. intellectual Tolkien fandom), or both before joining. In broad terms, Legendarium Reconstructionism can thus be seen as a convergence of Tolkienology and Pagan Reconstructionism, just as Middle-earth Paganism can be conceptualised as a convergence of *LR* fandom and eclectic Wicca (cf. section 14.2.1 above). Even so, both Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion include non-Pagan members, most of whom are Christians. To some extent, Pagans and non-Pagans have been able to work together, but not all non-Pagans in Ilsaluntë Valion have been comfortable with the strong Neo-Pagan influence. In late 2012, they therefore created an independent sub-forum on the Ilsaluntë Valion site which they named Anima Mundi (Soul of the World) and on which they discuss their explicitly non-Pagan and "gnostic" spirituality.

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[483] The podcast can be downloaded from http://eclecticpagan.libsyn.com/webpage/epp-26-the-elven-path [300712].

In the second section I discuss religious blending in Legendarium Reconstructionism, focusing the analysis on the groups' collective rituals. I choose this focus, partly because I have more detailed information on the rituals of Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion than on the rituals of any other group within the spiritual Tolkien milieu, and partly because the ritual formats provide a condensed overview of the groups' core beliefs. The members of Tië eldaliéva originally created a core ritual by adapting Wiccan circle-casting to Tolkien's literary mythology in a manner inspired by the Fifth Way Mystery Group's High Elvish Working (cf. ch. 13 above). Furthermore, they crafted an Elven ritual calendar with solar and lunar observances by combining evidence in the lore with inventions of their own. After the hive-off, Ilsaluntë Valion reworked both the lunisolar calendar and the ritual format to make it fit the Legendarium more closely. The members expelled all non-Tolkienesque notions (e.g. references to chakras), substituted some of the Wiccan-inspired rites for Legendarium-based inventions of their own, and changed the overall structure of the ritual from an evocation of the Valar to a journey in the imagination to the Blessed Realm. Two processes of ritual invention can be discerned in the development of Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion's collective rituals. One is the blending process of inward acculturation by which rites from Wicca and ceremonial magic were adapted to Tolkien's literary mythology and increasingly assimilated. The other process is intra-traditional elaboration, here in the form of the invention of ritual elements that emulate existing rites, but are constructed bottom-up as strictly Legendarium-based alternatives. The group rituals originally took place via the phone or on Skype, but this practice was eventually given up. Gradually, it became normal practice to carry out the group rituals individually, and this allowed for an increased importance of individual rituals that did not strictly follow the group format.

The third section concerns the rationalisation and justification in Legendarium Reconstructionism. As I will show, there is general agreement on four things: (1) There exists a non-physical dimension of reality which one can tap into in meditation; (2) Tolkien's narratives, letters, and essays demonstrate that Tolkien himself had experiences of this aspect of reality; (3) Tolkien's works therefore provide a "means of transportation" into this other reality; and when using his works as such (4) one can communicate with the Valar and the Quendi. Opinions differ, however, on three other things, the first two of which pertain to rationalisation. The first point of disagreement concerns the relation of Middle-earth to our own world. Some members consider Tolkien's Middle-earth to correspond in some way with the distant past of our physical world, while others consider both the Blessed Realm *and* Middle-earth to exist within the non-material sphere of reality, often referred to as the Imaginal Realm or Faery. In other words there is tension between a mytho-historical and a mytho-cosmological reading of Tolkien's literary mythology. A related point of disagreement concerns the nature of the Quendi, the Elves of Tolkien's writings. Some members feel that the Quendi refer to a class of beings who used to inhabit the physical world as corporeal beings and whose genes can still be found in the human gene pool. Others perceive the Elves in more spiritual terms

and consider it possible for humans to possess partly Elven souls, or argue that the Elves exist only within the Imaginal Realm. The third point of disagreement concerns justification rather than rationalisation. Members disagree on the question whether it is possible to argue for or even prove the reality of the Valar and the Quendi and of Tolkien's narrative world, and on the related questions whether such an attempt at objectivisation is necessary or desirable. This debate does not only take place internally in Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion, but also involves clashes with Legendarium Reconstructionists who are not members of these groups. Concluding the third section, I revisit the hypotheses on *HoMe*-based religion formulated in chapter 15 to evaluate whether Legendarium Reconstructionism has in fact taken the form which *HoMe*'s repertoire of religious affordances led me to predict.

In the fourth and final section, I revisit the question why the Legendarium Reconstructionist online communities have been relatively more successful and stable than the online communities discussed in chapter 14. As possible reasons I suggest superior forum moderation and group leadership together with the presence of older and more knowledgeable members. Also of importance is the very fact that Legendarium Reconstructionism draws on a much larger text corpus than Middle-earth Paganism. With *HoMe* as one's foundational text corpus, there is simply more to digest and discuss and that alone makes for longevity compared to spirituality based mainly on the *LR* movies.

16.1. History and Social Organisation of Legendarium Reconstructionism

Tië eldaliéva was founded in August 2005 on the initiative of two Americans, Nathan Elwin and Calantirniel. In this section, I sketch the history and social organisation of this group and its successor, Ilsaluntë Valion. I give also some information on the members of the two Legendarium Reconstructionist groups, pertaining both to numbers and social profile. I begin with a short overview of the events that led up to the formation of Tië eldaliéva.

16.1.1. The Prehistory of Legendarium Reconstructionism Online

By 2005, Elwin had been searching for almost three decades for people sharing his conviction that Tolkien's Legendarium was not just fiction, but "mytho-history with euhemeristic elements". He had started his search in the mid-1980s, first through bulletin board systems and FidoNet and later on the Internet. Along the way, Elwin had found many individuals who used Tolkien's works spiritually, but unlike Elwin, who wanted a strictly Legendarium-based spirituality, these other individuals always embedded a selective use of Tolkien's literary mythology within another, usually Neo-Pagan, framework.

Elwin felt most affinity with individuals who asserted that Tolkien's works included a deeper form of esoteric knowledge or 'gnosis'. In particular, a lecture by Stephen Hoeller called "J.R.R. Tolkien's Gnosis for our Day" made a strong impression. In this lecture, the long-time leader of the Ecclesia Gnostica in Los Angeles explained that Tolkien had visited the Imaginal Realm and that his narratives reflected the gnosis which Tolkien had so achieved.[484] Upon listening to Hoeller's lecture around 2001, Elwin decided to found a group himself devoted to the "gnostic" exploration of the Legendarium, but the initial attempt mostly attracted the attention of "detractors" wanting to make fun of his project. A few years later Elwin bought and read *The Magical World of J.R.R. Tolkien* (Knight 2001), a book by the British occultist Gareth Knight. Like Hoeller, Knight emphasised the gnostic character of Tolkien's writings, but Elwin ultimately found that he was more interested in fitting the Legendarium into his own esoteric system than in exploring it for its own sake. Even so, Elwin did value an elaborate pathworking ritual by Vivienne O'Regan which was published as part of the book (Knight 2001, 49-71). This ritual would later be among the sources of inspiration for Legendarium Reconstructionist rituals.[485]

Perceiving in 2005 that the spiritual interest in Tolkien was booming as a result of the *LR* movies, Elwin decided to try again to create an online community for individuals interested in a mytho-historical and gnostic exploration of Tolkien's literary mythology. In February 2005 he founded the newsgroup UTolk (short for United Tolkienists) on Yahoo Groups! and this time, Elwin attracted people who sincerely wanted to work spiritually with Tolkien's literary mythology. As we have seen in chapters 11 and 14, a large number of spiritual Tolkien groups sprung up on Yahoo Groups! around this time,

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[484] In section 16.3 on rationalisation, I return to the meaning of the terms 'gnosis' and 'the Imaginal Realm'. Hoeller's lecture was given on 2 October 1998 and has been online since late 1998. It can be downloaded from http://bcrecordings.net/store/index.php?main_page=page_4 [300114]. The website of the Ecclesia Gnostica can be found here: http://www.gnosis.org/eghome.htm [300114].

[485] Knight is an occultist in the tradition of Dion Fortune and his book offers an interpretation of Tolkien's writings as "a fleshing out of Qabalistic doctrines" (2001, 13). Knight's interpretation floats between a mythopoeic and a mytho-cosmological reading of Tolkien's literary mythology. On the one hand, Knight characterises Tolkien as a "mythopoeic writer" (2001, 8, 46) and considers the Valar to be expressions of more fundamental archetypes (2001, 17). As a mythopoeic work, Knight emphasises that Tolkien's mythology constitutes "basic material" for magical work and "sequences of initiation" that is as adequate as any other mythology (2001, 4). On the other hand, Knight sometimes adapts a mytho-cosmological stance, stating that Tolkien's Legendarium tells the accurate history of another world located on the astral ethers. Knight speculates that Tolkien's "imagination was reading off deeper levels of existence and experience that had an objective validity of their own" (2001, 39). He even goes so far as to suggest that Tolkien was "reading the akashic records", i.e. that he had "imaginative access to the record upon the subtle ethers of all that has ever happened" just as it has been claimed about Madame Blavatsky, Rudolf Steiner, and Edgar Cayce (Knight 2001, 39). The book on Tolkien's magical world was originally published in 1990 as a part of a larger work, *The Magical World of the Inklings* (Knight 1990). O'Regan's pathworking ritual was already included in this version (Knight 1990, 136-151).

and not surprisingly, Tolkien-integrating Pagans and self-identified Elves found their way to UTolk.[486] This was much to Elwin's dismay, for in his eyes these Pagans and Otherkin were misusing the Legendarium by reinterpreting it according to spiritual world-views other than its own. Even so, the Elves, some of whom identified straight-out as Quendi, were allowed into UTolk together with Pagans of various backgrounds, and many of these individuals joined Tië eldaliéva upon its inception later in 2005.

UTolk was Tië eldaliéva's most direct precursor, but Middle-earth Reunion: The Alternative Tolkien Society must also be mentioned. Like UTolk, Middle-earth Reunion was a meeting place for individuals interested in a spiritual approach to Tolkien's literary mythology, and both Elwin and other Tolkien religionists subscribed to the society's journal, *Reunion: the Journal of Middle-earth Studies*. More importantly, it was *Reunion*'s editor Martin Baker who introduced Elwin and Calantirniel, the two founding members of Tië eldaliéva, to each other.[487] It is furthermore worth introducing Middle-earth Reunion at some length, as the society not only facilitated the birth of Legendarium Reconstructionism proper, but also illustrates that there are many individuals with Legendarium Reconstructionist tendencies outside those online groups which are the focus of this chapter.

Middle-earth Reunion was founded in 1996 as a so-called "smial" (i.e. division) of the Tolkien Society, but broke off from the mother-organisation in 2001. *Reunion*, the alternative society's quarterly magazine, was published from 1996 until Baker withdrew in 2005 and both journal and society were discontinued.[488] The subtitle of the journal, *The Journal of Middle-earth Studies*, suggests an intellectual fanzine devoted to Middle-earth Studies (or Tolkienology),[489] but the journal also printed articles about fey apparitions

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[486] United Tolkienists is still located at http://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/utolk [121213]. Since the end of 2005, it has no longer been open to non-members and it is mostly used as a safe place to store links and other material.

[487] Also other Tolkien religionists besides Elwin and Calantirniel subscribed to *Reunion*, including Laurasia of Middle-Earth Pagans. After losing contact with Martin Baker, members of Ilsaluntë Valion later established close contacts with other former contributors to *Reunion*. The Martin Baker who used to edit *Reunion* is not the same person as the Martin Baker who did audience research on the reception of the *LR* trilogy and whose work was cited in the general introduction.

[488] The society's homepage is still online and selected articles from the journal are still available. Middle-earth Reunion can be visited at http://alt-tolkien.com [100114]. A selection of articles authored by roughly 20 different contributors can be read at http://alt-tolkien.com/byissue.html [100114].

[489] Intellectual Tolkien fans use the terms Middle-earth Studies and Tolkienology to distinguish their diligent studies of Tolkien's writings from the activities of the mainstream fan culture around *LR*. The two terms are synonyms. Middle-earth Studies/Tolkienology takes account of *S* and *HoMe* and is devoted to the study of Tolkien's world as if it were a real world. Rather than role-playing in Middle-earth or writing fan fiction, Tolkienologists learn Quenya and write articles such as 'Flowers and Trees in Middle-earth' or 'Power-structures in Hobbit Society', to take two imagined examples. Along another axis, Middle-earth Studies can be distinguished from Tolkien Studies, where the latter refers to studies of Tolkien's texts which

and articles connecting Tolkien's narratives to Western esotericism.[490] Baker himself contributed an article on pathworkings within Tolkien's world.[491] Most importantly, Baker wrote a whole series of articles in which he claimed that the "Tresco manuscript", which had come into his possession via a certain Alice Bailey, proved the historicity of the Legendarium.[492]

It is not always easy to determine how serious the contributions to *Reunion* were. As far as I can determine, Baker and the other contributors were seriously interested in Western esotericism and considered Tolkien's literary mythology to be spiritually powerful in the same way as other myths. The articles about fey apparitions also seem to express a sincere belief in the reality of elves, even if it remains unclear whether the authors believed that their own unusual experiences indeed were encounters with elves. Baker's articles on the Tresco Manuscript extended Tolkien's feigned history ploy by cementing the connection between Middle-earth and Anglo-Saxon England which Tolkien had never managed to develop to his own satisfaction.[493] Even so, Baker did not consider his work to be mere fan fiction, but told Elwin that to him the Tresco Manuscript and related lore was "intensely "real", if not "actually" true".[494]

Like Elwin, Calantirniel found her way to Middle-earth Reunion where Baker put the two in contact with each other. The journey that took her there was very different from Elwin's, but Calantirniel's background and discovery of Tolkien's literary mythology is more typical for the members of Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion in general. Calantirniel's spiritual journey began when her former boss, an attorney who used astrology to win his cases, drew up a birth chart for her (2008a, 189). Completely baffled by the divinatory power of this technique, Calantirniel went on to study astrology herself,

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ultimately attempt to shed light on something *outside* the textual universe, for example Tolkien's personal beliefs, his mythological sources, or the intended 'message' or 'morale' of his stories.

[490] The articles on fey apparitions include one by Baker (http://alt-tolkien.com/r13home11.html [100114]) and one by the British artist Ruth Lacon (http://alt-tolkien.com/r18hawthorn.html [100114]). An article by Rey Arnold on Tolkien's world related to the Qaballah and the Tarot can be accessed here: http://alt-tolkien.com/r12qabbala.html [100114].

[491] The pathworking article can be accessed at http://alt-tolkien.com/r2pworking.html [100114].

[492] The most important article on the Tresco Manuscript is entitled "New Middle-earth: Exploring Beyond the Mountains". It was published in *Reunion* 1 (June 1996) and can be accessed online at http://alt-tolkien.com/samples/r36/r36nme.html [090114].

[493] Baker states that his article neither concerns the actual world, nor Tolkien's narrative world, but a third, "sub-created world" which he refers to as "New Middle-earth". This world is "[t]o all intents and purposes […] identical to the primary world we all inhabit, with one important exception: within it the 'Middle-earth' related by the late Professor JRR Tolkien in *The Lord of the Rings* is not fiction, but historically true". See http://alt-tolkien.com/samples/r36/r36nme.html [090114]. Baker's reference to an Alice Bailey must be a nod to the influential British theosophist who died in 1949 and cannot be the same person as the Alice Bailey from whom Baker allegedly obtained the manuscript in the early 1990s.

[494] Baker wrote so in an email to Elwin dated 6 April 2005.

and when I first talked to her in 2009, she worked professionally as an astrologer and had also been certified as a healer within several traditions, including Reiki and flower essences. On a more personal level, Calantirniel began to identify as a Neo-Pagan. Bringing an astrologer's fascination with the stars into her Pagan practice, Calantirniel studied the expression of the Star Queen deity in various mythologies, as Isis, Astraea, Arianrhod, and so forth. Having Celtic and German ancestors, she wished to integrate the Star Queen within a Celtic/Teutonic Pagan tradition (Calantirniel 2008a, 191-192).

While this was going on, the *LR* movies premiered and Calantirniel became fascinated by the depiction of the Elves. In an interview in the *Psychic Times International*, she even said that she felt that "Tolkien had a more "correct" idea about the Elven archetype; more so than other mythologies and cosmologies I had explored in the past" (Giles 2009, 7). An Otherkin friend of Calantirniel's even told her that she was an Elf and asked her whether she knew it; even though Calantirniel found that too exaggerated a claim, she took it as a sign of her special resonance with elves. A few years later, in 2005, Calantirniel finally read *S* and discovered the Celtic/Germanic-inspired Elves and their main deity Varda, the Star Queen. It was a perfect fit.[495] Within a few weeks of hectic online networking she found Elwin, and together they decided to create a spiritual path embodying Tolkien's mythos. Soon she took the Elvish name Calantirniel, meaning (Lady) Guardian of the Gift of Light in Sindarin.

Most of the members of Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion tell stories of spiritual seeking and homecoming which are similar to Calantirniel's, though not always as elaborate. Most have a background as Neo-Pagans of some sort and are either long-time Tolkien fans or became deeply moved by the movies and went on to read the books. Common for them all is that they feel that Tolkien's literary mythology "resonates" better with them than does any other mythology or tradition. Besides Elwin and Calantirniel, the core group that founded Tië eldaliéva in 2005 or joined later and helped develop the group during 2006 and 2007 included the following individuals: (1) Lomion, a Wiccan who helped make the Tië eldaliéva "birthing ritual" (cf. section 16.2 below); (2) Llefyn Mallwen, a Canadian practitioner of witchcraft, energy-work, and Ninjutsu; (3) Niennildi, Elwin's wife and a metaphysical Christian; (4) Lomelindo, who had a background in Heathen Reconstructionism and had been active in Middle-Earth Pagans and in the

[495] An account of the spiritual awakening and search that led Calantirniel to Tolkien-based Elven spirituality has been published in the *Llewellyn's 2008 Witches' Companion* (Calantirniel 2008a). Editor Sharon Leah changed the order of the paragraphs, however, so that it is seems that Calantirniel first became intrigued with the Star Queen in her expression as Varda and only subsequently went on to study expressions of the Star Queen in other mythologies. In fact, the chronology was the reverse, and one wonders whether editor Leah consciously wanted to downplay the primacy given by Calantirniel to Tolkien's mythology. In any case, Calantirniel distributes the original version of "How the Star Queen Changed My Life" (2013a) through the Tië eldaliéva website. Calantirniel has also published a number of other small pieces, including 24 spells (or short meditations) in the *Llewellyn's 2009 Witches' Spell-A-Day Almanac* (Calantirniel 2008b) of which five are related to Tië eldaliéva.

Legendarium Reconstructionist group Faer en Edhel Echuiad (Si: the Spirit of the Elf Awaken Again); and (5) Ellenar, who had practised different forms of ceremonial magic and Paganism and says that he has been able to communicate with fairies and elementals since childhood.

16.1.2. The History of Legendarium Reconstructionism Online I: Tië Eldaliéva

It is useful to distinguish between two phases in the development of Legendarium Reconstructionism online, a formative phase from 2005 to 2007 and a consolidation phase from the Ilsaluntë Valion hive-off in November 2007 to the present day. The formative phase was characterised by a collective feeling of having found a spiritual home and by optimism about the group's future cohesion and growth. Leading up to the official launch of Tië eldaliéva with the 'birthing ritual' on 23 August 2005, a group of core members had settled on a name for the new group and devised the format for the birthing ritual. In the time that followed, the ritual format was further developed and collective rituals were performed over the phone and later on Skype on the occasion of all the solar and lunar holidays of Tië eldaliéva's own Elven ritual calendar (cf. section 16.2 below).[496] On 23 January 2006, a discussion forum was launched on the bulletin board hosting site Freebb.com, and the forum remained active until Freebb.com closed its services on 30 August 2007.[497] In early August 2007, a homepage was also launched which included general information about the group, a breakdown of the group's main beliefs, and an elaborate FAQ section.[498]

Sections 16.2 and 16.3 below discuss Tië eldaliéva's rituals and beliefs in more detail, so let me here just point out three things that characterised the group in its first years of existence. First, the Tië eldaliéva presented itself as an Elven form of spirituality. This is witnessed by the meaning of the group's very name, The Elven Path, and as Calantirniel put it, the guiding question in developing this path was 'What would the Elves do?' Indeed, Tië eldaliéva declared on the homepage that the group's aim was to "re-create, as closely as possible the original spirituality and way of the Elves, and in

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[496] Already the birthing ritual was done over the phone. In December 2006, Tië eldaliéva began to use Skype instead of the phone and also began to record their rituals. I have a number of recorded rituals from the period December 2006 to September 2007.

[497] The forum was hosted at http://51.freebb.com/tieeldalieva/. The various posts and articles on the forum are no longer avaible, but the forum homepage has been captured by the Wayback Machine as it looked on 16 March 2007. See http://web.archive.org/web/20070316070517/ http://51.freebb.com/tieeldalieva/ [140114].

[498] Tië eldaliéva's original homepage used to be situated at http://www.lassiquendi.com/ TheHiddenRealm/ and at http://www.thehiddenrealm.org, but is no longer online. Portions of the homepage have been captured by the Wayback Machine. The main page, as it looked on 8 August 2007, can be accessed here: http://web.archive.org/web/20070810184835/ http://thehiddenrealm.org/ [240114]. Through the left-hand menu one can link to the "Beliefs" page and to the "FAQ" page. Other portions of the original homepage have not been saved.

particular of the "Quendi" […] described in JRR Tolkien's […] writings".[499] Everyone who resonated with the "Elven archetype" or felt to be an "elf-friend" interested in the "innate wisdom of the Elves" was welcomed. Given this profile, it is not surprising that Tië eldaliéva attracted members from other, less successful, Tolkien-affirming Elven groups. Especially, Tië eldaliéva swallowed up core members from the Eldalondë Society and from Faer en Edhel Echuiad, a group that had been active from December 2004 to mid-2006 and was explicitly focused on reviving the religion and culture of the Grey-elves in Middle-earth during the Second Age.[500] The members of Tië eldaliéva made it clear, however, that their group was not an Otherkin group. While the Tië eldaliéva members sympathised with the Otherkin's fascination with elves, they also found them too obsessed with their identity and too far-going in their claim to be non-humans trapped in human bodies. Rather than focusing on Elven identity, Tië eldaliéva focused on the *wisdom* of the Elves. The group's members identified primarily as humans, though they believed it to be possible for humans to possess a partly Quendian soul or some portion of Quendian genes.

Second, Tië eldaliéva was Reconstructionist in character. On the original homepage, the group compared its approach to that of Reconstructionist Heathens and referred to *S* as a kind of "Bible" for their path and more generally to Tolkien's Legendarium as the "framework or BASIS".[501] A core aim was therefore to build a tradition of rituals and beliefs based on Tolkien's mythology, including a standard ritual format, a ritual calendar, a system of correspondences based on the fourteen Valar, and tradition-specific symbols. In the process, the group drew on *HoMe* and *Letters* as well as on *S*. Both in interviews with me and on the homepage, members of Tië eldaliéva clearly distanced themselves from Middle-Earth Pagans and similar groups who in their eyes merely integrated random pieces of Tolkien's literary mythology into a Wiccan frame. Tië eldaliéva wanted a tradition based exclusively on the Legendarium, though it was considered legitimate to add beliefs and practices that had no explicit grounding in Tolkien's texts as long as no information in the Legendarium explicitly spoke against it and a strong need was felt for them to be included. While members sought to keep the Elven Path exclusively Tolkien-centred, they considered it merely one valid spiritual path among others.

The third characteristic of Tië eldaliéva was its Neo-Pagan profile. Most members saw Tië eldaliéva not only as one spiritual path among others, but as one *Pagan* tradition

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[499] This information was given on the group's main page.

[500] The Eldalondë Society was a Tolkien-affirming Elven group that took its name from Eldalondë, a port city on the Western coast of Númenor whose name means "the land-locked haven of the Eldar". The Eldalondë Society still has a page on LiveJournal, see http://eldalonde-socie.livejournal.com/ [260114]. The ProBoard of Faer en Edhel Echuiad is still online at http://shadowwolf2005.proboards.com/index.cgi [080114]. I included both groups in the overview of second wave Tolkien religion online, cf. figure 14.1 above.

[501] This information was given on the group's main page and beliefs page.

among others. After joining Tië eldaliéva, these members continued to identify primarily as Pagans and typically continued to be engaged in other forms of Paganism. While accepting Tolkien's works as foundation of Tië eldaliéva's practices, these Pagan members were therefore also interested in comparing Tolkien's Valar and Maiar with the gods and goddesses of other pantheons and in interpreting Tolkien's works in the light of various esoteric teachings.

Not all members were equally happy with the Elven, Reconstructionist, and Neo-Pagan profile of Tië eldaliéva, and it was partly unresolved tensions pertaining to these three emphases which caused the schism in November 2007. The first cause of tension was Tië eldaliéva's explicitly Elven approach. Some members did not identify with the Elves and wanted a more Mannish approach, or at least an approach open to both Elvish and Mannish perspectives. These members pointed out that many key texts in *HoMe* had a human point of view, and the tension between the 'Elvish only' and the 'blended Mannish/Elvish' takes on Tolkien's Legendarium thus reflected their defenders' relative emphasis on either *S* or *HoMe*. Second, some members with a background as non-Pagan Tolkienologists grew uneasy with the Pagan mode of Reconstruction that allowed Legendarium-foreign elements to be added to the tradition. This group wished for a purer form of Reconstructionism, exploring Tolkien's literary mythology completely on its own terms. A third and related tension concerned how the Legendarium should be approached ritually. One group preferred relatively elaborate rituals based on ceremonial magic and Wicca. Another group wanted simply to explore the Legendarium in individual meditations of a "natural shamanic" character, occasionally with the help of entheogenic allies such as Salvia Divinorum.

Ironically, the two Tië eldaliéva founders disagreed on all three points with the remaining members falling somewhere in between. Calantirniel stood for a continued Elven-centred, Pagan Reconstructionist, and ritualistic approach; Elwin wanted a balanced Mannish/Elvish, purely Legendarium-confined, and natural-shamanistic approach. Elwin decided to break off in November 2007, and a new forum for Ilsaluntë Valion was launched in December 2007.[502] I suppose that the timing of the schism was determined partly by the fact that the Tië eldaliéva forum had gone offline in late August 2007 and that a new forum was needed in any case. At any rate, the fact that Tië eldaliéva had no working forum meant that most members followed Elwin into Ilsaluntë Valion no matter whether they agreed with him or not. That is to say, the hive-off had more the character of a restart than of a schism. A handful of the original Tië eldaliéva members continued to identify as such and did not officially become members of Ilsaluntë Valion, but even so, the two most important Tië eldaliéva members, Calantirniel and Llefyn, joined the Ilsaluntë Valion forum. Officially they had the status of 'Honored Guests' rather than members, but they participate on equal terms in the discussions. Together with other Tië eldaliéva members, Calantirniel and Llefyn continued to use Tië eldaliéva's rituals, while

[502] Ilsaluntë Valion's forum is located at http://westofwest.org/ [250114].

the members of Ilsaluntë Valion devised a new ritual format. Both groups continued doing rituals on Skype (Tië eldaliéva) or over the phone (Ilsaluntë Valion) throughout 2008, and members from both groups also did two rituals together in that year.

16.1.3. The History of Legendarium Reconstructionism Online II: Ilsaluntë Valion

The new profile of Ilsaluntë Valion was laid down in a Charter and later in a FAQ article on the public part of the forum. Regarding Elves, it was stressed that Ilsaluntë Valion was no group for Otherkin, and also not for people who profess to have an affinity with the elven archetype. It was emphasised, however, that Ilsaluntë Valion was on friendly terms with the latter group, i.e. the members who had stayed in Tië eldaliéva. Embracing a combined Mannish/Elvish approach, Ilsaluntë Valion took the notion of the Line of Lúthien (cf. section 9.2.1 above) as a cornerstone of its teachings, asserting that Maian and Elvish blood had entered the human gene pool in the past and that some humans therefore possess a divine spark and some measure of Elvishness. In any case, Ilsaluntë Valion cast the Quendi as ancestors and role models, not as a race to which they themselves claimed to belong. Concerning the mode of Reconstructionism, Ilsaluntë Valion explicitly delegitimised the adaption of Pagan and ceremonial magical elements into the group's rituals and teachings. The only additions to Tolkien's own writings that were still deemed legitimate were Legendarium-based inventions and revelations acquired in Legendarium-induced trancework. While still welcoming Pagan members, Ilsaluntë Valion made it clear in the Charter that it was not Neo-Pagan as a group.

Positively, the Charter described Ilsaluntë Valion as a "Gnostic Research Group" whose goal was to explore the Imaginal Realm, connect with its inhabitants, and to use "the knowledge thus obtained to enrich our lives and add to our collective body of knowledge". To reflect this new focus, the group chose the name Ilsaluntë Valion which means 'Silver Ship of the Valar' in Tolkien's Qenya. The name had a double symbolism. In Tolkien's mythology, Ilsaluntë is a poetic name for the moon (*LT I* 192, 255, 284). Furthermore, the Charter explains that the ship metaphor "uses the symbology of traveling the "Straight Road"". It casts the members as metaphorical crewmembers on a ship sailing from Middle-earth to the Blessed Realm. In actual practice, the members do not sail, of course, but use different imaginal techniques to visit the Blessed Realm, techniques that can better be likened to travelling the Olórë Mallë or the Ilweran, the two other 'roads' to the Blessed Realm (cf. section 15.2.3 above).[503] The Charter also stressed Ilsaluntë Valion's mytho-historical approach and initially it was the ambition of the group to supplement their gnostic research with historical research. The intention was to

[503] The name Ilsaluntë Valion was possibly inspired by the pathworking ritual by Vivienne O'Regan included in Gareth Knight's *The Magical World of J.R.R. Tolkien* (2001). In any case that ritual is entitled "The Voyage West" and participants are required to visualise themselves as passengers on a ship setting out from the Grey Havens and taking the Straight Road to the Blessed Realm.

identify parallels between the Legendarium and the history of the actual world and to systematise them into an "Arda Timeline".

A renewed sense of optimism characterised Ilsaluntë Valion in the first couple of years after the launch in late 2007. The group hoped to grow to 25-30 active members, and in order to facilitate the integration of new members a basic curriculum was put together and a mentor institution set up. The curriculum consisted of volumes I and II of *The Book of Lost Tales* and *Morgoth's Ring*, i.e. volumes 1, 2, and 10 of *HoMe*, in addition to *S*. Furthermore, new members were made aware of *The Lost Road* and *The Notion Club Papers*, *On Fairy Stories*, and the essay "Ósanwe-kenta" on thought-communication (to which I return in section 16.3). The gist of the mentor institution was that new members were assigned a mentor who introduced them to the group's basic meditation focused on the Two Trees. The idea was that once the basic meditation was mastered, new members could better appreciate the Ilsaluntë Valion ritual in which individual meditation played a more prominent role than had been the case in Tië eldaliéva. Several members who had joined in 2008 told me that they very much appreciated how their mentor had integrated them into the group. Even so, the formalised mentorship program was discontinued in 2009, partly as a result of the temporary leave of Ellenar who had served as chief mentor during 2008.

Around this time, in late 2008, Ilsaluntë Valion stopped doing collective rituals over the phone. For one part, the rituals were discontinued due to external reasons, including serious illness and the fact that European members had begun to join which made collective rituals impractical due to time zone differences. More importantly, the core members of Ilsaluntë Valion increasingly experienced it as dissatisfying to do rituals over the phone. This was partly because the rituals had been changed after the hive-off and were now less ceremonial and more focused on the individual meditative experience. Members continued to use the group's ritual formats, but increasingly did the rituals individually and irregularly. At this time, also Tië eldaliéva's regular Skype rituals came to an end, mainly because the number of active members in that group had become too small to sustain them.[504]

Though there were good reasons for Ellenar's withdrawal as mentor and for the discontinuation of the collective rituals over the phone, the two developments also reflected an increased division and individualisation within Ilsaluntë Valion. As a further sign of this, Ilsaluntë Valion began to take a turn away from Reconstructionism during 2009. While the group stayed Reconstructionist in the sense that it remained focused solely on the Legendarium, disagreements broke out on the question whether it was pos-

[504] After the hive-off, Tië eldaliéva did not attempt to launch an independent forum and hence had little opportunity for recruiting more members. The group also did not update its homepage for several years. The current homepage of Tië eldaliéva has nothing in common with the original one, and rather has the character of Calantirniel's personal page. Even so, new members occasionally find and join Tië eldaliéva via this site. The current Tië eldaliéva homepage can be visited at http://elvenspirituality.wordpress.com/ [240114].

sible to verify gnosis. As mentioned above, the original Ilsaluntë Valion take on Reconstructionism was based on the idea that adding elements from other religious traditions to Tolkien's literary mythology is illegitimate, but that Legendarium-induced trancework can lead to reliable knowledge which can safely be added to Tolkien's own revelations. This belief had been the cornerstone in the project of collective and gradual tradition-building, first in Tië eldaliéva and later in Ilsaluntë Valion, but now became challenged by a group of members that included Elwin and Gwineth, the latter having joined Ilsaluntë Valion in the summer of 2008. Referring to Stephen Hoeller's already mentioned lecture on Tolkien and gnosis, these members stressed that imaginal experiences are qualitatively different from perceptions of the everyday world and that gnosis can therefore never be validated as fact.[505] As Elwin handed over the moderation of the Ilsaluntë Valion forum to Gwineth in December 2009, while Lomelindo, the Heathen Reconstructionist, left the group, it was clear that a strong 'gnostic' faction had emerged to challenge the original Reconstructionist profile of Ilsaluntë Valion.

In 2010, Ilsaluntë Valion entered a stable period. The core members have kept using the group's ritual formats, albeit with some individual variation (cf. section 16.2.2 below). Since 2010, the membership of the group has remained much the same. Fewer potential members have found the group since 2010 than was the case during 2005-2008 and fewer of those who found it have stayed active. There are three reasons for this. First, the spiritual interest in Tolkien generated by the *LR* movies had passed. Second, Ilsaluntë Valion had closed most parts of its forum to the public and become more reluctant to accept new members after having been ridiculed by the Skeptics' Guide to the Universe Forum during the summer of 2009.[506] Third, by identifying explicitly as a non-Pagan group and requiring new members to be both willing to research *HoMe* and be able to do trancework on their own, Ilsaluntë Valion deliberately fished only in a very small pond.

Since 2010, it has become increasingly clear that Ilsaluntë Valion includes two kinds of members. One group identify as Pagans, continue to value other ritual expressions than pure meditation, and have an interest in relating the Legendarium to other mythologies. The other group consists of members who are not Pagans, but of metaphysical Christian background or who have been raised as Christians, but no longer practise. These members are not adverse to rituals as such, but prefer them in non-Pagan form and are primarily interested in the individual, meditative exploration of Tolkien's world. Not wanting to break with the rest of Ilsaluntë Valion, Gwineth, Elwin, and Niennildi in December 2012 launched the sub-forum, Anima Mundi, as a place to discuss what they

[505] I return to this debate in more detail in section 16.3.3 below.

[506] The Skeptics' Forum can be found at http://sguforums.com/index.php [121213]. The thread making fun of Legendarium Reconstructionism is located at http://sguforums.com/ index.php/topic,21216.0.html [121213]. Between 12 July and 11 August 2009 the thread received 607 comments; per 121213 it had been read 25261 times.

call the "gnostic" approach as opposed to the "ritualistic" or "pagan" approach"; in March 2013, Eruannlass took over as captain on the general forum. As Gwineth put it, Ilsaluntë Valion is not so much a "group" or a "path" as an environment in which individuals can pursue their spiritual engagement with the Legendarium in the ways that seem most fit to them. Indeed, that has been the situation for the last five years, but even so, some members continue to harbour a more collectivist ambition. Significantly, at the time of writing (early 2014) members of Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion are planning to reinvigorate the custom of doing collective rituals on Skype, in cooperation between the two groups.

16.1.4. Membership

As already mentioned Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion combined have since 2006 had a core membership of 7-9 people who lead the discussions about the groups' mission, create ritual formats, and so on. Besides this core group, some 10-20 peripheral members have additionally been active at any given time. Let me now supply some more detailed information on the composition of the membership of the two groups. Table 16.1 below shows a breakdown of the core members.

Table 16.1. Legendarium Reconstructionism Core Members

Period	Members joining	Members leaving	# Core members
Founding members (Summer 2005)	Elwin (US; raised Lutheran; identifies as shaman ǀ mod. 2006-2009) Calantirniel (US; Pagan) Lomion (US; Pagan) Earendil (US; Pagan) Niennildi (US; metaphysical Christian)		5
Pre-schism period (2005-2007)	Lomelindo (US; Heathen) Ellenar (US; Pagan) Llefyn (CA; Pagan)	Lomion	7
Post-schism period (2007-2014)	Gwineth (raised Catholic; IV mod. 2010-2012) Eruannlass (US; Pagan ǀ IV mod. 2013-) Alyras (US; Charismatic and esoteric Christian; joined T-e)	Lomelindo	9

A couple of things are worth pointing out about the core members. First, there have been few changes in the constituency of the core members over the years. Most of those who helped found and shape Tië eldaliéva in 2005-2006 are still active. The three core members who joined after the Ilsaluntë Valion hive-off have been fully integrated. Gwineth and Eruannlass have each taken a turn as main moderator ('captain') on the Ilsaluntë Va-

lion forum, and Alyras, who only became a core member of Tië eldaliéva after I had interviewed the members of that group, showed her commitment by generously commenting on a draft of this chapter. It can furthermore be observed that most core members come from North America. Of the eleven core members, nine are American and one Canadian. When they joined, three core members were in their late 20s, four were in their late 30s, and two were in their early 40s, and one in her mid-50s. (I do not know the age for one of the core members, but expect him to have been in his 40s when joining). We almost have a gender balance, with five of the core members being female and four male.

The total number of peripheral members of Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion combined has always been in the 10-20 range, but since most of these members have left after some time, the number of people who have been peripheral members at some point is much larger. The Tië eldaliéva forum (active 2006-2007) had a total of 59 registered members per 14 July 2007 of which 27 took at least some part in the discussions. From 2008 through 2014, Ilsaluntë Valion, which has had a stricter procedure for admitting new members, has welcomed 33 peripheral members of whom five are currently active on the forum.

Table 16.2. Legendarium Reconstructionism Member Profiles

	Gender			**Nationality**				**Age when joining**					
	Male	Female	N/A	North American	Other English-speaking	Other	N/A	10s	20s	30s	40s	50s	N/A
Core members (T-e + IV)	5	6	–	10	–	1	–	–	3	4	2	1	1
Periphery members (IV)	13	18	2	14	4	8	7	5	8	–	5	2	13

The gender, age, and nationality patterns of the peripheral members differ interestingly from those of the core members. The greatest difference is in age profile. Of the 20 peripheral members of whom I know the age at joining, five were in their teens and an additional eight were in their (mostly early) twenties. Many of these young members joined in order to learn from more senior members. Among the peripheral members were also five individuals in their 40s and two in their 50s. None of the young joiners had social ties with other members prior to joining, but some of the middle-aged joiners were friends of the core members and had been invited to join. The gender profile of the peripheral members roughly mirrors that of the core members. In total, out of the 31 members I have data on, 18 were female and 13 male. The preponderance of females is partly due to an overrepresentation of women among the young members. Overall, while most members of Ilsaluntë Valion are women, the female overrepresentation in the

group (58%) is much smaller than in for instance Neo-Paganism in general (72%; cf. Berger 2012, 5). The peripheral members stem from a large number of countries. Besides twelve Americans and two Canadians, Ilsaluntë Valion has (had) peripheral members from the United Kingdom and the Netherlands (each 3), and from Australia, Israel, Portugal, Romania, Spain, and Ukraine (each 1). It is my impression that most members, both core members and peripheral members, are/were highly educated (or are currently following higher education programmes) though I have no systematic data to back up that hunch. Table 16.2 gives an overview of the member profiles.

16.2. Rituals and Ritual Blending in Legendarium Reconstructionism

The rituals of Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion are both similar to and different from the rituals of the other groups discussed in this dissertation so far. On the one hand, the rituals of the Legendarium Reconstructionist groups, like all other rituals in the spiritual Tolkien milieu, are fundamentally based on ritual formats from the ceremonial magic tradition. The rituals of Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion to some extent appear as the incorporation of Tolkien material into a ceremonial magical format akin to that of Wiccan circle-casting rituals. This is only half the story, however. Legendarium Reconstructionist rituals differ from all other rituals in the spiritual Tolkien milieu because the ceremonial magical rites that make up these rituals have themselves been transformed and adapted to Tolkien's literary mythology. In some cases, original rites have even been substituted by new rites based on the Legendarium. Where Middle-earth Pagans, for example, use a standard Wiccan ritual to call upon characters from *LR*, Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion have devised their own Legendarium-based rites for preparing the magical space and based other rites on revelations from the Valar.

16.2.1. Rituals in Tië Eldaliéva: Inward Acculturation and Belief Elaboration

Tië eldaliéva was launched with a "birthing ritual" held over the phone on 23 August 2005. In crafting the ritual, Lomion and Calantirniel had drawn inspiration from Wiccan rituals and from the Fifth Way Mystery School's High Elvish Working (cf. ch. 13), but constructed a ritual aligned more closely to the Legendarium. Over the next year or so, a standard Tië eldaliéva ritual gradually emerged, and the group created a total of twenty-one ritual formats, one for each solar and lunar observance in their ritual calendar (to which I return below). From August 2006 onwards, these rituals were carried out by about four to seven people over the phone and later on Skype. After the schism in late 2007, members of Tië eldaliéva continued to do rituals together, but from 2009 it gradually became normal practice to do the rituals individually. Table 16.3 below gives a synoptic overview of the phases of an average Tië eldaliéva ritual, compared to a stan-

dard Wiccan circle-casting ritual, to the High Elvish Working of the Fifth Way Mystery School, and to an Ilsaluntë Valion ritual (as they were developed after the schism).[507]

Table 16.3. A Synoptic Overview of the Structure of Legendarium Reconstructionist Rituals

	High Elvish Valar Working (1993)	**Wiccan Standard Ritual**	**Tië eldaliéva Ritual (2007)**	**Ilsaluntë Valion Ritual (2009)**
Separation phase		1. Preparation of food		1. Preparation of altar and food
	1. No Form, breathing, Oms			
	2. Meta-programming protocol (Lesser Banishing Ritual of the Pentagram, Cross of the Elements, Middle Pillar, Caduceus)	2. Drawing the circle	1. Song of the Starflower 2. Draw Septagram in the air to seal energy	2. Song of the Starflower (or Blessing Circle Dance)
	3. Elvish Supreme Invoking Ritual of the Pentagram	3. Calling the Quarters	3. Acknowledgement of the directions and evocation of the Valar 4. Reading from TLM 5. Drinking starflower-infused water 6. Visualisation of Oneness with Arda	3. Awareness of Arda as Sacred Sphere 4. Reading from TLM
	4. Rending of the Veil/Hymn to Elbereth			
	5. Calling the Lords of the Valar	4. Calling the Goddess (Drawing Down the Moon/ Charge of the Goddess) or calling of other deity/deities		5. Intonation of Valarin name
Liminal phase				6. Communication with Lunar Radiance
	6. Silent Communion with the Valar	5. Communication with deities; other magical work	7. Individual Otherworld experience, including direct communication with one or more of the Valar; initiated by reading / guide is thanked	7. Individual Otherworld experience; initiated by reading / guide is thanked

[507] On the structure of Wiccan rituals see Cheal and Leverick (1999) and Magliocco (2004, 138-142).

				8. The flower of Telperion is thanked
Reinte-gration phase	7. Closing/Hymn to Elbereth	6. Banishing the circle 7. Cakes and wine ceremony	8. Returning awareness to physical space 9. Opening the circle	9. Returning awareness to physical space 10. The blessed food is eaten

TLM = Tolkien's Literary Mythology.

In their basic structure, the rituals of Tië eldaliéva follow the Wiccan standard ritual with (a) a *separation phase* in which a sacred space is created by casting a circle and calling the quarters, (b) a *liminal phase* in which contact with the Goddess or other deities is established and experienced, and (c) a *reintegration phase* in which the deities and the spirits of the quarters are thanked and the circle is opened.[508] Tië eldaliéva modified this format in three significant ways, however, to produce a ritual more aligned with Tolkien's Legendarium.

First, the pentagram ritual, which Wiccans and other ceremonial magicians use to prepare a space for magical work, was developed into a septagram ritual. This was done because the Tië eldaliéva members felt that seven was the sacred number in Tolkien's literary mythology, but the choice probably also reflected that the septagram is a popular symbol in the broader Elven movement.[509] The septagram ritual was named Lindë Elenlótë (Qu: The Song of the Starflower).[510] The Lindë Elenlótë goes:

a. Touch forehead, intone MEN-EL [Qu: Heavens]
b. Point down, covering groin, intone AR-DA [Qu: Earth]

[508] The notions of separation phase, liminal phase, and reintegration phase are indebted to Arnold van Gennep, Victor Turner, and Jens Peter Schjødt. Van Gennep (1909) originally observed that initiation rituals have three phases, consisting each of what he called separation rites, margin rites, and aggregation rites. Turner (1964; 1969) subsequently argued that this tripartite structure can be found in all rituals, not only in initiation rituals. Turner also emphasised the transformative character of rituals, arguing that rituals (in contrast to ceremonies) are always intended to transform an initial situation into something else (e.g. boyhood into adulthood, sickness into health). For this reason, Schjødt (1992, 11) has argued that Turner actually operates with five ritual phases, which Schjødt refers to as the initial phase, the separation phase, the liminal phase, the reintegration phase, and the final phase (1992, 11). The rituals of Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion aim at some combination of empowerment and gnosis and can therefore be considered transformative, though only moderately so.

[509] Tolkien nowhere explicitly said that "seven was the sacred number of the Elves", but Tië eldaliéva observed that there are seven pairs of Valar and seven stars in the Valacirca (The Great Bear), the most important constellation in the Legendarium. The Silver Elves (1986) introduced the septagram, or the "Seven-Pointed Star" or the "Elven Star of the Seven Sisters", as an Elven symbol and it later became the main symbol for all Elves and Otherkin (Lupa 2007, 52-53).

[510] The Starflower was chosen as a symbol because of its association with the stars – and thus with the Elves – and because it has seven petals.

c. Touch right shoulder, intone VA-LAR
d. Touch left hip, intone E-LE-NIL-LOR [Qu: Stars]
e. Touch left shoulder, intone TEL-PER-I-ON [The older of the two trees]
f. Touch right hip, intone LAUR-E-LIN [The younger of the two trees; Qu: Song of Gold]
g. Fold hands at chest level, intone E-A [Qu: Let it be]

The seven gestures made while intoning do not add up to drawing a septagram, but a septagram is drawn in the air afterwards to seal the energy.

Second, the Wiccan Calling of the Quarters was transformed into a seven-phased evocation of the Valar.[511] This meant adding two directions, Above and Below, to the five ordinary directions, East, South, West, North, and Within. Gestures and intonations in Quenya were crafted for all seven directions. The 14 Valar were sorted into pairs, six pairs of husband and wife and a seventh pair made up of the two 'single' Valar, Ulmo and Nienna. The Valar pairs were coupled to the seven directions and a number of 'key words' were attached to them as shown in table 16.4 below. For the same reason, the Valar were only aligned with directions and elements, but not, for example, with particular crystals, planets, or with the gods of other pantheons.[512]

Table 16.4. Tië Eldaliéva Directions and Key Words

Direction	Valar Lords	Valar Ladies
East (*Rómen*)	Manwë AIR, Mind, Clear Sight, Authority, Poetry, Truth	Varda Star energy, Transformation, Divine Love

[511] The members of Tië eldaliéva stressed that they *evoke* the Valar, but do not *invoke* them. As they formulated the difference between these terms in the interview on Eclectic Pagan Podcast, evocation refers to the calling forth of energies to be present within one's sacred space, while invocation refers to the channelling of the souls or spirits of these energies into one's own body. The distinction between evocation as "calling forth" and invocation as "calling in" goes back to Crowley (1929a, 15).

[512] I give only some of the key words. Correspondences between Valar and the four elements are given in capitals. The associations of the three main Valar, Manwë, Aulë, and Ulmo, with Air, Earth, and Water flows logically from the Legendarium (cf. section 15.2.2 above). The element Fire, left vacant by Melkor's Fall, is here relegated to Tulkas. Departing from the standard elemental associations in Wicca, Tië eldaliéva associated Water with the direction 'Below' rather than with West. That is because, according to the cosmology of the Legendarium, the flat Earth flows on the great ocean Vai which is thus below the Earth (cf. section 15.2.3 above). The Valar pairs were taken to correlate further with seven of the Elven Cirth (Si: Runes). Later the Cirth runes were replaced by letters of the Tengwar, another of Tolkien's scripts and the one most often used for writing in Quenya. The different associations were established through a diligent reading of Tolkien's literary mythology and through the occasional use of trancework. This was mainly the work of Elwin, with the assistance of Calantirniel and Ellenar. Members of Tië eldaliéva hope to develop a more encompassing system of correspondences in the future, including also planets and herbs, and comparing the Valar to the gods and goddesses of other pantheons.

South (*Hyarmen*)	Tulkas FIRE, Protection, Warmth, Justice, Strength	Nessa Animals, Dance, Light-heartedness, Activity
North (*Formen*)	Aulë EARTH, Craftsmanship, Foundation, Endurance	Yavanna Mother Earth, Trees, Fruitfulness, Abundance
Within (*Mi*)	Oromë Nature, Instinct, Guardianship, Male Sexuality	Vána Flowers, Spring, New Growth, Youth, Beauty
Above (*Or*)	Lórien Dreams, Visions, Hope, Goals, Desires	Estë Healing, Rest, Gentleness, Comfort
Below (*Undo*)	Ulmo WATER, Music, Song, Renewal, Creativity, Force	Nienna Pity, Compassion, Humility, Purification
West (*Númen*)	Mandos Death, Judgment, Prophecy, Fate	Vairë Weaving, Experience, Fate

In ritual, the directions are called and the Valar evoked in the order given here, so that ritualists end up facing West, towards the Blessed Realm. The Valar pairs are each addressed with a short greeting. In the Skype ritual which was hosted for me in September 2009, Manwë and Varda were for example called upon with the words: "We now call on Manwë Sulimo, High King of Arda, of the Eagles and Winds … and his Lady, Varda Elentári, Queen of the Stars and protector of Arda and Ilúvatar's Children [Elves and humans]. We welcome you into our circle. Aiya!" The final expression, Aiya, is Quenya for "Hail" and all Valar were welcomed with this greeting. At the end of the ritual, the Valar are thanked for "being with us in circle and for [helping] carrying out in Spirit our work done here tonight, and hereby open ourselves to you even outside this circle." This thanksgiving is concluded with the exclamation "Laita!" (Qu: Praise).[513] After calling the

[513] Tolkien uses the term Aiya twice in *LR* when Frodo and Sam wield the phial of Eärendil (*LR* 720, 915). By contrast, Laita is used in Tolkien's works only in compounds, such as the Erulaitalë (Qu: Praise to Eru), one of the great Númenórean festivals (*UT* 214). 'Laita' is never used as a greeting. The use of Aiya and Laita as greetings is a loan from a Tolkien-inspired ritual published by Sandra Kynes in *A Year of Ritual* (2004, 181-189). Here, Aiya is used to welcome evoked spirits and Laita as a farewell greeting. Kynes gives the alternative translation "bless" for Laita instead of "praise" (2004, 220), which suggests that she perceived Laita as a translation of the Wiccan farewell greeting "blessed be". In general, Kynes' ritual is plainly structured with (a) circle-casting, (b) calling of the quarters, (c) a reading from Tolkien's works, and (d) the opening of the circle. She has adapted the calling of the quarters somewhat to the Legendarium, using six directions and calling upon the Dwarves, the Elves, the Hobbits, the Vanyar (an Elven people), and the Lord and Lady of All [the God and the Goddess] in the guise of Laurelin and Silpion [Telperion], the Two Trees. The evocation of the God and the Goddess, together with other elements. such as the final greeting "Merry meet, merry part, and merry meet again", give the ritual a strongly Wiccan feel, more so than Tië eldaliéva's ritual.

seven pairs of the Valar, an eighth sub-phase follows in which the participants' Oneness with Eä and Ilúvatar is acknowledged after intoning ILÚVË (Qu: The All).[514] It is perhaps not surprising that the ritual includes a reference to Eru Ilúvatar, as Ilúvatar is the supreme deity in Tolkien's literary mythology, but the pantheistic interpretation of Eru as The All is foreign to the Legendarium. In Tolkien's texts, the distance between Eru and his creation is stressed rather than dissolved.[515]

The third way in which Tië eldaliéva adapted the Wiccan ritual format to the Legendarium was by including a Tolkien-based visualisation sequence. After drinking water infused by starflower essence, the visualisation proceeds in three steps.[516] First, in a variation of the Middle Pillar exercise, the ritualists visualise themselves circulating the silver light of Telperion and the golden light of Laurelin through their chakras, and after that visualise themselves being one with Arda. This step constitutes the last of the separation rites and establishes a connection with the Blessed Realm. In the second step of the sequence, the ritualists visualise themselves as being *within* the Blessed Realm. A short text, which is different in every ritual, is read aloud, describing a particular scene and perhaps introducing one of the Valar as a guide. Then follows 5-20 minutes of silent meditation in which the vision is allowed to unfold. The third step is a twin of the first and represents the return to the physical world. The participants are now back at Corollairë, the Mound of the Two Trees, and visualise that they detach themselves from the Oneness with Arda and slow down the circulation of light/energy from the Two Trees. A bit of the "healing energy" from the Two Trees is brought back and the ritualists visualise carrying it in their pocket, ready for use when needed.[517]

The final and fourth way in which Tië eldaliéva adapted their ritual to the Legendarium concerns the ritual calendar used rather than the content of the ritual. Tolkien nowhere provides a full description of the Elven ritual calendar, but he gives enough information for such a calendar to be constructed. Elwin did this for Tië eldaliéva. He took the information on the six solar seasons and the new-year and mid-year festivals from the *LR* appendix on calendars (cf. footnote 197 above) and the scattered information on Elven festivals given in *LT* (cf. footnote 446 above) and fitted seasons and festivals with each other so as to have one festival at each seasonal transition and at each solstice. A Cuivérë Quendiva holiday celebrating the Elves' awakening was improvised by Tië elda-

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[514] If Christians are participating, the Christ Consciousness is called into the circle as well.

[515] I return to the pantheistic conception of Eru in section 16.3.2 below.

[516] Calantirniel, who is a professional flower essence practitioner, got the idea of using starflower essence. The point is that since the Quendi are the People of the Stars, starflower essence resonates with Quendi and one can appreciate one's Elvishness or Elven connection by consuming it.

[517] Perhaps the idea of carrying healing energy back from the Blessed Realm was inspired by Vivienne O'Regan's pathworking ritual "The Voyage West". Concluding this ritual, healing energy is channeled from the Blessed Realm into Middle-earth (Knight 1990, 147; 2001, 67).

liéva, and the entire calendar was fixed to the Gregorian system.[518] In table 16.5 below, I list both Tië eldaliéva's solar and lunar observations. Tolkien's texts include no moon calendar, but Tië eldaliéva has given Quenyan names to the thirteen moons of the year and dedicated most of them to one of the Valar. These Moon celebrations were inspired by Wicca and provides a series of Elven 'Esbats' to supplement the Elven solar festivals supplanting the Wiccan Sabbats (Equinoxes, Solstices, and Cross-quarter Days). The dates for the moons differ each year; those given are the Full Moon dates for the Elven year 2012-2013. Ilsaluntë Valion changed some details in the calendar, especially concerning the Valar (or Maiar) to whom the various holidays are dedicated. These changes are given in sharp brackets.

Table 16.5. Ritual Calendar of Tië Eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion

Solar observations	**Lunar observations**
March 28. Vinya Loa (New Year; *Vairë*). Beginning of Spring (Tuilë).	
	Isilvíressë (Moon of Youth; *Tulkas [Vána]*). April 6.
	Isillótessë (Moon of Flowers; *Nessa*). May 6.
May 21. Nost-na-Lothion (Birth of Flowers; *Vána [Ilmarë]*). Beginning of Summer (Lairë).	
	Isilnárië (Moon of Bright Fire; *Varda*). June 4.
June 21. Tarnin Austa (Gates of Summer; *The Sun [Melian]*). Solstice.	
	Isilcermië (Moon of the First Harvest; *Irmo*). July 3.
August 1. Yávië (Autumn; *Arda [Olórin]*). Beginning of Autumn (Yávië).	
	Isilúrimë (Moon of Heat; *Ainur [Aulë]*). August 2.
	Isilyavannië (Moon of Yavanna; *Yavanna*). August 31.
September 25-27. Enderi (Middle-days; *Oromë [Ossë]*). Beginning of Fading (Quellë).	
	Isilnarquelië (Moon of the Fiery Fading; *Mandos [Oromë]*). September 30.
	Isilhísimë (Moon of Mists; *Estë*). October 29.
November 21. Cuivérë Quendiva (Awakening of the Quendi; *the Elves*). Beginning of Winter (Hrívë).	
	Isilringarë (Moon of Frosty Cold; *Mourning Morgoth's Mark on Arda [Nienna]*). November 28.
December 21. Turuhalmë (The Logdrawing; *The Moon [Tulkas]*). Solstice.	
	Isilnarvinyë (Moon of the New Fire; *Aulë [Mandos]*). December 28.
	Isilnénimë (Moon of Waters; *Ulmo*). January 27.

[518] Two of the feasts, Yávië and Sovalwaris, have only scant foundation in Tolkien's texts. Yávië normally refers to the autumn season rather than to a festival at its beginning. Sovalwaris is a term used for the month February. Its use as a name for a festival is based on the occurrence of the capitalised noun *i Sovallë* (Qe: the Purification) in a very early wordlist of Tolkien's, the "Qenya Lexicon" (Tolkien 1998b).

February 1. Sovalwaris (February; *Nienna [Uinen]*). Beginning of 'Stirring' (Coirë).
Isilsúlimë (Moon of the Breezes; *Manwë*). February 25.
Isilmaiaron (Moon of the Maiar; *Maiar*) [IV doubles Isilsúlimë if 13th moon needed]. March 27.

To sum up, two different logics or processes were at work in the development of Tië eldaliéva's rituals. The first of these logics was *inward acculturation*, i.e. the assimilation of elements from other traditions into one's own tradition through adaptation and naturalisation. Through inward acculturation the group adapted the Wiccan circle-casting ritual to the Legendarium by (1) transforming the pentagram ritual into a septagram ritual and the Calling of the Quarters into a seven-phased evocation of the Valar, by (2) reworking of the Middle Pillar exercise into a visualisation of light energies from the Two Trees, and by (3) adopting the notion that one can raise healing energy in ritual and bring it back into the world. In the first case, the effect of acculturation was achieved by explicitly transforming the original five-phased rites into new, seven-phased Elven rites; in the two later cases acculturation was achieved implicitly by letting practices and beliefs from the ceremonial magic pass as natural elements of a Legendarium-based ritual. The second logic is what I call *belief elaboration*, i.e. systematisation of Legendarium lore and invention of new elements according to the inner logic of Tolkien's literary mythology. Belief elaboration was at work in (1) the fixing of key words, elements, and directions to the Valar on basis of trancework and research of Tolkien's texts and in (2) the construction of the Elven ritual calendar.

In 2007, the content of Tië eldaliéva's rituals became a source of tension. Members disagreed on whether the ceremonial magical rites that made up the standard ritual had been sufficiently acculturated. One group, led by Calantirniel, found that the rituals were sufficiently Legendarium-aligned. The other group, led by Elwin, was disturbed by the continued reference to circle-casting, chakras, and Hindu mudras. For this group, the Tië eldaliéva ritual ultimately felt too foreign and 'Pagan'. As mentioned in section 16.1.2 above, this disagreement was one of the main reasons for the Ilsaluntë Valion hive-off. Consequently, one of the first things to happen after the hive-off was that the members of Ilsaluntë Valion constructed a new and more purist ritual format.

16.2.2. Rituals in Ilsaluntë Valion: Continued Acculturation and Belief Elaboration

A new Ilsaluntë Valion core ritual and a range of specific rituals for the various solar and lunar observances were created by reworking the Tië eldaliéva originals. The core ritual was changed by assimilating Wiccan elements more thoroughly (continued inward acculturation) or by substituting elements that could not be acculturated with Legendarium-inspired rites of the group's own invention (continued belief elaboration). The ritual calendar was modified a bit as well, so that a number of holidays became aligned with a

different Valar or Maia. Also, Ilsaluntë Valion does not observe a thirteenth moon, Isilmaiaron, but doubles Isilsúlimë if a thirteenth moon is needed (cf. table 16.5 above).

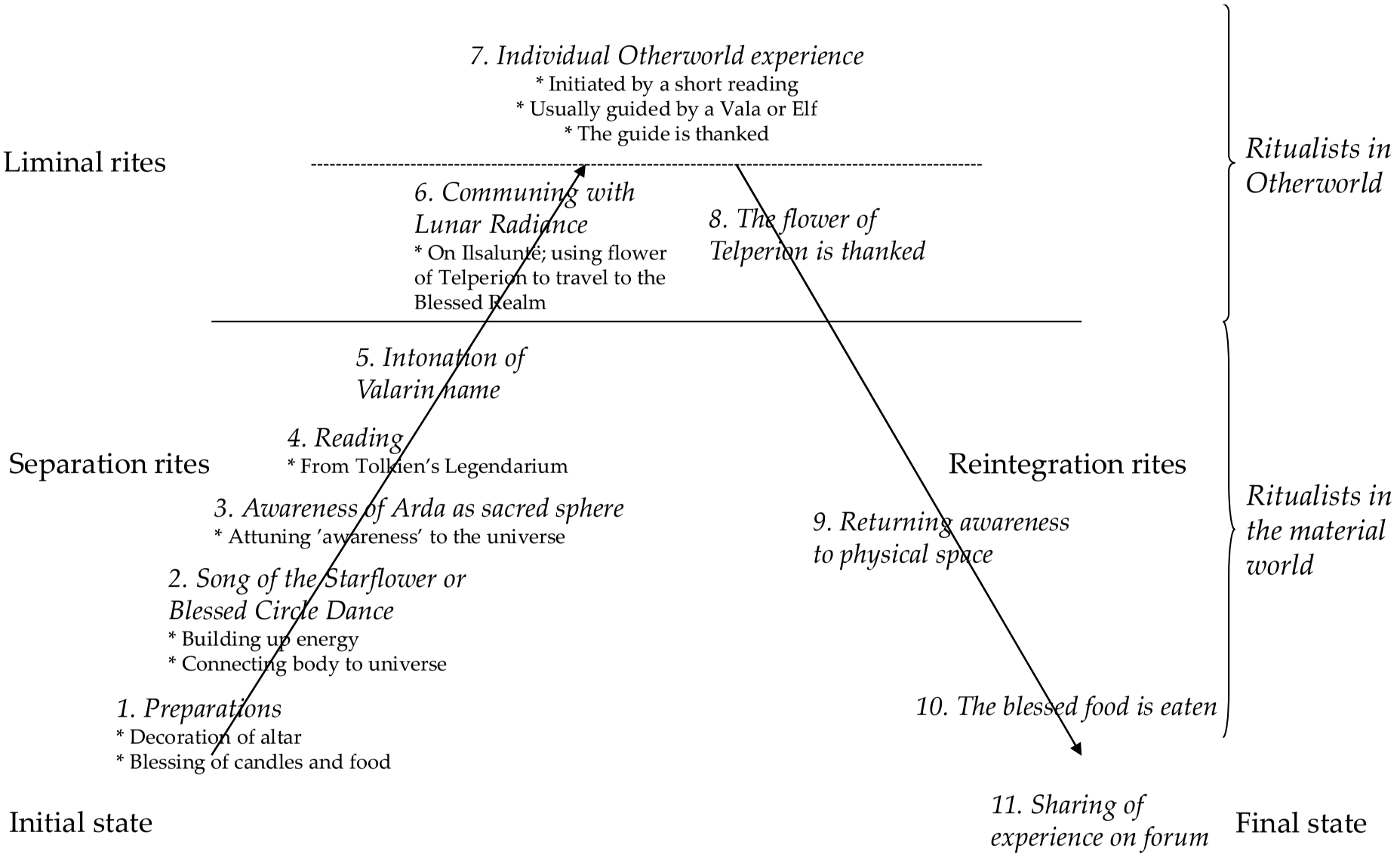
Ellenar, Elwin, and Niennildi, together with various occasional joiners, performed the new rituals together over the phone until mid-autumn of 2008, when they had produced ritual formats for a full year. Other members used these formats for individual rituals. In the spring of 2009, Eruannlass took over the responsibility of further developing the rituals and distributing them in advance of the approaching holiday or full moon.[519] These are the rituals which are presented to new members as the official rituals of the group. Though the practice of doing the rituals collectively over the phone or on Skype has never been revived, most members of Ilsaluntë Valion continue to use the group's formats for individual rituals. The practice is no longer standardised, however, as some members use Eruannlass' 'third-generation' formats, while Elwin and Niennildi continue to use the 'second-generation' rituals developed in 2008, and still other members have a freer approach. An overview of an 'official' Ilsaluntë Valion lunar observation as they have looked since 2009 is given in figure 16.1 below.

The preparation phase of the Ilsaluntë Valion ritual represents an addition to the Tië eldaliéva ritual analysed above. In this phase one's home altar is decorated in accordance with the Vala to whom the observance is oriented (e.g. metal for Aulë; flowers for Yavanna). Furthermore, candles are lit and a blessing sign made over a selection of seasonal food and drinks to be consumed later. According to the members, this special blessing sign had been taught to Ellenar by the Valar in a meditation. The rest of the separation rites are transformations or substitutions of rites from the Tië eldaliéva ritual. To raise energy, members either use a new version of the Song of the Starflower modified by Eruannlass, or the alternative "Blessed Circle Dance" written by Niennildi.[520] The Blessed Circle Dance involves gestures and intonations just like the Lindë Elenlótë, but is experienced by some members as more true to the Legendarium because it is not directly based on the pentagram ritual. Furthermore, reflecting the more Mannish perspective of Ilsaluntë Valion, references to "Elven DNA" and the drinking of Starflower-infused water have been abandoned. In the phase that follows ritualists visualise Arda as a sacred sphere, focusing in turn on the three Airs (Vilna, Ilwë, and Vaitya), the Great Sea (Vai), and the Earth. Contrary to the Arda visualisation of the Tië eldaliéva ritual, the Ilsaluntë Valion ritual no longer has any circulation of energy via the chakras. Indeed, just as the Blessed Circle Dance has been designed as a Legendarium-true substitute for the pentagram ritual-based Lindë Elenlótë, the new 'Awareness of Arda as Sacred Sphere'-rite has been crafted as a Legendarium-true alternative for the Middle Pillar-inspired visualisation of oneness with Arda. The Sacred Sphere phase creates a sense of beginning the meditative journey, but not more so than awareness can return to the here and now for the

[519] According to Eruannlass, her Elven spirit companion Rowan assisted with all her ritual compositions (280710). Occasionally, Rowan is listed as author of certain passages.

[520] The Ilsaluntë Valion version of the Lindë Elenlótë uses eight as a sacred number instead of seven.

Figure 16.1. An Ilsaluntë Valion Lunar Observation



following two phases of the ritual, a reading from Tolkien's literary mythology (phase 4) and the intonation of the Valarin name of the Vala on whom the ritual is focused (phase 5).[521] The intonation of the Valarin name can be seen as a very condensed substitute for the evocation of the 14 Valar in the original Tië eldaliéva ritual. Not only does this change eliminate the most important ceremonial rite in the original ritual, it also includes an element of belief elaboration. According to the members, several of the Valarin names which are intoned in this phase have been discovered by Lomelindo, in trance. These names supplement the few names of the Valar in Valarin provided by Tolkien (cf. table 15.2 above).

Whereas the Ilsaluntë Valion ritual compresses the ceremonial separation rites to a bare minimum, it expands the liminal phase by doubling the ritual structure of separation-liminality-reintegration *within* the liminal phase itself. This has been done to create a feeling of actively journeying to the Blessed Realm. The first liminal rite, phase 6 of the whole ritual, is referred to as "Communing with Lunar Radiance".[522] In this phase, ritualists visualise themselves as standing on the Moon and looking at the flower of Telperion, which according to Tolkien's mythology is the light-source of the Moon. Eruannlass and Gwineth explained that some things exist *both* in the physical world *and* in the Blessed Realm, and because the Moon is such a thing, one can transport oneself from the physical world to the Blessed Realm by visualising the Moon. This is done by first visualising the Moon as it looks in the physical world and thereafter visualising it as it is described in Tolkien's mythology. Like in the Tië eldaliéva ritual, the liminal culmination is a visualisation of the Blessed Realm (phase 7). Little is changed here. A passage sets the scene for the meditation, usually opening with a sentence such as "When the time is right, you find yourself in a forest/dale/…". Usually a guide appears and a scene unfolds or messages are conveyed. The journey back to the physical world again goes via the Moon (phase 8) where the flower of Telperion is thanked for helping establish connection with the Blessed Realm.

In broad terms, Ilsaluntë Valion transformed Tië eldaliéva's ceremonial magical evocation of the Valar into something more reminiscent of a shamanic journey to the Blessed Realm. Most explicit and implicit references to Legendarium-foreign concepts (mudras, chakras) and rites (pentagram rituals, Middle Pillar) were purged, though the main function of the ritual remained the same, viz. to communicate with the denizens of Aman and bring back gnosis in the form of experiences or personal messages.[523] We can

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[521] Most readings are from *HoMe* or *S*. The 32 ritual formats I have from the period April 2008 to October 2010 include a total of 45 reading fragments. Of these, 35 were from *HoMe* or *S*, six from *LR* or *H*, and four from other texts than Tolkien's.

[522] For solar rituals, a parallel visualisation focused on the Sun is used. The Cuivérë Quendiva ritual includes a visualisation passage focused on the stars.

[523] The second function of Tië eldaliéva rituals of bringing back healing energy from Aman has been lost in the Ilsaluntë Valion rituals. That does not mean that Ilsaluntë Valion rituals cannot have as goal to bring about a real transformation in the material world. In fact, some of Ilsaluntë Valion's rituals in 2008 had a

say that the blending mode of the ritual changed, at least in degree. The ritual formats of Tië eldaliéva were characterised by a form of weak inward acculturation in which Legendarium-foreign ritual elements were integrated into a Legendarium frame, but not changed enough to completely assimilate them. The ritual formats of Ilsaluntë Valion, by contrast, were characterised by a strong form of inward acculturation where Legendarium-foreign elements were adapted and assimilated to such a degree that they no longer seemed foreign to the Legendarium. Similarly, the Tië eldaliéva ritual included only occasional instances of tradition-internal belief elaboration; the Ilsaluntë Valion ritual includes many.[524]

Besides observing the lunisolar holidays, many members of Ilsaluntë Valion also engage with the Legendarium in less ritualised ways. It is common to visit the Blessed Realm in simple mediations, and many members report spiritually significant dreams. Meditation experiences and spiritual dreams are shared and discussed in special sections of the forum. Furthermore, some members have experimented with ancestral memory regression inspired by *The Lost Road* and *The Notion Club Papers* and/or say that they sometimes receive spontaneous communications from the Valar outside rituals.

16.2.3. Ritual Approaches and Blending Patterns in Legendarium Reconstructionism

From 2009 onwards, it gradually became clear to the members that Ilsaluntë Valion comprised two groups of members who have a different outlook on how to approach the Legendarium ritually. One group uses the Ilsaluntë Valion ritual formats regularly and more or less literally and considers these rituals to be the very core of what Ilsaluntë Valion is about. The members of the other group may or may not use the rituals, but do

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more magical, transformative character than had been the standard in Tië eldaliéva, using visualisations and affirmations to attract success, money, and good health.

[524] In a preliminary analysis of the spiritual Tolkien milieu, I used the terms "narrative framing" and "reconstructionism" (Davidsen 2012a, 194-197) to refer to what I now describe as positions of weak acculturation or strong acculturation combined with belief elaboration. I defined the "narrative framing approach" as using "the Legendarium as a hermeneutic key or religious perception filter through which [members] interpret other religious traditions" (Davidsen 2012a, 195). I now find my old terminology problematic for two reasons. To begin with, not only the "narrative framing" (or weakly acculturating) approach takes Tolkien's literary mythology as its narrative frame; the "reconstructionist" (or strongly acculturating) does so even more. At the same time, any narrative framing approach is by definition reconstructionist in nature, at least in the basic meaning of being focused on a particular narrative corpus. It is therefore quite confusing to contrast a reconstructionist position to a narrative framing position. The second problem is that I described Middle-earth Pagans as having a narrative framing approach. I now think my definition of the narrative framing approach fits the blending mode of Tië eldaliéva very well, but that it is no accurate description of the blending mode of Middle-earth Pagans. As I have argued in chapter 14, Middle-earth Pagans do not use the Legendarium as a hermeneutic key through which they interpret other religious traditions, but rather use *other* religious traditions as hermeneutic keys through which they interpret the Legendarium.

not see them as the core of Ilsaluntë Valion's practice. Instead, they have come to focus primarily or exclusively on simpler, individual meditations. Though this second group had used the fixed formats in the past, they increasingly felt that they were no longer necessary to facilitate that which was really important, namely the gnostic exploration of the Blessed Realm in meditation. That is to say, a third ritual approach had emerged in Legendarium Reconstructionism besides the formal Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion approaches analysed in the two sub-sections above. I have summed up the three modes of Legendarium Reconstructionism in table 16.6 below.[525]

Table 16.6. Three Modes of Legendarium Reconstructionism

Mode	T-e Ceremonial Mode *(2005 onwards)*	IV Ceremonial Mode *(2008 onwards)*	IV Gnostic Mode *(2009 onwards)*
Preferred rituals	Tië eldaliéva rituals	Ilsaluntë Valion rituals	*Ad hoc* meditations
Group purpose	Codification of beliefs and rituals into a tradition	Codification of beliefs and rituals into a tradition	Attainment of individual gnosis
Blending style	Weak acculturation of Legendarium-foreign rites *(Explicitly Pagan)*	Strong acculturation of Legendarium-foreign rites *(Implicitly Pagan)*	No acceptance of Legendarium-foreign rites *(Explicitly non-Pagan)*
Core members (2014)	Calantirniel, Llefyn, Alyras	Ellenar, Eruannlass	Elwin, Gwineth, Niennildi
Core members (past)	Lomion, Ellenar, Elwin, Niennildi, Earendil	Elwin, Niennildi, Gwineth	

Each ritual approach correlates with different ideas about the very purpose of Legendarium Reconstructionism. A preference for fixed, ceremonial rituals, either of the Tië eldaliéva or the Ilsaluntë Valion type, goes together with the conviction that the ultimate purpose of Legendarium Reconstructionism is collective tradition-building. By contrast, those Ilsaluntë Valion members who have come to prefer individual, unscheduled meditations no longer have tradition-building as their aim. These members rather consider individual experience to be the purpose of their spiritual practice. The different ritual preferences also correlate with different attitudes on religious blending, ranging from wide openness to the use of Pagan and ceremonial magical elements in ritual to the rejection of all non-Tolkienesque ritual elements. Not surprisingly, most of those who

[525] Of the core members, Lomelindo does not figure in the overview. Lomelindo never used the reconstructed Elven ritual calendar. He claimed to observe the three Númenórean festivals (cf. footnote 446). Earendil is a core member of Tië eldaliéva, but does not perform rituals regularly and only participated in a few of the collective rituals on Skype in the early days of the group.

use Pagan rituals also self-identify as Pagans, while the 'gnostic explorers' in Ilsaluntë Valion all have a non-Pagan background.

16.3. Rationalisation and Justification in Legendarium Reconstructionism

In the previous section, I emphasised that the rituals of Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion have been a cause of debate and division, but that is only half the story. It is just as important to stress that the groups' ritual formats were the result of a collaborative effort and that they express two first-order beliefs that all members share. These beliefs are (1) that Tolkien's literary mythology refers to real supernatural beings, namely the Valar, the Maiar, and the Quendi, and (2) that these beings dwell in a world that is different from the physical world, but which can be accessed in ritual. These two core beliefs, together with the rituals in which they are expressed, and the experiences which those rituals generate, comprise the elemental religious core of Legendarium Reconstructionism.

The elemental religion of Legendarium Reconstructionism has a superstructure of rationalised religion, comprising theories about the precise ontological nature of Tolkien's supernatural beings and their otherworldly abode, and about the epistemological status of the experiences one can have of them. These theories defend the legitimacy of elemental religious practice based on Tolkien's fiction and explain its significance. In other words, the ontological and epistemological theories comprise a battery of semiotic strategies for the construction and maintenance of plausibility. In the bulk of this section, I chart the repertoire of rationalisation and justification strategies in Legendarium Reconstructionism, looking in turn at (a) theories about the reference authority of Tolkien's literary mythology and the relation between Tolkien's narratives and other mythologies, (b) theories about the ontological nature of the various supernatural beings in Tolkien's literary mythology, and (c) the various epistemological strategies employed in justifying the religious use of Tolkien's mythology. Having explored in detail the rationalised beliefs of Legendarium Reconstructionism, I revisit the four hypotheses on *HoMe*-based religion formulated in chapter 15 and assess whether they have held up.

16.3.1. The Reality of Tolkien's Narrative World: Mytho-historical and Mytho-cosmological Approaches

All the Legendarium Reconstructionists I have talked to emphasise that they consider Tolkien's literary mythology to be a "valid" mythology. This means two things. First, it means that members do not see Tolkien's narratives as mere fiction, but take them to constitute a mythology in their own right. Being a full-fledged mythology, Tolkien's narratives are considered to be *as valid* a textual foundation for religious practice as any other body of myth. By labelling Tolkien's mythology "valid" rather than "true", the

Legendarium Reconstructionists, second, distance themselves from religious literalism. The denouncement of literalism only concerns *absolute* literalism, however, for most Legendarium Reconstructionists believe that Tolkien's narratives provide quite accurate descriptions of the Valar and the Quendi and some believe that they may even have some foundation in historical fact. That Tolkien's literary mythology is merely deemed valid is not to say that Legendarium Reconstructionists consider Tolkien's literary mythology inferior to other mythologies; to the contrary, they consider *all* mythologies to be merely valid rather than absolutely, literally true. In line with this view, they consider Legendarium Reconstructionism a valid spiritual path, but only one valid path among many.

Even so, Legendarium Reconstructionists sometimes make bolder claims about the relation between Tolkien's literary mythology and other mythologies. Indeed, one can distinguish between a weak and a strong claim on this matter. The weak claim is that 'Tolkien's literary mythology is as valid as any other mythology, but superior in its fit to me personally'. The strong claim is this: 'Tolkien's literary mythology is *objectively* more valid, authentic, and 'true' than other mythologies'. Later in this section we will encounter the strong claim in the guise of assertions that Tolkien's account is more historically accurate than the accounts of other myths, and in the claim that the Valar are the archetypal beings revealing themselves in the guise of the gods and goddesses of the world's many pantheons. This view, which approximates an identification of Tolkien's Legendarium with "perennial philosophy", is the binocular approach put upside-down. Now, it is no longer Tolkien's literary mythology which is taken to be a palimpsest of other myths, but the other myths which are considered to be derived from a core which is retained most purely in Tolkien's lore. The presence of the strong claim sets Legendarium Reconstructionism, together with some Tolkien-affirming Elven groups, apart from all the other groups in the spiritual Tolkien milieu for whom Tolkien's literary mythology is ultimately considered either derived from or inferior to other mythologies.

Members of Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion have developed different theories about how Tolkien's narrative world relates to the actual world. They agree that Tolkien's narratives refer, at least in part, to an independent, non-material reality, and inspired by Henry Corbin they often refer to this reality as "the Imaginal Realm". With references to Islamic esotericism (1969; 1972), Corbin claimed that the Imagination (which he always capitalises) constitutes both a valid source of knowledge and a realm or mode of being, the *Mundus Imaginalis* or the Imaginal Realm. He coined the term "Imaginal", as opposed to "imaginary", to emphasise the reality of the Imaginal as opposed to the non-reality of imagination and fantasy. For Corbin, the Imaginal Realm not only stands in opposition to the material world, but constitutes an intermediary realm between the material world, on the one hand, and the realm of pure Spirit on the other. The notion of the Imaginal Realm has entered the vocabulary of Legendarium Reconstructionism through Stephan Hoeller, who in his lecture on "J.R.R. Tolkien's Gnosis for Our Day" explains that

Tolkien had accessed this realm and that his narratives are based on imaginal experiences.[526] Tolkien himself never spoke of the Imaginal Realm, but in *Smith of Wootton Major* he makes a distinction between World and Faery (cf. section 15.3.1 above). The Legendarium Reconstructionists follow Hoeller in considering Tolkien's distinction between World and Faery synonymous with Corbin's distinction between the material world and the Imaginal Realm.

The Legendarium Reconstructionists see the relation between Tolkien's narrative world and Corbin's esoteric cosmology in one of two different ways, depending on whether they read Tolkien's literary mythology in the mytho-historical or the mytho-cosmological mode. Those who approach Tolkien's narratives in the mytho-historical mode, and hence consider them to refer in some way to historical events in the actual world, see a close fit between Corbin's three-layered cosmology and the likewise three-layered cosmology of the Legendarium. For this group, Middle-earth, the material world in Tolkien's mythology, can be equated with our physical world. The Blessed Realm, which is the intermediary world in Tolkien's mythology, can furthermore be taken to correspond to the Imaginal Realm. This makes sense, for even though the Blessed Realm is part of the created World within Tolkien's cosmology, it is no longer physically connected to Middle-earth and can only be accessed from Middle-earth via the Olórë Mallë, the Path of Dreams.[527] Another group of members approach Tolkien's literary mythology in the mytho-cosmological mode. These members do not believe that Tolkien's narratives say anything about the history of the physical world, but consider both the Blessed Realm *and* Middle-earth to be situated within the Imaginal Realm, or at least to reflect experiences of this realm. For both groups the notion of the Imaginal Realm serves to explain how the Valar and the Blessed Realm can be real, even though they do not exist in the physical world.

Most Legendarium Reconstructionists more or less share Corbin's emanentist cosmology and pantheist theology and acknowledge that the Imaginal Realm is ultimately an intermediary world between the World of Spirit and the material world. This does not rhyme well with Tolkien's dualistic cosmology and theistic theology, a point I return to in section 16.3.2 below. As a consequence of this, Eru's Timeless Halls outside the Created World cannot be identified outright with Corbin's World of Spirit. This has been no great cause of cognitive friction, however, since the ritual practice of the Legendarium Reconstructionists is focused solely on the Imaginal Realm. Table 16.7 below gives an

[526] Legendarium Reconstructionists use the notion of the Imaginal Realm to embed Tolkien's narrative world within established esoteric cosmology in the same way as other groups within the spiritual Tolkien milieu have made reference to the astral plane. On Hoeller and the lecture, see footnote 484 above.

[527] In Tolkien's narrative world, the Blessed Realm used to exist on the same plane as Middle-earth, but gradually became separated from this material plane, first through the Hiding of Valinor and later through the Rounding of the World following the destruction of Númenor (cf. section 15.2.3 above).

overview of the mytho-historical and mytho-cosmological rationalisations of Tolkien's narrative cosmology.

Table 16.7. Rationalisations of Tolkien's Narrative Cosmology

Corbin's esoteric cosmology	**The cosmology in *Smith***	**Tolkien's cosmology in the Middle-earth text corpus**	
		The Mytho-historical fit	***The Mytho-cosmological fit***
The World of Spirit	-----	(The Timeless Halls)	(The Timeless Halls)
The Imaginal Realm	Faery	The Blessed Realm	The Blessed Realm; Middle-earth
The Material World	World	Middle-earth	-----

A few additional points must be made about the relation between the Blessed Realm and the Imaginal Realm. First, the two are usually not simply equated. Most often, the Imaginal Realm is taken to include both the Blessed Realm *and* other otherworlds within it. This view is in accordance with the inclusive theology of religions of Legendarium Reconstructionism: Members not only consider other paths legitimate, but are typically also prepared to grant the deities and otherworlds of other traditions the same ontological status as their own deities and otherworld, by situating them within the Imaginal Realm. Second, some members hold a view that combines elements from the mytho-historical and the mytho-cosmological ones already sketched. Extending Tolkien's notion that the Blessed Realm used to be part of the physical world, these members claim that both the Blessed Realm *and* Middle-earth together constitute a plane of existence that used to be intertwined with our world, but have become detached at some point in history.

Legendarium Reconstructionists rationalise their ritual interaction with Tolkien's narrative world in different ways. Members with a mytho-cosmological approach, for whom Tolkien's entire world is situated within the Imaginal Realm, typically use notions from *beyond* Tolkien's Middle-earth text corpus to rationalise their ritual practice. With Jung they may say that they use the "active imagination" and the "transcendent function" of the psyche to connect with the Imaginal Realm.[528] If they draw on Tolkien, they will invoke *Smith* or *On Fairy-Stories* and consider their own experiences emulations of Tolkien's experiences of Faery.[529] Legendarium Reconstructionists with a mytho-histori-

[528] Jung-inspired members will not talk about the collective unconscious, however, and if they use the term 'archetype' it will mean 'one of many cosmological powers' rather than 'one of a few psychological basis-structures'.

[529] Several individuals who are not members of Tië eldaliéva or Ilsaluntë Valion share the view that Tolkien had visited Faery and that his narratives reveal this fact. One noteworthy example is James Warren Maertens (aka Alferian Gwydion MacLir), a Druid and freemason who in 2007 held the Mount Haemus Lecture

cal outlook, by contrast, tend to rationalise their ritual practice in the light of the Legendarium itself. For instance, members of Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion did an experimental ritual together in 2008 in which they visualised themselves travelling to Aman via the Ilweran, the Rainbow Bridge, which connects Middle-earth with the Blessed Realm according to the lore (cf. section 15.2.3 above). The same members will sometimes speak of their dreams and meditation experiences as journeys on the Olórë Mallë, the Path of Dreams. Taking the physical description of the Olórë Mallë in *The Lost Tales* to be metaphorical, they prefer to refer to their various ways of establishing imaginal contact with the Blessed Realm as a repertoire of "*olórmë*" through which one can receive "*olor*-messages". Elwin considers a late essay of Tolkien's, the "Ósanwe-kenta" (Qu: Enquiry into the Communication of Thought), to be the Legendarium core text which best provides a rationalisation of the group's ritual practices from an 'inside the lore'-perspective. This text describes thought-communication between the various beings in Tolkien's world, including thought-communication between Eru, the Valar, and the Quendi on the one hand, and humans on the other. The "Ósanwe-kenta" makes it possible to interpret both the members' meditation experiences, dream visions, and spontaneous revelations from the Valar, as well as Tolkien's dream visions and 'Faery' experiences, as being in fact thought-communication with the Valar (and occasionally with the Quendi or even with Eru).[530]

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on Tolkien and Faery for the Order of Bards, Ovates, and Druids (Maertens 2007). In this text Maertens expresses the conviction that Faery is real and he equates it both with the Otherworld and with Jung's concept of the Anima Mundi (2007, 9, 13). He is furthermore convinced that Tolkien had found a way into this world and that he wrote his tales to help others find the way as well. As Maertens writes, "the Lord of the Rings and the other mythological works of Professor Tolkien have given all of us a doorway into the world of Faerie that is perhaps not fully appreciated even by his fans. Tolkien considered that what he was writing was a "Faerie tale" in the most serious sense of the term" (Maertens 2007, 25). At least one of the Legendarium Reconstructionist core members, Ellenar, found Tië eldaliéva after having studied in Maertens' now defunct Avalon College. Maertens' homepage can be accessed at http://www.bardwood.com [140812]. The Avalon College of Druidry used to be hosted at www.avaloncollege.org. It is no longer online, but the site has been captured numerous times by the Internet Wayback Machine. The site, as it looked per 4 October 2006, can be accessed at http://web.archive.org/web/20061004040548/http://avaloncollege.org/ [070214].

[530] "Ósanwe-kenta" was not included in *HoMe*, but was later published in *Vinyar Tengwar* (Tolkien 1998a). Like the "Note on the Language of the Valar'" discussed in section 15.2.2 above, the "Ósanwe-kenta" is an appendix to *Quendi and Eldar*, and like the "Note", it is framed as a summary of certain passages of Pengoloð's *Lhammas* (cf. footnote 456). The very phenomenon of thought-communication is mentioned in the main text of *Quendi and Eldar*, but only as a form of communication used by the Valar among themselves. "Ósanwe-kenta" makes it clear that thought-communication is the natural form of communication, not only for the Valar and the Maiar, but also for Quendi and Men (Tolkien 1998a, 23). The races differ in their capacity of communicating in this way, however. This is partly because thought-communication, being the communication between two souls (*fëar*), is inhibited by the presence of a body (*hröa*), and partly because the ability to transmit messages via thought depends on the sender's stature and authority (Tolkien 1998a, 23-24). For these reasons, it is much easier for humans to receive thought-messages than to send them.

While all Legendarium Reconstructionists agree that Tolkien had in some way accessed another reality and that his writings can be used as a doorway back into that reality, opinions differ much on whether Tolkien's texts also refer to events in our own world's prehistory. Of the core members, especially Elwin and Lomelindo have been interested in exploring correspondences between the Legendarium and the historical record, and as mentioned in section 16.1.3 above, the mytho-historical approach is prominently stressed in Ilsaluntë Valion's Charter. A cornerstone of the Charter is the belief that some humans, though not all, belong to the Line of Lúthien and hence have some measure of Elven and Maian ancestry. These so-called Edain are further said to possess a special spiritual quality that can manifest itself in different kinds of talents. One such talent is the ability to connect with the Blessed Realm, so it seems that at least the founders of Ilsaluntë Valion considered themselves to be Edain. An ambitious, mytho-historical project in the first years of Ilsaluntë Valion's existence was the "Arda timeline", an attempt, in Elwin's words, to fuse information "from the Lore and archeo-astronomy and geological and paleontological information". Elwin told me that Tolkien's estimate in a letter (*Letters* 283) that *LR* took place 6000 years ago was just a guess and that the events in his narratives better fit the historical evidence if placed much further back in time.

16.3.2. The Ontology of Tolkien's Supernatural Beings: Affirmative and Transformative Approaches

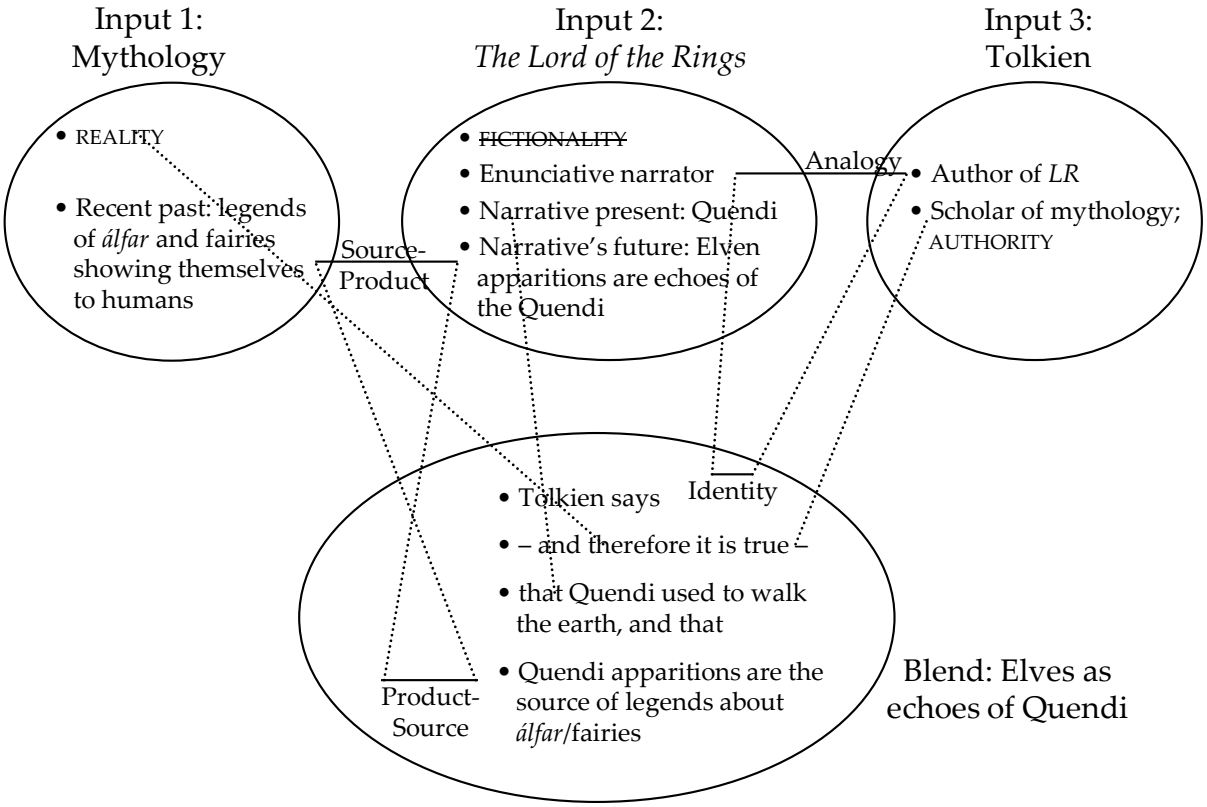
While all Legendarium Reconstructionists feel that the supernatural beings in Tolkien's narratives refer to real supernatural entities, they sometime disagree on whether these beings exist simply in the way Tolkien describes them (literal affirmation) or whether his description has in some way been distorted and is therefore in need of restoration (theistic or dynamistic transformation). Members disagree among each other, and sometimes individual members slide between different positions.

The Legendarium Reconstructionist conception of the Quendi stays fairly close to Tolkien's description. Members generally agree that the Quendi were a kind of advanced humans who deserve respect as ancestors rather than as deities. Members of a mytho-historical bent believe that modern humans, if they belong to the Line of Lúthien, can possess some measure of Elven genes. They also believe that 'faded Quendi' or Lingerers (cf. section 15.2.4 above) exist in our world (as opposed to the Blessed Realm). According to the narrator of *LR*, Quendi can still show themselves to humans in his time, and based on this statement, mytho-historical members consider myths and legends about fairies, *álfar*, and other such beings to reflect contact with faded Quendi in pre-Christian times.[531] In other words, they invert the intertextual chain with a source-product reversal, sugges-

[531] In *LR*, the enunciative narrator states that Elves in "later days" were sometimes seen as "present and yet remote, a living vision of that which has already been left far behind by the flowing streams of Time" (*LR* 373; cf. section 7.3.1).

ting that it is not Tolkien's depiction of the Quendi (product) which borrows from the *álfar* of myth (source), but the *álfar* of myth (source > product) who are echoes of the more real Quendi (product > source).[532] I have illustrated this characteristic source-product reversal in figure 16.2 below.

Figure 16.2. The Quendi-*Álfar* Relation as Source-Product Reversal



Some members view the Quendi in a way that goes somewhat beyond Tolkien's own formulations, and as we have seen this was one of the causes for the Ilsaluntë Valion hive-off. The members who stayed in Tië eldaliéva move beyond Tolkien in three ways. First, though they still view the Quendi as ancestors and believe that humans can possess Elven DNA, they believe that this Elven DNA, as a result of the sundering of the worlds, no longer is of a physical nature, but exists on a non-material plane. The non-physical nature of Elven DNA explains why it has not yet been proven by science to exist.[533] Second, though Tolkien's texts include no notion of mixed Elven/human souls, members of Tië eldaliéva believe that besides being in part genetically Elven, one can

[532] This relation between the Quendi and the *álfar* is described on the "Beliefs" page on Tië eldaliéva's original homepage. See http://web.archive.org/web/20070810184835/ http://thehiddenrealm.org/ [140114].

[533] Also those members of Ilsaluntë Valion who believe that some (or all) contemporary humans have Elven ancestors propose to explain why this has not been verified by science. Instead of arguing that the Elven DNA is now situated on another plane, however, they argue that processes of genetic drift and gene deletion have made it close to impossible to detect Elven genes in present-day humans.

also possess a partly Quendian soul.[534] Third, the Elven-centred members of Tië eldaliéva are interested in the existence of other kinds of elves besides the Quendi, allowing especially for the existence of various lineages of star elves who are different both from the Quendi and from the purely spiritual "Fae" beings, i.e. the Valar, Maiar, and lesser elemental spirits. The members of Tië eldaliéva accept the existence of star elves because many members of the Elven community self-identify as such non-Quendian elves (cf. ch. 11 above).[535] They have even considered the possibility that also the Quendi might be star elves and that Middle-earth might be situated on an exo-planet in the Pleiades star cluster.[536]

While disagreement over the nature of the Elves was one of the causes of the schism, members of Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion largely agree on the nature of Eru and the Valar. Most fundamentally, they agree that Eru and the Valar exist and follow Tolkien's description of the relationship between them: Eru is the supreme deity and the Valar are created beings and subordinates to Eru. Therefore, while the members focus their ritual work on the Valar, they stress that they do not worship these beings. Especially the Christian members further point out that the Valar are not gods, but are rather on a par with (arch)angelic beings. Theological critics have argued that the Elves and humans in Tolkien's narratives treat the Valar more like Roman Catholic Saints than like angels, and this is arguably also an adequate description of how Legendarium Reconstructionists approach the Valar. Indeed, members de-emphasise the ontological diffe-

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[534] The notion of partly Quenyan souls goes together with a more general belief in human reincarnation. This belief is foreign to the Legendarium, in which only Elves reincarnate, but it is nevertheless the rule rather than the exception in the spiritual Tolkien milieu.

[535] The relation between Quendi, star elves, and Fae is discussed in detail on Tië eldaliéva's original FAQ page. See http://web.archive.org/web/20070810184835/http://thehiddenrealm.org/ [240114]. I think that the members found it necessary to clarify the relation between the Quendi and other types of Elves partly because Tië eldaliéva in 2007 was in contact with James Warren Maertens, the Druid mentioned in footnote 529 above. Maertens has developed a set of oracular Elvish Runes, a so-called Elvish Ogham, and claims that these Alferic runes are used by the Sarithin, a certain kind of star elves. He further claims that Eranor, the language of the Sarithin Elves, has "linguistic ties and affinities to Quenya and Sindarin" which he claims that Tolkien "discovered" rather than "invented". Departing from Tolkien's notion of the Quendi being created and awakened in Middle-earth, Maertens claims that the elves originated from the stars. He furthermore asserts that Quenya split off from Eranor when some of the star elves went to earth. Certainly, some of the names for the 13 Elvish gods in Eranor (consider Oronwë, Tulan, and Ulmaran) have a striking similarity with the names of the Valar in Quendi (Oromë, Tulkas, and Ulmo), but the most sober explanation is that Maertens borrowed from Tolkien. See http://www.bardwood.com/RIANAR.HTML [140812]. The relation between Tolkien's Quendi and the elves with whom Maertens claims to have a connection is also discussed in the lecture quoted in footnote 529 (Maertens 2007, 14).

[536] The notion of star elves actually has some foundation in Tolkien's texts. Star elves or En-keladim are mentioned on one occasion in the Legendarium, namely in Ramer's account of his space travel experiences in *The Notion Club Papers* (*SD* 206). Even so, Tolkien nowhere discusses the relationship between the Quendi and other Elves. In the narratives set in Middle-earth, Tolkien furthermore never suggests the existence of non-Quendian Elves, nor does he consider the Quendi to originate from the stars.

rence between themselves and the Valar and approach them as teachers and role models or even as friends with whom they "hang out" as Calantirniel and Llefyn jokingly put it when I participated in one of their Skype rituals.

Pagan and Christian members alike feel uncomfortable with the depiction in Tolkien's tales of Eru Ilúvatar as a male, theistic being residing in distant sovereignty outside the created World. The Pagan members subscribe to a fundamentally holistic outlook in which it makes sense to talk of a pantheistic Spirit, but in which there is no room for a strong dualistic division between Creator and Creation. Actually, the same goes for the Christian core members Alyras, who describes herself as a Charismatic Christian interested in esoteric Christianity, and Niennildi, who self-identifies as a metaphysical Christian and belongs to the Unity Church, a New Thought-oriented church somewhat similar to Christian Science. The shared holistic world-view made for an alliance between Pagan and Christian members on the issue of rationalising Eru. Members wanted to be true to the Legendarium, but would not give up something as important as their basic conception of the divine. Elwin squared the circle by declaring first Tië eldaliéva and later Ilsaluntë Valion *panentheistic*, stating that Eru is *both* outside Eä, such as Tolkien says, *and* Eä itself, such as the holistic world-view of the members dictates. Elwin supported this view with a reference to Tolkien's own texts, pointing out that Eru creates the world by sending his creative power, the Secret Fire or the Flame Imperishable, into the Void (cf. section 15.2.1 above). Even so, Tolkien himself never referred to this theology as panentheism and would probably rather have seen it as a reflection of Christian omnipresentism.

A parallel discussion has taken place regarding Eru Ilúvatar's gender. Pointing out that Tolkien prefers to refer to this deity as Eru (Qu: The One), while Ilúvatar (Qu: All-father) is merely a name used by the inhabitants of Arda (*S* 3), members have argued both that Tolkien intended to portray Eru in gender neutral terms, and that Eru indeed probably *is* gender neutral. Going one step further, members have argued that the personal, male Ilúvatar should ultimately be treated as a metaphor for Ilúvë (Qu: All That Is), the real non-personal and un-gendered divine power. In other words, the Legendarium Reconstructionists have made Ilúvatar subject to a process of dynamistic transformation. As a further corollary of the holistic conception of Eru, members reinterpret the Timeless Halls and Eru's act of creation in non-dualistic, emanentist terms. Where the Timeless Halls in Tolkien's mythology is a place, indeed a kind of Heaven outside Eä, Legendarium Reconstructionists either bracket this very notion or dissolve the distinction between Eru (the person) and the Timeless Halls (his place). Furthermore, where Tolkien lets Eru create the Valar and Eä in the different ways, the Valar being described as "the offspring of [Eru's] thought" (*S* 3) and Eä being created *ex nihilo* with a word, Legendarium Reconstructionists tend to see *both* Eä and the Valar as "thought emanations" from Eru/Ilúvë/Spirit.

In ritual, Legendarium Reconstructionists treat the Valar as discrete, spiritual beings. In theoretical discussions outside ritual, the status of the Valar as independent

powers or angels is either cemented (literal affirmation), or they are referred to as "energies", "archetypes", or even "archetypal energies". It is tricky to discern what that means exactly, for 'energy' and 'archetype' are flexible concepts that can carry different meanings, including some that are conventional within the cultic milieu, but may seem odd for an outsider. Crucially, the reference to the Valar as energies is not meant to reduce them to non-personal powers or cosmic principles: One can be energy and a person at the same time. In expressions such as "I resonate with the archetypal energies embodied by the Valar", 'energy' thus means much the same as 'spirit' or 'soul'. Furthermore, not only the Valar are essentially considered to be energies. Those members who speak of the Valar as energies will also say that humans are ultimately made up of energy. Indeed, that is why humans can have "vibration levels" and that allows them to "resonate" with the Valar. That the Valar embody *archetypal* energy means that they are beings with more refined energy levels than humans, or, put differently, that they are beings of a more spiritual and less material nature. In other words, even when the Valar are spoken of as energies, the point is always that they are more spiritual than humans, not that they are less personal. I therefore hesitate to label this ontology assessment dynamistic transformation, although it certainly goes in that direction.

The reference to the Valar as "archetypes" not only stresses their position in the spiritual hierarchy, but also indicates that they are thought to stand in some relation to the deities of other pantheons. I have encountered three different views on this issue among Legendarium Reconstructionists. The first view, which many Pagan members share, is the most cautious. According to this view the Valar are just one expression of a group of more fundamental archetypes, which in turn are seen either as spiritual beings or cosmic powers (but never as psychological structures). The general idea is that a number of spiritual beings exist, but that different cultures interpret these beings differently. Going along with this logic, Calantirniel argues, for example, that there exists an archetypal Star Queen who expresses herself as Varda in Tolkien's literary mythology, but takes on other guises in other mythologies. Even those members who hold this cautious view will say that they personally have the greatest affinity with the guises taken by the archetypal beings in Tolkien's mythology, and their terminology will often slide so that they speak of the Valar as "Tolkien's archetypes" even when they mean to say that Tolkien's Valar are merely archetypal images of other, more fundamental archetypes.[537] The second view of the nature of the Valar is really a variation of the first. Also this view holds that Tolkien's Valar are merely one possible interpretation of a set of more fundamental archetypes, but it adds that Tolkien's interpretation probably gives a more accurate depiction than other mythologies, because it has not been handed down for generations with all the risks of distortion that entails. The third view is bolder and simply states that the Valar and Maiar *are* the archetypes. According to this view, the Valar and

[537] As pointed out in chapter 5, this terminological slide is common. In the cultic milieu, 'archetype' can refer both to the archetypal source and the archetypal expression.

Maiar have revealed themselves to people around the world. Different people have given the Valar different names and tell different tales about them, but in ritual these people really address the Valar even if they do so in their local guises. Only Tolkien describes the Valar and the Maiar as they really are.

16.3.3. The Concept of Gnosis: Disagreements on Justification

In its Charter, Ilsaluntë Valion describes itself as "a gnostic research group". Literally, gnosis means 'knowledge', but like esotericists in general, Legendarium Reconstructionists use the term to refer more specifically to knowledge of spiritual matters achieved through trancework. All members agree that gnosis is a particular *mode* of knowing, namely one governed by the imagination rather than by ordinary 'five sense'-perception or reason. They disagree, however, on the *epistemological status* of gnosis. Three epistemological positions can be discerned. Most members, especially the Pagans, consider the Valar to be ontologically real, but have not given much thought to the epistemological questions 'how one can *know* that the Valar are real?' This group justifies its beliefs with reference to subjective experience, but justification takes place implicitly and the epistemological value attributed to subjective experience varies. A second group of Legendarium Reconstructionists, which is largely found outside Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion, assert that gnosis can be a source of objective knowledge and is therefore not fundamentally different from other kinds of knowledge. The third group of self-identified 'gnostic explorers' assert that one cannot ask whether gnosis is subjective or objective because gnosis by its very nature transcends the categorical distinction between the subjective and the objective.

Even the majority of (Pagan) members who do not think systematically about epistemology, do justify their beliefs with a straightforward reference to subjective experience. They refer mainly to their own, first-person experience, but also to the second-person experiences of their peers and to Tolkien's third-person experiences as these are attested in his "channelled" writings. As pointed out in chapter 5 above, subjective experience can both be used to objectivise and de-objective beliefs, and this allows these members to slide between an objectivising and a subjectivising conception of gnosis. Their default mode is to view gnosis in objective terms, arguing straightforwardly – or assuming implicitly – that their subjective experiences demonstrate that the Valar and the Blessed Realm really exist. In other words, the Pagans use their subjective experiences as a source of *legitimisation*, i.e. as evidence for the referentiality of their belief assertions. When confronted with sceptic outsiders, however, most Pagans members are prepared to switch mode and slide into a subjectivising conception of gnosis. De-objectivising their beliefs, they will then say that Tolkien spirituality is all about "what works" and what "feels right" and that those things differ from person to person. Such *subjectivisation* can be prudent as it eliminates the plausibility threat caused by the sceptics: the critics miss their mark when they say that it is stupid to assert that the Valar objectively

exist, for we only claim that we have meaningful experiences of the Valar and that Tolkien spirituality is therefore valid for us.

The second epistemological position explicitly considers knowledge obtained with psychic means to be as objective as other knowledge. Parapsychologists, who attempt to prove the reality of telepathy, fall into this category, as does Camille Flammarion whose psychic research on the reality of astral fairies was mentioned in chapter 10. Within the spiritual Tolkien milieu, the objectivising approach is characterised by three claims: (1) Tolkien's narratives are reliable sources of factual information about the supernatural; (2) it can be *proved* that this is the case; and (3) anyone can obtain objective knowledge through psychic means in the way Tolkien did it. One Tolkien religionist who holds this view is Xavier de la Huerga, who briefly was a member of Ilsaluntë Valion, but left again because his objectivising approach to gnosis clashed too strongly with the compartmentalist approach to gnosis of Ilsaluntë Valion's leaders (to which I return below). Consider as example of the objectivising position a talk given by Xavier de la Huerga at the Tolkien Society's conference The Return of the Ring, which was held 16-20 August 2012 at Loughborough University. De la Huerga's talk was entitled "From 2012 to Atlantis and back again: Tolkien's Time-Travelling and the Notion Club Papers Mystery"; his abstract went:

> *I offer evidence* that Tolkien did somehow accomplish some form of time-travel, or else what could be termed pre-cognitive and retro-cognitive insights in writing his unfinished novel The Notion Club Papers. From the uncanny prediction of the Great Storm of 1987, to the odd coincidences that connect the story with the Mayan Long Count Calendar (whose cycle of 5,125 years finishes in 2012), the Black Monday Stock Market Crash of 1987 and other enigmatic facts. […] I will […] show how auto-biographical The Notion Club Papers is and how it can be read as a 'metaphysical manifesto' of sorts, a document revealing Tolkien's innermost visionary experiences, often going deep into the realm of mysticism and the paranormal (emphasis added).[538]

As I have shown in section 15.1.2 above, *The Notion Club Papers* indeed includes autobiographical features, and Tolkien at least incorporated one unusual experience of his, the Great Wave dream, into the text. De la Huerga goes further, however, and claims that Tolkien actually predicted a number of future events, including the Great Storm of 1987. In the *Notion Club Papers*, the fictional editor, who is writing in 2012, observes that the minutes from the Notion Club, written in the 1940s, quite accurately predicted certain major events, including the Great Storm of 1987, taking place on June 12th within the fictional world (*SD* 157). There is an obvious parallel between, on the one hand, the prediction within the fictional world, and, on the other hand, the fact that Tolkien himself wrote in 1940s and that a real hurricane, "The Great Storm of 1987", struck Great Britain

[538] http://www.returnofthering.org/timetable_items.php#Huerga [100214].

on the night of 15-16 October 1987. Even though the exact dates differ between Tolkien's fictional Great Storm and the actual Great Storm, De la Huerga is convinced that Tolkien's text proves that "pre-cognitive" insights about the future are possible, that Tolkien had in fact discovered a way to obtain such insights, and that this had enabled him to predict various future events.[539] By the same token, De la Huerga believes that Tolkien had achieved "retro-cognitive" insights in past events.[540]

Those members of Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion who read Tolkien's literary mythology in a mytho-historical mode seem to share De la Huerga's objectivising approach, but they only do so to some extent. Indeed, these members consider it possible to obtain gnosis about the material world through psychic means, such as ancestral memory regression, as Tolkien describes this technique in *The Lost Road* and *The Notion Club Papers*. These members also compare the history of the Legendarium with the historical record of the actual world. They refer, for instance, to research on Doggerland, the landmass that used to connect Great Britain and continental Europe before the Ice Age, and point out that the pre-historical coastline of Europe quite closely fits the coastline on Tolkien's maps of Middle-earth. They also have not failed to see that Tolkien in *The Notion Club Papers* seems to have predicted the Great Storm of 1987. Members of a mytho-historical bent refer, furthermore, to Laurence Gardner's speculations on the Elven bloodline (cf. ch. 12) to back up their belief in the Line of Lúthien, and they cite Martin Baker's articles on the Tresco Manuscript (cf. section 16.1.1) to add weight to their general belief that Tolkien's stories have an historical core.[541] Even so, the mytho-historical members of Ilsaluntë Valion differ from De la Huerga in that they do not speak in terms of proof, evidence, and objective truth. They take delight in pointing out parallels or "synchronicities" between established history and Tolkien's narratives, and they may personally be convinced that Tolkien's narratives include some measure of historical truth. But they cautiously leave it to "further research" to determine whether Tolkien's narratives are 'really' and objectively historical.

Elwin has developed an elaborate justification for Ilsaluntë Valion's mytho-historical speculations which works by dissolving the very border between the objective and the subjective. Elwin goes as far as to argue that there is no 'objective reality', only a multitude of reality-versions which subjects can tap into. There exists what might be

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[539] A large portion of the audience, including Verlyn Flieger, left in outrage during De la Huerga's talk, to the apparent surprise of the speaker.

[540] Another Tolkien religionist who holds an objectivising approach to gnosis is William Norman. Norman hosts the blog Gnostic Tolkienology at http://www.gnostictolkienology.blogspot.com/ [070214].

[541] Probably inspired by Laurence Gardner and Nicholas de Vere (cf. section 12.2 above), Lomelindo even expressed the belief that Tolkien *knew* that he was writing actual history about the Elven bloodline, but that he had to mask the truth as myth so as not to risk his job and reputation. Lomelindo also interpreted Tolkien's gradual Christianisation of the Legendarium as the tainting of an originally pure and pagan vision which Tolkien did not have the courage to uphold.

called a 'consensus reality', namely the reality version which most people, inter-subjectively, consider the 'real' world, but ultimately this reality version is no more real than the alternate realities. Even though the alternate realities are not objective, they are ontologically real and hence *more* than just subjective ways of experiencing reality. Tolkien's Legendarium tells of one of these alternate realities, and the ontological and epistemological status of this world thus hovers between the subjective and the objective. According to this view, gnosis is knowledge about the various alternate realities, and Elwin therefore refers to knowledge obtained in Legendarium-based spiritual experiences specifically as "Tolkien-affine gnosis". Tolkien-affine gnosis is true of its own world, the alternate reality constituted by the Legendarium, but not (necessarily) true also of consensus reality. In other words, Elwin divides the world into two compartments, so to speak, namely consensus reality and the 'set of alternate realities', and he considers gnosis to be true but non-objective knowledge of the alternate realities. Elwin told me that he does not *experience* the world as divided into distinct compartments, however, as he constantly and easily switches between two "cognitive modes", i.e. the "rational" mode directed towards consensus reality and the "shamanic" mode directed towards the alternate realities. Given the ontological, epistemological, and phenomenological duality of Elwin's position, his mode of justification can be categorised as a form of *compartmentalisation*, i.e. 'the position that religious beliefs constitute their own province of meaning and that their truth can therefore not be determined rationally, but only according to its own logic or language game' (cf. section 5.1.4 above). It is the first time we encounter this sophisticated type of justification in the spiritual Tolkien milieu.[542]

Where Elwin's justification is developed to fit a mytho-historical take on Tolkien's Legendarium, Gwineth has developed a similar epistemological position fit for the mytho-cosmological approach. Like Elwin, she rejects the subjectivising stance on gnosis, i.e. experiences are generated purely be the individual psyche, as well as the objectivising stance, i.e. experiences are straightforward perceptions of what objectively exists, and adopts a compartmentalist position, stating that neither the subjectivising nor the objectivising approach is true. For Gwineth, gnostic experiences are of a radically different kind pertaining to a world (ontologically speaking) or to a province of meaning (phenomenologically speaking) that transcends such rational distinctions as true/false and objective/subjective.

Most fundamentally, Gwineth distinguishes between two complementary cognitive modes, the rational mode and the imagination. Following Hoeller, she furthermore states

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[542] Elwin furthermore argues that time is largely an illusion and that everything ultimately happens simultaneously. From this point of view, he explains, the statement "the Valar influenced early humanoid conceptions of gods" (which he holds to be true) is just as valid as the statement "early humanoid conceptions of gods influenced Tolkien's characterizations of the Valar". This view on time echoes W.J. Dunne's (cf. footnote 475 above), a fact that Elwin was well aware of. He said, however, that he had developed this view in response to a Salvia-induced experience, and that he had only subsequently become aware of Dunne's theory and its influence on Tolkien by reading Verlyn Flieger's work.

that these two psychological faculties are used to perceive different part of the reality – the Factual World and the Imaginal Realm. As Gwineth is quick to stress, this ontological distinction is *not* one between objective reality (the Factual World) and a subjective, psychological, or made-up fantasy world. It is rather a distinction between a part of reality in which such a distinction makes sense (the Factual World) and a part of the world in which it does not (the Imaginal Realm). The Imaginal Realm is not the realm of fantasy, but a part of reality, existing beyond the everyday world of facts, in which distinctions such as that between the objective and the subjective break down.[543] The ontological and phenomenological distinctions between the Factual World/rationality and the Imaginal Realm/imagination are mirrored by an epistemological distinction. One can have objective knowledge of the Factual World, but knowledge of the Imaginal Realm, referred to as 'gnosis', is of a different character: Since the Imaginal Realm is real, gnosis is true, but since the Imaginal Realm exists beyond the borders of the Factual World, gnosis is true in a way that transcends the distinction between the objective and the subjective: it is not factually true in the objective sense, but neither subjective in the crude sense of being made up. Gnosis is true in a way that cannot be described in terms of rational reasoning; one has to experience it and intuitively "get it". According to Gwineth, Tolkien conceived of the relation between World and Faery in much the same way as the relation between the Factual World and the Imaginal Realm described above. To demonstrate this, she referred me to a passage in a draft of *On Fairy-Stories*, the so-called 'Manuscript B', in which Tolkien wrote:

> The Land of Fairy Story is wide and deep and high [...] In that land a man may (perhaps) count himself fortunate to have wandered, but its very mystery and wealth make dumb the traveller who would report [...] The fairy gold (too often) turns to withered leaves when it is brought away. All that I can ask is that you, knowing all these things, will receive my withered leaves, as a token at least that my hand once held a little of the gold (Flieger and Donaldson 2008, 207).[544]

Gwineth took this quote to indicate that Tolkien believed to have experienced Faery (here called "The Land of Fairy Story"), but that he struggled to describe his experiences to his academic peers, because those experiences, while real and immensely significant, could not be grasped rationally, nor properly expressed in language. As Tolkien put it in the published version of *OFS*, "Faërie cannot be caught in a net of words; for it is one of its qualities to be indescribable, though not imperceptible" (*TL* 16).

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[543] That is not to say that the Factual World and the Imaginal Realm are experienced as disconnected. On the contrary, members of Ilsaluntë Valion consider the Imaginal Realm a completely natural part of overall reality, and consider visits to the Imaginal Realm crucial for their wellbeing and creativity in the Factual World.

[544] Gwineth had first encountered this quote in a lecture entitled "J.R.R. Tolkien: An Imaginative Life" by Lance Owen, an associate of Stephen Hoeller. See http://gnosis.org/tolkien/ [300114].

It was extremely important for both Elwin and Gwineth to stress that they were no Tolkien literalists. They consider their spiritual experiences within the Tolkien-framework to reflect contact with a real spiritual world, but do not make any claims about the objective or factual reality of the content of those experiences or of Tolkien's narratives. For Elwin and Gwineth, embedding Tolkien spirituality within a sophisticated epistemological framework, indeed a 'philosophy of Tolkien spirituality', made all the difference – in Elwin's words – between being "eccentrics" and being "nutcases". While very much aware that most outsiders at best considered them eccentrics, the gnostic members of Ilsaluntë Valion themselves do not feel that Tolkien spirituality is in need of additional justification compared to more conventional religious practices. To the contrary, they hold that *any* kind of spirituality or religion must be embedded within a serious philosophical framework to be legitimate.

For the gnostic/compartmentalist members, the epistemological devaluation of Tolkien's literary mythology vis-à-vis his original experiences has the practical consequence that the narratives need no longer be the focus in ritual. The gnostics still wish to be true to Tolkien, but believe that they can best be so by emulating what he did, i.e. opening themselves up to Faery/the Imaginal Realm and seeing what happens. It is partly for this reason that the gnostic members prefer simple meditations over elaborate, ceremonial rituals.

16.3.4. Semiotic Plausibility Construction in Legendarium Reconstructionism: A Summary

Certain patterns emerge from the discussion of rationalisation and justification in this section and the analysis of religious blending in the previous section. To begin with, it is possible to distinguish in rough terms between two member types in Legendarium Reconstructionism online. The larger group of members is comprised largely of Pagans who aim to build a new Legendarium-based tradition by acculturating Neo-Pagan and ceremonial magical rites and by solidifying their calendar, beliefs, symbols, and correspondence system into a stable system.[545] These members want collective rituals and consider the Valar to be real beings of whom one can have reliable knowledge. This 'traditionalist' type of members is found both in Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion. The second and smaller group of members is found only in Ilsaluntë Valion. These members have a non-Pagan background and take Tolkien himself, rather than the Elves or humans of his narratives, as role model for their own spiritual practice. Identifying their approach as "gnostic", these members focus on individual meditations through which they explore the Imaginal Realm/Faery just as Tolkien is believed to have done. Like Tolkien, they furthermore refrain from ascribing objectivity to their experiences. Both tradi-

[545] Calantirniel plans to publish a book on Tolkien-based Elven Spirituality with all this information and sent me a synopsis.

tionalist and gnostic members take Tolkien's literary mythology to constitute their exclusive body of authoritative texts and both can therefore be characterised as Reconstructionist in the sense of 'ideally non-eclectic'. Only the traditionalist members are Reconstructionists also in the second meaning of the term, as only these members actively seek to build a new tradition based on the religion of the Elves as it can be reconstructed from Tolkien's literary mythology.

Two further observations must be made about rationalisation and justification in Legendarium Reconstructionism. First, it is striking that while the presence of non-Tolkienesque elements in rituals has been a source of much tension (cf. section 16.2 above), no-one has challenged the legitimacy of borrowing strategies of rationalisation from the wider cultic milieu. Even those who are purists when it comes to rituals, matter-of-factly rationalise the Valar as "archetypes" and situate Aman within the "Imaginal Realm". Along similar lines, it is noticeable that Legendarium Reconstructionism has been able to accommodate dissimilar ontology assessments among members, whereas dissimilar modes of religious practice have caused tension. It has not, for example, been experienced as a problem that some members consider the Valar to be angels, while others consider them to be archetypal energies. It has also not been a problem that some members consider Tolkien's narratives to partly correspond with actual history while others do not. This is because these differences in rationalisation, great as they may be, have not stood in the way of a shared elemental religious practice in which the Valar are straightforwardly addressed as spiritual beings exactly as they are described in Tolkien's literary mythology. By contrast, different ideas about ritual formats, i.e. whether to include Pagan and ceremonial magical rites or not, have been a source of much frustration. To sum up, on the level of rationalised religion, religious blending has been deemed unproblematic and diverging ontology assessments have been tolerated, while on the level of elemental religion, religious blending has been deemed highly problematic and divergent ideas about ritual practice been a cause of great tension. From this we can conclude that in Legendarium Reconstructionism, as in most religion, rationalised religion is secondary to elemental ritual practice, both in importance and potential for social tension. It might seem as counterevidence that diverging justification strategies have caused half a schism, as the gnostics/compartmentalists in Ilsaluntë Valion have established the independent sub-forum Anima Mundi. That is not the case, however, for it is not the diverging justification strategies *per se* that cannot be accommodated. The rise of the gnostic approach has only become a problem for the social cohesion of Ilsaluntë Valion because it goes together with a different and more individualised form of ritual practice.

16.3.5. Revisiting the Four Hypotheses on Religion based on *A History of Middle-earth*

With the analysis of Legendarium Reconstructionism in place, it is now possible to revisit and evaluate the four hypotheses from chapter 15 concerning *HoMe*-based religion. I hypothesised that *HoMe*-based religion would (1) focus on the Valar as communication partners in ritual, with the Quendi playing only a secondary role; that it would (2) take a mytho-cosmological or possibly even a mytho-historical approach to Tolkien's literary mythology; that it (3) might or might not go together with a self-identification as Elves; and that (4) Tolkien would probably be taken as a role model for communicating with the Otherworld/Faery.

Before assessing these hypotheses, it is necessary to contemplate the very assumption that Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion are based on *HoMe*. In fact, that is a truth with modifications. As I remarked earlier in this chapter, Tië eldaliéva actually drew and draws primarily on *S* – which Calantirniel labelled the tradition's "Bible" on the group's original homepage. By comparison, Ilsaluntë Valion puts more emphasis on *HoMe*, together with Tolkien's letters and essays. I will argue that many of the differences in religious practice between Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion can be explained by this difference in textual basis.

The first hypothesis, that *HoMe*-based religion would focus on the Valar, must be considered verified. The rituals of both Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion focus primarily on the Valar, and only in the second place on the Maiar, the Quendi, and Eru. Given the portrayal of the Valar in the *Book of Lost Tales*, I had further expected the two Legendarium Reconstructionist groups to treat the Valar as a pantheon of gods. This is only the case among some of the Pagan members, however, while especially the Christian members strongly emphasise the merely angelic status of the Valar. The panentheistic interpretation of Eru took me completely by surprise, but that only demonstrates the obvious, namely that religious practice can never be predicted completely based on the authoritative texts that support it (cf. Malley 2004). This is the case even in explicitly Reconstructionist religion.

The second hypothesis was that *HoMe*-based religion would approach Tolkien's narratives in a mytho-cosmological or mytho-historical mode and back this up with references to Tolkien's letters and unfinished frame narratives. Also this hypothesis has been verified. Indeed, members of Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion consider Tolkien's texts to refer to real supernatural beings and they make no attempt to 'restore' them as really something else. The Valar are not reduced, for example, to expressions of Jungian archetypes or to images of the God and the Goddess. Similarly, the Quendi are not merely taken to be references to the 'real' fairies, but taken to constitute a class of beings of their own. The approach to Tolkien's literary mythology in Legendarium Reconstructionism is therefore mytho-cosmological (when not mytho-historical) rather than merely mythopoeic or binocular. I had furthermore hypothesised that *HoMe*-based religion

would consider only the Blessed Realm to be an otherworld while identifying Middle-earth with the actual world, either literally or metaphorically so. This is indeed the case for those Legendarium Reconstructionists who draw mainly on *HoMe*. Those members who take both the Blessed Realm and Middle-earth to exist on another plane or within the Imaginal Realm all consider other texts more central than *HoMe*, whether these be *S* (in the case of Tië eldaliéva members) or *OFS* and *Smith of Wootton Major* (in the case of some gnostic members in Ilsaluntë Valion).

I found it difficult to predict whether *HoMe*-based religion would go together with the self-identification as humans or Elves because *HoMe* includes texts both with an Elvish and with a Mannish point of view. In fact, most members draw on the motif of the Line of Lúthien to identify as a bit of both, namely as humans with some measure of Elven genes. Those Legendarium Reconstructionists who are more Elven-centred than this, and who count also on the possibility of Elven souls and star elves, are all active in largely *S*-based Tië eldaliéva.

My fourth hypothesis was that *HoMe*-based religion would take Tolkien as a spiritual role model and seek to emulate his experiences of Faery. That has certainly been the case. All members use meditation and visualisation to induce experiences of Faery/the Imaginal Realm, but as might be expected, it is especially the non-Pagan (and thus metaphysically or nominally Christian) members who most directly take Tolkien as their role model. By comparison, the Pagan members, including those in Ilsaluntë Valion, continue to see the Elves as their spiritual guides and role models.

In chapter 15, I formulated a fifth meta-hypothesis, namely that the nature of *HoMe*-based religion would be easier to predict than had been the case with religion based on *LR*, *S*, and the movies. This has been true to a large extent. I hypothesised Valar-directed religion, a mytho-cosmological or mytho-historical reading mode, uncertainty about whether to adopt a human or Elven perspective, and the use of Tolkien as a role model. All of this indeed characterises Legendarium Reconstructionism. On the other hand, this chapter also reveals that the religious affordances of a religious group's authoritative text can only predict the content of actual practice in very broad terms. Even among Legendarium Reconstructionists, who explicitly profess to be true to Tolkien's texts, rituals and rationalisations are determined largely by what Stanley Fish (1980) would call the religionists' 'interpretive communities', rather than by the exact content of the authoritative texts. Concretely, Pagan members and Christian members interpret Tolkien's texts differently and find different ritual approaches most natural and they do so for reasons that lie entirely outside the authoritative texts themselves.

16.4. Explaining the Relative Success of the Legendarium Reconstructionist Online Communities

In chapter 14, I stated that there are two main types of second wave Tolkien spirituality: Middle-earth Paganism and Legendarium Reconstructionism. By now, a number of differences between the two religionisation styles have become apparent. Middle-earth Paganism draws inspiration from the *LR* movies, focuses on ritual interaction with *LR* characters, and offers itself as an 'expansion pack', so to speak, for Neo-Pagans who want to try out a new pantheon. Legendarium Reconstructionism, by contrast, is based on *S* and *HoMe*, tolerates little blending of Tolkien's literary mythology with other religious frameworks, and focuses on the exploration of Tolkien's narrative world in meditation.

Middle-earth Paganism and Legendarium Reconstructionism differ not only substantively as different religionisation styles. The two modes also differ in their ability to produce stable and enduring online communities. Let me therefore now return to the question posed in chapter 14: why have the Legendarium Reconstructionist groups survived, despite tensions and divergent opinions, while Middle-Earth Pagans (and most of the other online communities discussed in chapter 14) have crumbled so fast?

I think there are five reasons for the relative success of the Legendarium Reconstructionist online communities. First, the Legendarium Reconstructionist forums have been much better moderated. The Tië eldaliéva forum was easy to navigate and discussions were streamlined and kept on-topic; the same has been true for Ilsaluntë Valion's forum. This has provided members with the feeling of contributing to a common project and counteracted the 'strain to variety' that caused the forums of Middle-Earth Pagans, Children of the Valar, Faer en Edhel Echuiad, the Eldalondë Society, and many other groups to lose focus and collapse. It is no surprise that the number of failed Tolkien-based online communities dwarfs the number of successful ones, for a strongly moderated forum requires considerable effort. When I first talked to Elwin in 2009, he told me that he devoted "perhaps 5-6 hours daily" to Ilsaluntë Valion and "sometimes much more if there is a crisis" (050909). Later moderators have used less time than this, but still much. Significantly, not all the time invested by the moderators goes into moderating the forum, and that leads me to the second reason for the relative success of Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion.

The primary information channel in these groups has never been the forums. The most significant discussions take place bilaterally, over chat, phone, or email, and new ideas are mostly generated and tested in this way before being introduced on the forum. Not only core members communicate in this way, new members typically have much contact with the captain/moderator or another mentor figure via email for some time before becoming active posters on the forum. As mentioned in section 16.1.3 above, a mentor system was formalised in the early years of Ilsaluntë Valion, and even though that is no longer the case, the captain still functions as a sort of mentor for new members, especially young joiners. I do not know whether members of the groups discussed in

chapter 14 also supplemented forum discussions and group emails with bilateral communication, but I dare say that for religious online groups to survive, it is necessary that individual members build relations with each other and come to feel loyalty towards specific other individuals rather than only towards the group. This is no different, of course, from how the cohesion of social groups in general can benefit from strong ties between individual group members.

A third reason for the success of Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion has to do with their membership. Already when joining, the core members had a substantial knowledge about Tolkien's literary mythology, and most had already experimented with Tolkien-based rituals. They were intelligent and highly educated individuals in their 40s, 30s, or late 20s with plenty of knowledge and experience to share and to further develop together. This stands in contrast to the groups discussed in chapter 14 whose member majority consisted of young people who were fascinated by Elves and Jackson's movies, but were in no position to contribute substantially in terms of spiritual knowledge.

The fourth reason for the successful community formation of the Legendarium Reconstructionist groups is that the religionising of Tolkien's literary mythology in these groups has been co-ordinated. Especially in the beginning, the aim was to construct a new path or tradition. As we have seen, this often led to disagreement and tension, but it also led to the formulation of certain core ideas: the Legendarium constitutes the tradition's exclusive lore; the Valar are the main pantheon; one can "resonate" with Elven energies or view the Elves as humankind's ancestors, but no human can possess a completely Elven soul. Most significantly, rituals were developed and carried out together. Even though most members eventually found it unsatisfying to do rituals via Skype or over the phone, all members continued to believe that Tolkien's narratives describe a real world in some way, and that the various ritual techniques used by the members constitute a repertoire of legitimate ways of communicating with this otherworld and achieving "*olor*-messages" or gnosis about it.

Finally, I will argue that Legendarium Reconstructionism as a religionisation style is simply better suited for tradition-building than Middle-earth Paganism. This is true especially for the 'traditionalist' members for whom Legendarium Reconstructionism entails the construction of a self-sufficient religious tradition, an approach standing in sharp contrast to the modest Middle-earth Pagan aim of developing an optional Tolkienesque add-on for eclectic Wiccans. Moreover, Legendarium Reconstructionism has the advantage of a much larger authoritative text corpus. *HoMe* simply takes more time and effort to discuss and digest than do the *LR* movies, and that provides for long-lived groups. Movie-based Middle-earth Paganism, by contrast, proved to have too little body for tradition-building: after trying out some movie-based rituals, most Middle-earth Pagans went back to being 'normal' Pagans, while a few went on to read *S* and *HoMe*, began working with the Valar, and hence turned into Legendarium Reconstructionists.

It must be noted, that the relative stability of the Legendarium Reconstructionist online cults as *social* units says nothing about the attractiveness of Legendarium Recon-

structionism relative to Middle-earth Paganism as a form of religion. The Legendarium Reconstructionist groups are stable, but they are small and do not grow. In fact, the number of present and former Middle-earth Pagans clearly dwarfs the number of active and formerly active Legendarium Reconstructionists. Working occasional rituals with Gandalf and Galadriel has proved to be no basis for tradition-forming and institutionalisation, but it has been attractive for individual Pagans all the same. From a numerical perspective, then, Middle-earth Paganism, rather than Legendarium Reconstructionism, must be considered the most successful expression of Tolkien religion in the 21st century.

Conclusion: Sixteen Theses on Tolkien Religion

The empirical findings of this thesis and their theoretical implications can be summed up in sixteen theses. I submit these theses here in an order that roughly follows the order of the research questions (formulated in the general introduction) and the four associated hypotheses (formulated in chapter 6). That is to say, the concluding theses are divided into four groups. The first group of theses sums up the religious affordances of Tolkien's literary mythology and compares the religion which I predicted to emerge from these affordances with the form that Tolkien religion has actually taken. This enables me to evaluate the usefulness of the religious affordances as a theoretical concept. The second cluster of theses summarises the patterns and processes of religious blending in the spiritual Tolkien milieu. I sum up the religious traditions with which Tolkien material is typically blended, and review the types of religious elements which are typically borrowed from these non-Tolkienesque sources. I also show that Tolkien religion has emerged in two stages, an experimental stage and a stage of institutionalisation and rationalisation, and review the four principal forms that Tolkien religion can take in the second stage. The third cluster on the dynamics of belief sums up the strategies of rationalisation and justification employed by Tolkien religionists. These findings are further used to argue against the notion that a metaphorical turn is taking place in contemporary religion. The final cluster of theses evaluates the plausibility structures of Tolkien religion with a special emphasis on the role of the Internet.

17.1. The Religious Affordances of Tolkien's Literary Mythology

#1. Tolkien's Middle-earth narratives constitute a literary mythology. As a body of fictional texts, Tolkien's literary mythology was not intended to be used as a source for religion.

Tolkien's Middle-earth universe had two creative beginnings. One was the invented ("private") languages which Tolkien began to work on already in the 1910s and which over time developed into Quenya and Sindarin. The languages came first, but around them Tolkien built a narrative universe to make sense of their speakers, the Elves, and of their culture and history. This 'Legendarium', which Tolkien continued to work on all his life, would eventually be published in 1977 by his son, Christopher Tolkien, as *The Silmarillion* (*S*). The second creative impulse originated in the early 1930s when the notion of Hobbits suddenly popped into Tolkien's daydreaming mind. Originally written to entertain his own children, *The Hobbit* (*H*) was published in 1937 and became a

major success. While writing, Tolkien had become aware that his Hobbit-story was set in the very same world as his Elven Legendarium, albeit at a later point in time. In *The Lord of the Rings* (*LR*), the sequel to *H*, Tolkien made this connection more explicit, as he included far more allusions to his the mythological background material, both in the main text and in six long appendices.

H, *LR*, and *S* were written as fiction and marketed as fiction. Especially in his preface to the second edition of *LR*, Tolkien unequivocally dismissed the notion that his stories should refer to states of affairs in the actual world, either directly or indirectly. Granting that the Middle-earth universe is presented as our world's ancient history, he emphasised that his history is "feigned". Against those who would read his stories as allegories, either as Christian fiction (like C.S. Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia*) or as a Cold War analogy (with the Ring representing the Atomic Bomb), Tolkien forcefully asserted that his story was no such thing and that he detested allegory in all its forms. That said, Tolkien would not deny that Eru, the supreme deity in his texts, mirrored the Christian God, nor that he had a didactic aim with his stories and hoped that the conduct of his protagonists revealed certain moral truths. In other words, Tolkien's narratives about Middle-earth cannot be classified as religious narratives (for they do not claim to reveal the truth about the being and acting of real supernatural entities in the actual world), but they do approach the genre of religious-didactic fiction. Collectively, the Middle-earth stories may be considered a 'literary mythology'. *Literary*, because the texts are fictional and the written work of a single, known author; *mythology*, because of the stories' religious-didactic aim and because especially *S* borrows style and motifs from Classical, Biblical, Celtic, and Germanic myth and legend.

#2. *Tolkien's literary mythology contains a repertoire of religious affordances that makes it usable as a corpus of authoritative texts for actual religious practice.*

Prototypical religious narratives include four semiotic traits, four 'religious affordances', which promote their interpretation as true accounts of real supernatural forces in the actual world. On the level of the narrate, religious narratives include *fantastic elements*, i.e. non-ordinary beings, worlds, dream visions, and so on, which are real within the narrative universe but supernatural from the perspective of the actual world; and they include *narrative religion*, i.e. beliefs and practices engaged in by the characters relative to supernatural beings. On the level of narration, religious narratives *thematise and assert their own veracity* and hence their non-fictional status; and sometimes they even claim to be revelations, stemming from a *divine source*.

Fictional narrative can include some of these religious affordances and when they do they can be used as authoritative texts for actual religious practice. This is true also of Tolkien's literary mythology. Indeed, the different texts in Tolkien's literary mythology include various sets of religious affordances, the most important of which are summed up in table 17.1 below.

Table 17.1. Overview of the Religious Affordances of Tolkien's Literary Mythology

Text	Fantastic elements	Narrative religion	Veracity claim	Divine source claim
H	Non-ordinary beings: e.g. Elves, Hobbits, Dragons; otherworlds: e.g. Lothlórien, the Undying Lands; magic and magical items; visions and intuition as sources of reliable knowledge.	N/A	N/A	N/A
LR		Theology: references to the One and the Valar; rituals: only few, esp. Elbereth hymns and Standing Silence; appendices include Elven calendar.	Feigned history ploy: the narrator claims that the main narrative is ancient history and that *H* and *LR* were originally authored by Bilbo and Frodo.	N/A
LR movies		N/A	N/A	N/A
S	Additional information on the Elves (their history, languages, customs), on the Blessed Realm, and on the Line of Lúthien (i.e. the notion that some humans have Elven and Maian ancestry).	Theology: Eru; functions, names, and abodes of Valar; cosmogony and cosmology: Eru's creation *ex nihilo* and subsequent shaping of the world (rounding; hiding of Valinor); rituals: none.	No frame story. Indirect thematisation of veracity through architextual and hypertextual connection to known myths (e.g. Númenor/ Atalantë ≈ Atlantis).	N/A
HoMe	Additional details; Elvish and Mannish versions of most tales.	Theology: Valar are the 'real gods' to which human myths refer; in Middle-earth lesser spiritual beings and 'faded Quendi' exist who sometimes show themselves to humans; cosmology: humans can visit Aman via the Olórë Mallë; rituals: none.	Various extensions of the frame story, with the aim of presenting the Legendarium as a 'mythology for England'.	The strongly autobiographical time travel stories suggest that Tolkien believed his Great Green Wave dream to be an ancestral memory.
Letters	N/A	Profession that Eru equates the Christian God.	N/A	Frequent statements disavowing authorship: Tolkien felt that he 'recorded' or 'reported' what was already there, rather than 'inventing'.

H and *LR* abound with fantastic elements of all sorts, but include very little narrative religion, as Tolkien had taken great care not to have his stories appear too explicitly pagan. Even so, *LR* includes a few references to a higher power (named The One), to the Valar (as a group of demiurgical, angelic beings), and to ritual practices, including the Elves' veneration for the Valië Elbereth/Varda. *LR* also thematises its own veracity in two ways. The main narrative is embedded within a frame story that describes how knowledge of the narrated events has been handed down through the ages until it came into Tolkien's possession in written form. *LR* also includes an arsenal of pseudo-historical appurtenances, including appendices, maps, notes, and an index. Peter Jackson's subsequent movie adaptations of *LR* kept all the fantastic elements, but lost both the narrative religion (barring a single obscure reference to the Valar) and the frame story of handing down the story from ancient times to our present day (though Bilbo and Frodo are still identified as the authors of *H* and *LR* within the narrative world).

S provides more information on the Elves, elaborating for example on the notion that Elves can interbreed with humans, and that even though all Elves have left Middle-earth, some humans still have Elven (and even Maian) blood and ancestry. *S* also includes much narrative religion, namely theology (of Eru and the Valar), cosmogony, cosmology, and eschatology as seen from the perspective of the Elves of Middle-earth. Like Jackson's *LR* movies, however, *S* lacks a frame story anchoring the narrative in the world of the reader.

The 12 volumes of *The History of Middle-earth* (*HoMe*) consist largely of drafts of *LR* and *S* and hence double many of the religious affordances already found in those works. Even so, *HoMe* adds to the religious affordances of Tolkien's literary mythology in different ways. Regarding *narrative religion*, *HoMe* adds to *S* the ideas that the Valar are the real gods to which human myths refer, and that Aman can be visited by humans in visions via the Olórë Mallë (Path of Dreams). Regarding *thematisation of veracity*, *HoMe* demonstrates that Tolkien had tried to extend his feigned history ploy from *LR* to include the Legendarium and to connect his entire Middle-earth corpus to early Anglo-Saxon history as a 'mythology for England'. Regarding *claim to revelation*, it becomes clear that Tolkien incorporated his own uncanny dream of a Great Green Wave as well as other autobiographical elements into *The Lost Road* and *The Notion Club Papers*. This suggests that Tolkien indeed believed in the possibility of re-experiencing ancestral memory and that he possibly believed in other psychic phenomena as well. This hunch is supported by numerous statements in Tolkien's letters in which he professes that the stories 'appeared to him as given things' and that he always felt to be 'recording' or 'reporting' rather than 'inventing'. *HoMe*'s repertoire of religious affordances is not only larger than those of Tolkien's other texts but also more complex, because *HoMe* often includes several versions of the same tale. In many cases, Tolkien provides both a Mannish and an Elvish account of the same past event (e.g. the destruction of Númenor) or of matters of narrative religion (e.g. afterlife beliefs). Also, early and later sketches of the

same stories can be at odds with each other. For example, the Valar are consistently referred to as "Gods" in the early tales, but as "angels" in the latest versions.

#3. A narrative's repertoire of religious affordances predicts which form religion based on that narrative is likely to take. Based on the different repertoires of religious affordances possessed by* LR, S, *the* LR *movies and* HoMe *respectively, it has been possible to predict the form which religion based on each of these narratives respectively has actually taken.

Each group within the spiritual Tolkien milieu draws most of its Tolkien inspiration from either *LR*, *S* (in combination with *LR*), Jackson's movies, or *HoMe*. Obviously, some groups draw on more than one of these texts, but even in those cases it is easy to identify a particular text as the group's main authoritative Tolkien text. For example, members of Tië eldaliéva agree that *S* is the most important Tolkien narrative (they refer to it as their 'Bible'), but they also recognise Jackson's movies as valid spiritual sources of inspiration and occasionally draw on *HoMe*.

Grosso modo, the actual Tolkien religion of a given group can be predicted by the religious affordances of the group's main Tolkien text. Groups in the spiritual Tolkien milieu consistently (a) identify with (the race of) the narratee of their main authoritative Tolkien text; (b) direct rituals towards those beings who are divine or extraordinary from the perspective of the narratee of their main authoritative text; and (c) adopt a reading mode that reflects their main text's thematisation of its own veracity. Table 17.2 below offers a brief overview of the forms taken by Tolkien-based spirituality based primarily on either *LR*, *S*, the movies, or *HoMe*.

Table 17.2. Comparison of Spirituality Based on Different Tolkien Narratives

Main Narrative Text	Rel. Affordances				Main Groups	Perspective	Supernatural Others	Reading Mode
	FE	NR	TV	DS				
LR	X		X		Neo-Pagans	Human	Elves	B
S	X	X			TS, SE, IE, T-e	Elven	Valar	M-C (M-H)
Movies	X				MEP	Human	*LR* characters	MP; M-C
HoMe	X	X	X	X	IV	Human/Elven	Valar	M-C (M-H)

FE = Fantastic elements; NR = Narrative religion; TV = Thematisation of veracity; DS = Divine source claim; EQD = Elf Queen's Daughters; TS = Tribunal of the Sidhe; SE = Silver Elves; IE = Indigo Elves; T-e = Tië eldaliéva; MEP = Middle-Earth Pagans; IV = Ilsaluntë Valion; B/MP/M-C/M-H = Binocular, mythopoeic, mytho-cosmological, and mytho-historical reading modes.

In *LR*, the narratorial perspective is part human, part Hobbit. The compiler/narrator voice is human and situated close to the reader in time, and he addresses a human

narratee. At the same time Frodo and other hobbits are presented as authors of parts of the text and most of the characters with whom the reader is invited to identify are Hobbits. Neo-Pagan and hippie readers have correspondingly identified with the human narratee or the Hobbit interlocutors. *LR* has no narrative religion, but the Elves, together with such characters as Gandalf and Tom Bombadil, are seen as spiritual and extraordinary beings from the point of view of the Hobbit characters and the human narrator and narratee. Consequently, *LR*-inspired Pagans have generally considered the Elves to be the relevant supernatural others with whom to interact in ritual practice.[546] Tolkien thematises *LR*'s veracity by presenting it as history, but he ultimately does so tongue-in-cheek. As a consequence, an outright mytho-historical reading of *LR* is possible, but exceedingly rare. (The Mojave Desert group is the only known example, and that group was small and short-lived). In general, Pagans have adopted a binocular reading of *LR*, taking the narrative to be a metaphorical tale about the real Elves.

Tolkien religion based on *S* is markedly different. The *S*-based groups, i.e. the Silver Elves, the Tribunal of the Sidhe, Indigo Elves, and Tië eldaliéva, have all adopted an Elven identity, either metaphorically or literally. Members of the Tribunal of the Sidhe, Indigo Elves, and Tië eldaliéva furthermore regularly engage in Tolkien-based rituals, and mirroring the narrative religion of the Elves in *S*, these rituals involve communication with the Valar, and to a lesser extent with Eru. Significantly, the *S*-based groups consider the Valar and Eru to exist in the actual world exactly as Tolkien describes them. By contrast, they are hesitant about literally adopting Tolkien's tales as actual history, although they will say that Tolkien's texts point to other myths and legends which do possess an historical core. This has everything to do with the fact that *S* includes no frame story that firmly anchors the narrative world in our world's past, while it does include a number of quite obviously intertextual loans from conventional mythology (such as Númenor/Atalantë ≈ Atlantis). The lack of anchorage dissuades a mytho-historical reading while the intertextuality of *S* lends itself to a binocular reading of the history of *S*. Adopting a binocular reading of *S* as far as its history is concerned, *S*-based religionists assert that Elves and humans originally lived peacefully together, that Elven/human unions took place, and that some humans today are of Elven descent. They point out that *S* includes all three motifs, but they subsequently construct their own religious historiography which they let pass for the true story which Tolkien only hinted at. (When *S*-based religionists go further than this and advocate a mytho-historical reading of *S*, that is always because they have become familiar with Tolkien's *Letters* and transfer the semiotic effect of 'historical anchorage', which some of the letters possess, to *S*). Also

[546] As noted in chapter 11, the Elf Queen's Daughters constitute a case of apparent counter-evidence, as this group adopted an Elven identity as well as the veneration of Elbereth/Valar prior to the publication of *S*. In fact, the Elven spirituality of the Elf Queen's Daughters was ironic and their identification as Elves transitory; their existence therefore does not alter the conclusion that *LR* in itself was unable to sustain a stable, Elven-centred and Valar-directed spirituality. (Only *S* could do that).

reflecting *S*'s lack of anchorage, *S*-based spiritual groups readily develop cosmologies that go beyond Tolkien's text and situate Middle-earth or the Elven/Changeling home world on another plane (or among the stars) rather than identifying Middle-earth simply with the physical world.

Of all Tolkien texts, Jackson's movie adaptations of *LR* have the most meagre repertoire of religious affordances and this is reflected in the form taken by movie-based Middle-earth Paganism. The movies have lost the frame narrative of the book version of *LR* and present Middle-earth as an independent world, completely unconnected to the actual world. Consequently, Middle-earth Pagans tend to approach the movies in the mythopoeic or mytho-cosmological mode, taking the narratives to refer indirectly to more archetypal beings or viewing the world depicted by the movies as some kind of Otherworld. The *LR* movies, like the *LR* book, are told from a hobbit/human, rather than an elven, perspective. Middle-earth Pagans adopt this perspective and *in lieu* of a narrative religion to mirror, they focus their own ritual communication with the spiritually significant characters of *LR*, i.e. Gandalf, Galadriel, Elrond, and Arwen. The fact that some members of Middle-earth Pagans also perform rituals directed at characters such as Aragorn and Frodo does not immediately match my predictions, but can be explained as a result of subsequent rationalisation. In the first instance Gandalf and Galadriel were conceivable as divine figures while Frodo and Éowyn were not. However, as soon as Middle-earth was constituted as a spiritual Otherworld, it became logical to consider *all* its inhabitants to be spiritual beings (or expressions of archetypal powers) from the perspective of the viewer's world, and hence to make no principal distinction between Gandalf/Galadriel and Frodo/Éowyn as potential ritual communication partners.

Also Ilsaluntë Valion's *HoMe*-based religion follows the established pattern. Reflecting the combination of human and Elven viewpoints in *HoMe*, members of Ilsaluntë Valion identify as both human and Elves, based on a literal or metaphorical reading of Tolkien's notion that descendants of human/Elven unions survive to this day. Fitting this self-identification, members do rituals directed at the Valar and, to a lesser extent, at Eru and the Maiar. Members of Ilsaluntë Valion read *HoMe* together with both Tolkien's letters and short stories, and the combined religious affordances of these texts allow both for a mytho-cosmological approach taking Tolkien's literary mythology to be based on revelation, and a mytho-historical approach taking the stories to be based on historical fact. *HoMe*-based religionists indeed adopt either of these two reading modes.

The first of the four main hypotheses formulated in chapter 6 read as follows: *The character of Tolkien religion based on a particular Tolkien text will largely be determined by the supernatural content, narrative perspective, and level of anchorage of that text*. We can now consider that hypothesis confirmed. This leaves me in a position to make two more general observations concerning religious affordances before moving on to discuss Tolkien religion as religious blending.

#4. Religious practices can emerge from a fictional narrative that possesses fantastic elements and no other religious affordances. Narrative religion is needed for a stable, fiction-based religious tradition to emerge. In either case, it is no prerequisite that the fictional narrative thematises its own veracity or suggests to stem from a divine source.

We have seen that the actual religious practice of any given group is largely determined by the religious affordances of that group's main authoritative Tolkien text. It is now possible to change perspective and examine the relation between a text's religious affordances and actual religious practice based on that text in a more abstract way. In what follows, I discuss the four classes of religious affordances in turn with the aim of determining which classes are necessary (and which are merely facilitating) for the emergence of fiction-based religious practices (as a first step) and for stable fiction-based religious traditions (as a second step).

The existence of religion based mainly on *LR* (both book and movies) indicates that it is possible for fiction-based religion to emerge from texts that have fantastic elements, but no narrative religion. More precisely, this is possible if the text in question, within its set of fantastic elements, includes beings who are extraordinary and spiritually superior within the narrative universe compared to the reader's point of view as such beings can take on the role of supernatural others in ritual exchange with religionists in the actual world. For logical reasons, however, the weak religious affordances of 'fantastic elements'-only texts impair the development of religious traditions based on such texts. By definition 'fantastic elements'-only texts lack narrative rituals, and religion based on such texts must therefore use existing rituals from established traditions. Furthermore, since the beings who are addressed in these rituals are not objects of cult within the narrative universe from which they stem, they must be reinterpreted so as to make sense of their new role. As we have seen, Middle-Earth Pagans subjected the *LR* characters to theistic transformation, perceiving them ultimately as archetypal images of the God and the Goddess. While this rationalisation was needed to explain why ritual interaction with the *LR* characters made sense at all, it also diluted the Tolkienesque dimension of Middle-earth Paganism, by effectively reducing it to normal Pagan duotheism. For this reason, Middle-earth Paganism was never more than an add-on to conventional Paganism. It never developed into a full-fledged and independent tradition, and it could not possibly have done so, impaired as it was by the weak religious affordances of its main authoritative text. The book version of *LR* could also not sustain durable religious traditions. Indeed most Pagans who were or are inspired by *LR* the book ascribe even less reference authority to this work than do Middle-Earth Pagans to the movies. Book-inspired Pagans normally do (and did) not engage ritually with the characters, but instead approach *LR* in the binocular mode as merely an indirect testimony to the existence of real Elves. To sum up, fictional texts with fantastic elements but no narrative religion can provide significant religious *inspiration* (*LR*-inspired Pagans) and even lead

to the formation of fiction-integrating religious *practices* (Middle-Earth Pagans), but no long-lived and distinct fiction-based religious *tradition* can arise from such texts.

It takes narrative religion for a fictional text to become the authoritative basis of a stable religious tradition and organisation. More precisely, to be usable as the basis of a fiction-based religion a fictional text must include divine beings who are subject to veneration within the narrative world. Both *S* and *HoMe* fit this criterion. Preferably, the text should also include descriptions of rituals, upon which real-world rituals can be modelled, but this is no absolute requirement.[547] None of Tolkien's narrative texts include explicit descriptions of rituals, but three more or less Tolkien-based religious traditions have emerged nonetheless: the Tribunal of the Sidhe, Tië eldaliéva, and Ilsaluntë Valion. It appears, thus, that *in lieu* of explicit narrative rituals, a fiction-based religious tradition can still emerge in one of two ways. A distinctive ritual approach can be developed out of building-blocks in the fictional material (Ilsaluntë Valion) or the fictional deities can be interacted with by way of ritual formats borrowed from established religious traditions (Tribunal of the Sidhe). It is also possible to combine the two approaches (Tië eldaliéva).

The very existence of fiction-based religions attests to the fact that religious practices and traditions can be based on texts which do not explicitly assert their own veracity. Even so, the presence in a fictional text of some form of indirect thematisation of its own veracity certainly adds to that text's usability as an authoritative text for religion. Furthermore, the character of a fictional text's thematisation of its own veracity sets certain limits on the religious modes in which the text is likely to be read. Some ambiguous claim to historicity (such as Tolkien's feigned history ploy) seems to be a requirement for the adoption of a mytho-historical or euhemeristic reading mode. Therefore these modes are found primarily in Tolkien religion based on *LR* (the book) or on *HoMe*, while they are completely lacking in movies-based religion. Other fictional texts thematise their veracity in an implicit way, for example through intertextuality (e.g. architextual and hypertextual links to known myths) and teacher discourse (i.e. that religious ideas come to seem real because they are endorsed by authoritative characters within the narrative). Such texts, and fictional texts that do not thematise their own veracity at all, are likely to be approached in the binocular, mythopoeic, or mytho-cosmological modes (rather than in the euhemeristic or mytho-historical modes). In any case, the very quality of the fictional narrative in question, as well as the level of inner consistency and depth of the narrative universe, help create an 'aura of factuality' around the text.

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[547] As pointed out in in chapter 4, the Church of all Worlds adopted a water-sharing ritual and the greeting 'Thou art God/dess' from Robert Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land*. One reason for the great impact of Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Mists of Avalon* on the Goddess movement was the fact the novel included descriptions of rituals which emerging Goddess groups could use as inspiration for their own rituals (cf. chapter 8).

Within the spiritual Tolkien milieu it is quite common to claim that Tolkien was divinely inspired. Groups and individuals who know about Tolkien's letters, the unfinished time-travelling stories, and *Smith of Wootton Major* will refer to these texts as evidence that Tolkien himself believed to be inspired. Acquaintance with these texts is no prerequisite for making claims about the otherworldly origin of Tolkien's fiction, however. Without backing it up with Tolkien's own texts, Terry Donaldson for instance claimed that Tolkien "channelled" his stories. In other words, fiction-based religious groups tend to justify their religious use of fictional texts by de-fictionalising those texts, and a logical component of this strategy is to make a claim to the text's ultimately otherworldly origin. It seems to matter less, however, whether such a claim can be supported by the fictional text itself (or by paratext or metatexts) or whether it must be constructed in some other way.

#5. The notion of religious/textual affordances will be useful for future analyses of the dynamics of belief in religious traditions and for analyses of reader-responses that go against the intentions of the author.

From the discussion above flow two general points which are relevant not only for the study of fiction-based religion. First, we have seen that the most important religious affordances that a text can possess are ideas about divine beings and models for interacting with such beings. Significantly, this empirical finding mirrors the theoretical axiom that ritual interaction with supernatural beings constitutes the core of religion. It is worth emphasising this point, for just as ritual interaction with supernatural beings constitutes the core of all kinds of religion (not only fiction-based religion), one may hypothesise that narratives which communicate ideas about divine beings and models for interacting with such beings will constitute the most central texts in any given religious tradition. In plain words: myths and ritual texts will always be more central to religious traditions than ethical and dogmatic texts. I offer this as a guiding hypothesis for the analysis of the dynamics of belief in any religious tradition.

My second general point is for literary studies rather than comparative religion. Let me briefly reiterate that my analysis of the religious affordances of Tolkien's literary mythology is based on the basic insight that a text can include *several* sets of textual affordances and hence promote different readings, with varying force. It should be restated at this point that Tolkien's literary mythology most forcefully promotes a fictionalising reading: the text largely presents itself as fiction and it is marketed as fiction. Even so, Tolkien's literary mythology *also* includes religious affordances, but these are much weaker than the fictional affordances. Reader-response theorists have stressed the fact that readers often interpret fiction in ways unforeseen or unwanted by its author, and they have sought to account for that by claiming that the reader's response is determined more by his predispositions or his membership of a certain interpretive community than by the content of the text. Without doing away with the insight that readers

bring predispositions to bear on any text they read, I hold that my notion of textual affordances is theoretically superior to the reader-response paradigm. That is so because the notion of (a multiplicity of) textual affordances enables one to predict and theorise *also* those interpretations that go against the intentions of the author.

17.2. Patterns of Religious Blending in the Spiritual Tolkien Milieu

#6. Where Tolkien's literary mythology lacks religious affordances, Tolkien religionists adopt building-blocks from other religious traditions to fill the gaps. In these cases, Tolkien elements are blended with elements from Paganism, the Western magic tradition, theosophy, and Christianity, in roughly this order of importance.

All groups in the spiritual Tolkien milieu engage in integrative religious blending, and this process is patterned. To begin with, Tolkien religionists draw on non-Tolkienesque material to fill the gaps, so to speak, in the religious affordances of Tolkien's literary mythology. There are two crucial gaps to be filled. First, due to its narrative form Tolkien's literary mythology presents its supernatural inventory in a straightforward literal way: the deities are personal, the otherworlds are real places, and so on. In other words, Tolkien's narratives include no second-order ontology assessments of the nature of the Elves, the Valar, and Tolkien's entire narrative world. As a consequence, those groups that develop second-order beliefs about the Valar, their own Elven identity, and the nature of Middle-earth and the Blessed Realm which go beyond literal affirmation, do so by applying established strategies of rationalisation to the Tolkien elements in question. Secondly, Tolkien's narratives include no elaborate narrative rituals. Tolkien religionists must therefore construct Tolkienesque rituals by adopting or adapting existing ritual formats which they can fill with Tolkien content.

The religious traditions which provide ritual formats and rationalisations for Tolkien religion include Paganism, the Western magic tradition, theosophy, and Christianity, in roughly that order of importance. Rituals in the spiritual Tolkien milieu are typically based on Wiccan circle casting or on rituals of evocation or pathworking from the Western magic tradition. Rationalisations of the true nature of the Tolkien deities (Valar and *LR* characters) invoked in these rituals draws on a wider range of source traditions. Where the Tolkien deities are not literally affirmed, they are variously taken to be expressions of Jungian archetypes, or of the Pagan God and Goddess. Christian Tolkien religionists identify Eru with the Christian God, who in turn is conceived of in either theistic or pan(en)theistic terms. Tolkien religionists who interpret Middle-earth and/or the Blessed Realm in mytho-cosmological terms typically situate these places on the astral plane (theosophy) or within the Imaginal Realm (Corbin). The various rationalisations of what it means to be an Elf draw either on Neo-Pagan ideas found in the writings of Gerald Gardner and Robert Graves (Elvenhood as cultural or genetic matter), or on ideas from theosophy and the Otherkin movement (Elvenhood as matter of incarnation).

Table 17.3. Integrative Religious Blending in the Spiritual Tolkien Milieu				
Groups	**Ritual formats**	**Rationalised beliefs**		
		Tolkien deities	***Tolkien's world***	***Elven identity***
Tribunal of the Sidhe	Wicca (circle casting)	N/A	Theosophy (astral Home)	Wicca, Graves, theosophy (Elves as Changelings)
Elf Queen's Daughters	Wicca, Western magic (visualisation, evocation; rituals only occasionally)	Goddess Spirituality (Elbereth as Mother Earth)	Theosophy (Elves on the astral plane)	Paganism (Elves as practitioners of the Old Religion) Theosophy, Otherkin (Elves as astral beings)
Silver Elves		N/A		
Elven movement		N/A		
Fifth Way Mystery School	Western magic (pentagram ritual)	N/A	N/A	N/A
LR Tarot	Western magic (Tarot; pathworking)	Jung (*LR* characters as archetypes)	Theosophy (Tolkien channelled)	N/A
Esoteric historians	N/A	N/A	N/A	Paganism, mythologies (Elves as divine bloodline)
Middle-Earth Pagans	Wicca (circle casting)	Wicca (*LR* characters as the God and the Goddess)	Theosophy (Middle-earth previous world incarnation or situated on the astral plane)	N/A
Indigo Elves	N/A	Christianity (Eru as God)	N/A	N/A
Tië eldaliéva	Wicca, Western magic (visualisation; evocation)	Christianity, Paganism (Eru as panentheistic God)	Western magic (Tolkien's world part of the Imaginal Realm)	Paganism, theosophy (Elves as practitioners of the Old Religion and/or astral beings)
Ilsaluntë Valion	Western magic (visualisation)			N/A

Table 17.3 gives an overview of the most significant blended elements (rituals and beliefs) analysed in this dissertation, together with the non-Tolkienesque traditions from which blended material has been drawn.

The second main hypothesis from chapter 6 concerned religious blending and reads as follows: *Wherever Tolkien's literary mythology lacks religious affordances, Tolkien religionists will adopt or adapt building-blocks from other religious traditions to overcome these lacks.* This hypothesis can now be considered confirmed. This does not exhaust the subject of religious blending, however. Indeed, there are three additional points worth making about the patterns and processes of religious blending in Tolkien religion.

#7. On the tradition level, Tolkien religion emerges as the convergence of Tolkien fandom and cultic religion. It emerged in two stages. In a first experimental stage, Tolkien religion is characterised by the hunch that Tolkien's literary mythology is more than mere fiction and by rituals whose status hovers between play and religion. From here, Tolkien religionists take one of two trajectories of rationalisation and institutionalisation: either they affirm the supernatural referentiality of Tolkien's narratives and embark on a project of more or less Tolkien-centred tradition building, or they disaffirm the supernatural referentiality of Tolkien's narratives and assimilate their Tolkien-based practices into broader streams of cultic religion.

Tolkien religionists borrow ritual formats and rationalisation strategies from Neo-Paganism, Western magic, and theosophy because these are the traditions they already know. Indeed, most Tolkien religionists have a background as Neo-Pagans and/or have been active in other kinds of cultic religion, and they keep their identities as Pagans, magicians, or (more rarely) theosophists, Jungians, or metaphysical Christians even as they adopt new identities as Elves or explorers of Tolkien gnosis.

We may even say that Tolkien religion emerges as the *convergence* of Tolkien fandom and cultic religion. I have already argued that Middle-earth Paganism arose as the convergence of movie fandom and eclectic Wicca, and that Legendarium Reconstructionism emerged as the convergence of intellectual Tolkien fandom and Reconstructionist Paganism. By the same token, the Fifth Way Mystery School's Valar Working arose as the convergence of ceremonial magic and Tolkien fandom (members were 'steeped in Tolkieniana' according to Vincent Bridges). This point could be made for every single case examined. Of course some individual Tolkien religionists had a background as Tolkien fans without any religious engagement or used to be Pagans/magicians without a special bond with Tolkien. Such individuals are rare, however, and they always join groups led by 'convergers', and typically join only when invited by members with whom they already had social ties.

Like all fiction-based religion, Tolkien religion has emerged gradually through experimentation and innovation. In some cases, convergences of Tolkien fandom and alternative religion have led to the formation of stable organisations and traditions, but

an experimentation stage always precedes such subsequent institutionalisation and tradition-forming. Indeed, Tolkien religion emerges in two stages. It begins with an *experimentation stage* in which the referential status of beliefs and practices is ambiguous. If the Tolkien-based religious experiment is not abandoned, an *institutionalisation stage* follows in which an identifiable religious tradition forms, possibly together with a semi-formal organisation.

The experimentation stage is characterised by the hunch that Tolkien's narratives refer to deeper spiritual truths and are in some way more than ordinary fiction. At this stage, however, no rationalised beliefs about the referentiality of Tolkien's texts have yet been developed, and the spiritual nature of Tolkien's narratives remains vague and ambiguous. Even so, the hunch that there is more to Tolkien's narratives than meets the eye can lead to the development and performance of Tolkien-based rituals of various kinds. For example, many of the individuals who joined UTolk and Tië eldaliéva in 2005 had already experimented with Tolkien rituals on their own: variously, they had prayed to the Valar, visited Middle-earth in pathworking rituals, or used some of the Valar as the four Watchtowers in Wiccan circle rituals. The High Elvish Working of the Fifth Way Mystery School is a more elaborate example of a ritual belonging to the experimentation stage. All these rituals have in common that they were created and performed in response to the hunch that Tolkien's literary mythology includes some spiritual truth, but that the ritualists initially were ambiguous about whether the deities addressed were real, and in what way. In the experimental stage of emerging fiction-based religion, rituals hover between play and religion.

From the ambiguous experimental stage, Tolkien religion can develop in different directions. First, individuals can abandon their experiment with Tolkien religion altogether and fall back on a more established form of religion. That is what the Fifth Way Mystery School did. For them the Valar Working was a playful experiment that was never integrated with their serious ceremonial magic. If the experiment is not abandoned, Tolkien religion will enter into the institutionalisation stage. This stage is characterised by three developments. Most importantly, rationalised beliefs are developed about the referentiality of Tolkien's literary mythology and the deities addressed in ritual, so that the ambiguity that characterises the experimental stage is dissolved. Second, practices are further developed, and, third, an organisation typically forms alongside the emerging tradition.

The processes of institutionalisation and rationalisation during the institutionalisation stage takes either the direction of dissociation or *sub-Tolkienisation*, by which decreasing centrality and reality are attributed to Tolkien's literary mythology, or of affirmation or *super-Tolkienisation*, by which increasing centrality and reality are attributed to Tolkien's narrative world. Each process has two possible stable end-points, resulting in a total of four principal outcomes of the blending- and rationalisation processes involved in Tolkien religion. The four principal types of Tolkien religion, together with their associated blending and reading modes are listed on table 17.4 below.

Table 17.4. Blending Outcomes on the Tradition Level				
	Groups	**Reading Modes**	**Blending Mode and Outcome**	
	Elven movement	Fictional Binocular	Fiction-integrating religion (Assimilation)	The original practice becomes absorbed by a religious tradition that subsequently denies its fictional origin
	Elf Queen's Daughters *LR* Tarot Middle-Earth Pagans	Fictional Binocular Mythopoeic	Fiction-integrating religion (Mixture)	The original practice becomes a facultative add-on for a more primary practice
Ambiguous fiction-based practice	Fifth Way Mystery School	*(Decreasing centrality and reality attributed to Tolkien's literary mythology)* ∧ Sub-Tolkienisation ∧ ∨ Super-Tolkienisation ∨ *(Increasing centrality and reality attributed to Tolkien's literary mythology)*		
	Tribunal of the Sidhe Indigo Elves	Mytho-cosmological Mytho-historical	Fiction-integrating religion (Synthesis)	The original practice is integrated into a stable tradition constituted predominantly by non-fictionbased religious elements
	Tië eldaliéva Ilsaluntë Valion	Mytho-cosmological Mytho-historical	Fiction-based religion (Reconstruction through inward acculturation)	The original practice is developed into a stable tradition constituted predominantly by fiction-based religious elements

I speak of sub-Tolkienisation when the ambiguity of the experimental stage is resolved by settling for a non-literal reading of Tolkien's literary mythology that treats Tolkien's texts as fiction, albeit possibly as fiction which indirectly refers to real supernatural entities (binocular mode) or as mythopoeic fiction in which archetypal forces reveal themselves in transfigured form (mythopoeic mode). This overall approach to Tolkien's mythology goes together with two different blending modes, mixture and assimilation. Mixture refers to the situation in which religionists (a) engage in Tolkien-based rituals as a supplement to a more fundamental religious practice, (b) do so consistently over time, and (c) rationalise these practices in non-literal terms. We have this situation in Middle-Earth Pagans whose members, as a supplement to conventional Wiccan practice, have developed and regularly performed rituals directed at *LR* characters, and rationalised these beings as expressions of the God and the Goddess. Other examples can be pointed out as well, including the practice of the Elf Queen's Daughters to do Elbereth rituals while considering Elbereth merely another name for the Goddess. The Elven

movement constitutes an example of assimilation of fictional material. In the early days of the Elven movement, self-identified Elves not only did Tolkien-based rituals, but their very identity as Elves was explicitly inspired by *LR*. As the Elven movement developed, however, it gradually distanced itself from its Tolkienesque roots. Rituals directed at Elbereth/Varda and the other Valar were discontinued and more importantly, the Elven identity, though still very much informed by Tolkien's majestic magicians, became explicitly de-coupled from Tolkien's literary mythology as the Elves claimed legitimacy through Walter Yeeling Evans-Wentz, Gerald Gardner, and Robert Graves. The Elven movement absorbed and assimilated Tolkien's image of the Elf, but subsequently denied its partial fictional roots.

Tolkien religion can also evolve in an affirmative direction. When the ambiguity of the experimental stage is alleviated by settling for one of the literal reading modes (i.e. the mytho-cosmological or the mytho-historical), the way is paved for a process of super-Tolkienisation. This affirmative trajectory also has two stable outcomes. One possible outcome is that Tolkien practices are integrated into a stable tradition constituted predominantly by non-fictionbased religious elements. When this is the case we have a fiction-integrating religious *synthesis*, as in the case of the Tribunal of the Sidhe where the Valar are venerated alongside the Norse and Celtic pantheons. The process of super-Tolkienisation can be taken even further. We may speak of fiction-based religion *sensu stricto* (or reconstruction) when an attempt is made to construct a full-fledged Tolkien-based religious tradition in which non-Tolkienesque elements (such as ritual formats) are systematically acculturated to the logic of Tolkien's universe.

#8. The dissociative blending modes are most common because they most effectively neutralise the plausibility threat posed by the fact that Tolkien's narratives are fictional.

The two dissociative blending modes, assimilation and mixture, are much more common than the two affirmative modes, synthesis and reconstruction. In the first wave of Tolkien religion, the Tribunal of the Sidhe was the only group with an affirmative approach to Tolkien's narratives. Decidedly Tolkien-based religion has only emerged in the second wave of Tolkien religion after the movies and the Internet, but not in numbers anywhere near those of religionists who use elements from Tolkien's narratives and subsequently dissociate themselves from Tolkien. Interestingly, dissociative Jediists also outnumber affirmative Jediists (Davidsen 2010; 2014), so there is reason to think that it is default in all fiction-based religions that even when religionists plainly base their practices and identities on a fictional source, they will still develop rationalisations and justifications that dissociate those practices and identities from the fictional source and link them to more venerable sources and traditions.

The preponderance of dissociative blending in the province of fiction-based religion has two implications. First, it becomes clear that fiction-based religion which is identifiable and acknowledged as such only constitutes the small visible tip of an iceberg comprised of religion influenced by fiction. Below the surface, we have all those indivi-

duals who read fiction (Tolkien's books or other works) and whose religious ideas, practices, and identities are influenced (or reinforced) in some way by this practice, either consciously or unconsciously. It would be very interesting to know more about this 'under the radar' influence of fiction on lived religion, but it will also be extremely difficult to research. The second implication is that if the fiction-dissociative approach is the default, then the emergence and endurance of the Tolkien-affirmative groups, the Tribunal of the Sidhe, Tië eldaliéva, and Ilsaluntë Valion, require explanation. I return to this issue in the fourth section of the conclusion on the plausibility structures of Tolkien religion.

#9. The spiritual Tolkien milieu constitutes a sub-milieu within the cultic milieu.

We have seen that individuals include Tolkien elements in their individual religious repertoires in four different ways: They either (1) adopt a Tolkien-inspired Elven identity; (2) occasionally engage in Tolkien-based ritual practices; (3) integrate Tolkien-based practices and beliefs into a broader whole; or (4) build a Reconstructionist Tolkien-tradition. In all cases, even in the case of Legendarium Reconstructionism, Tolkien religion involves religious blending as ritual formats and strategies of rationalisation from established traditions within the cultic milieu are blended with material from Tolkien's literary mythology. Due to this dependence, Tolkien religion must be considered part of the broader cultic milieu. At the same time, Tolkien religion constitutes a milieu in itself and has done so at least since the rise of the Internet. Substantially, the spiritual Tolkien milieu is maintained by the shared notion that Tolkien's literary mythology constitutes a valid foundation for religious practice. As a social unit, it is furthermore kept together by "an interpenetrative communication structure" (cf. Campbell 1972, 135) that allows individuals to exchange ideas and groups to share members. The spiritual Tolkien milieu can be analysed on its own level, but at the same time constitutes a sub-milieu within the broader cultic milieu.

Like other individuals active in the cultic milieu, Tolkien religionists engage in both integrative and supplementary bricolage. Integrative bricolage, i.e. the construction of new practices and traditions through religious blending, has already been covered, so let me now make two points about supplementary bricolage, i.e. the parallel engagement in several religious traditions or organisations. First, Tolkien religionists as a rule continue their original religious engagements when they join spiritual Tolkien groups. Awakened Elves continue to be Pagans and magicians, Middle-Earth Pagans continue to perform normal Wiccan rituals, and Christian members of Reconstructionist groups continue to attend church. Second, while Tolkien-based rituals for some individuals become their most central religious practices and/or their Tolkien-inspired Elven self becomes the most significant spiritual identity, no Tolkien religionists have adopted notions about soteriology and eschatology from Tolkien's literary mythology, even though Tolkien's texts thematise these issues. This is interesting because Tolkien religionists as a rule *do*

have beliefs about eschatology and soteriology. Most of them believe matter-of-factly in reincarnation, and the Elven movement and the Tribunal of the Sidhe have developed ideas about the sundering of the Veil and their return to their astral Home, but these ideas are completely disconnected from Tolkien's literary mythology. Arguably, the hesitation of Tolkien religionists to use the term 'religion' about their Tolkien-based practices should be seen in this light. I think that Tolkien religionists do not only prefer to speak of their Tolkien-based practices as 'spirituality' because that term is in vogue, but also in order to stress that Tolkien spirituality is about practice, experience, and identity, and not (or much less) about such things as soteriology, ethics, and theology.

17.3. The Dynamics of Belief in Tolkien Religion

#10. Any analysis of dynamics of religious belief must distinguish between elemental religion and rationalised religion. In elemental religious beliefs, practices, and experiences, and in religious narratives, the supernatural appears in tangible forms: supernatural beings are discrete persons, supernatural otherworlds are real places. Non-literal beliefs arise only through subsequent rationalisation.

Led by Meredith McGuire (2008), many scholars of religion argue that religious traditions can only be properly understood by paying attention to both the *prescribed religion* of authoritative narratives and theological treatises and to *lived religion*, i.e. actual religious practices and experiences, of ordinary individuals. I fully concur, but hold that if one is to grasp the dynamics of belief of a religious tradition, another distinction is equally crucial. That is the distinction between first-order and second-order beliefs.

First-order beliefs assume the existence of supernatural agents, worlds, and processes in a straightforward, literal way. Such beliefs are expressed in religious narratives and in the segment of lived religion which I refer to as elemental religion. Elemental religion comprises people's first-order beliefs, and those practices (esp. rituals) which express first-order beliefs, together with the experiences induced by those practices. Second-order beliefs arise when first-order beliefs are rationalised, systematised, and elaborated upon. Second-order beliefs can be penned down in theological treatises, but also ordinary individuals develop rationalised religion. I then speak of 'folk rationalisations'.

The *post hoc* rationalisation of first-order beliefs includes an assessment of the ontological nature of the presumed referent of those beliefs, and this can lead to a reduction of the ontological status of those deities from personal being to cosmic principles or psychological structures. For instance, a Tolkien religionist who invokes Varda in ritual engages in elemental religion and treats the deity in question as a personal, supernatural being. If probed, this individual might say that he ultimately considers Varda to be merely a personification of a cosmic or psychological feminine principle, but even if he holds such a rationalised, second-order belief, it is the straightforward first-order belief in a personal Valië which is activated in ritual. A consequence of this is that no religious

system can consist only of 'metaphorical belief' (in the sense of non-literal belief). For example, even a religious system whose rationalised beliefs reinterpret prayer as a healthy emotional discharge rather than a communication with a deity will have a core of elemental practice and literal belief (here: the practice of addressing a personal deity in prayer). It is important to stress this point as it is critical for the argument in the following theses.

#11. All spiritual Tolkien groups, both those based on an Elven identity and those based on ritual interaction with spiritual beings from Tolkien's narrative world, have an onion-shaped belief system. At the centre of the belief system are a few core beliefs which are very stable. Around this core are a multitude of rationalisations and justifications which are flexible and prone to change.

The belief system of any religious tradition can be thought of as an onion with three layers. The core is made up of a few stable core beliefs which all adherents to the tradition share. For example, the belief system of the Elven movement centres on the core identity statement 'we are Elves', and the core belief of Middle-Earth Pagans is that Middle-earth and its inhabitants are in some way real. Legendarium Reconstructionism rests on the core beliefs that Tolkien's literary mythology refers to real supernatural beings, namely the Valar, the Maiar, and the Quendi, and that these beings dwell in a world that is different from the physical world, but can be accessed in ritual.

The second layer is made up of beliefs that elucidate, elaborate, and rationalise the core beliefs. There exists a relation of mutual support between, on the hand, the core beliefs and the elemental religion in which they are expressed, and, on the other hand, the second-order beliefs of rationalised religion. Core beliefs are crucial because they define the identity of the religious tradition; elaborated and rationalised beliefs are crucial because they explain the deeper meaning and purpose of the religious practice and hence reinforce the plausibility of the religious tradition. On top of the core beliefs and rationalisations is a third layer of justifications, i.e. of epistemological arguments for the validity of the religious world-view.

An interesting feature of Tolkien religion, and possibly of all religion, is that while the core beliefs are relatively stable over time, rationalisations and justifications are relatively unstable in three ways. First, it is common for individuals to change their mind about rationalisations and justifications, exchanging, for example, a literal conception of the divine for a depersonalised conception, while holding on to the same core beliefs, elemental practice, and religious identity. Second, it is common for individuals to hold several, in principle mutually exclusive, rationalisations and justifications to be true at the same time, and to activate the one or the other according to context. For instance, while among his peers an individual can hold his beliefs to be objectively true and supported by revelatory evidence (legitimisation), but fall back on the modest claim that his beliefs are subjectively valid for him personally when confronted by a sceptic

(relativisation). Finally, it is relatively unproblematic for a group to include individuals with conflicting rationalisations and justifications as long they share core beliefs and elemental practice.

#12. In Tolkien religion, folk rationalisations gravitate towards a balance between fabulousness and plausibility.

In Tolkien religion, folk rationalisations tend to gravitate towards a cognitive optimum position between fabulousness and plausibility. Consider first Tolkien's Elves. The Quendi are special humans with magical powers, long lives, and an otherworldly abode. When humans self-identify as Elves, they dilute the fabulousness of Elvenhood, for if ordinary humans can be Elves, Elves do no longer by definition possess magical powers or extraordinarily long lifespans. To counter this, self-identified Elves have constructed folk rationalisations that enhance the Elven fabulousness, but in a way that is cognitively combinable with their human, bodily nature. These folk rationalisation stress ontological exclusivism (Elves constitute a superior and spiritually advanced race) and sectarian exclusivism (Elves possess spiritual knowledge acquired through many lives), and claim a magnificent past (Elves helped shape human civilization from Atlantean times) and a special mission and future (Elves have now come again to educate humanity and rend the Veil). At the same time the claim to Elvishness is kept plausible, as self-identified Elves do not claim to possess magical abilities or extraordinary longevity in this life, but push the most extraordinary Elven fabulousness into some unverifiable place (another dimension; a distant star system) or time (the future; the distant past).

If folk rationalisations of Elvenhood tend to enhance Elven fabulousness, folk rationalisations of the Valar tend to downplay their fabulousness. The attractor point is the same, however, namely the cognitive optimum position of fabulousness-cum-plausibility. As already mentioned, the Valar in Tolkien's narratives are a collective of demiurges, spiritual beings created before the creation of the world, immortal and immensely powerful. As humans perform rituals with the Valar, especially visualisation rituals in which the Valar 'hang out' with the ritualists and give them advice for their personal lives, cognitive friction arises between the magnificent Valar of Tolkien's texts and the casual Valar of ritual experience. This tension is resolved by rationalising the Valar in a way that downplays their fabulousness and makes them gravitate towards the cognitive optimum. As Tolkien religionists repeatedly stress, the Valar are *not* gods, but angelic or archetypal beings. Furthermore, and in accordance with the dominant mytho-cosmological (rather than mytho-historical) approach to Tolkien's literary mythology, the Valar lose their status as demiurges in rationalised Tolkien religion. Being reframed as denizens of a spiritual otherworld, they can no longer retain their function as shapers of the material world. As a result, they lose most of their power and become recast as a collective of spiritual beings who are superior in stature to the Elves, but not radically different from them. We see this most clearly in the Tribunal of the Sidhe where the border be-

tween Elves and Valar is very vague and both groups are counted among the 'kin folk'. The process of de-deification is not restricted to the Tribunal, however, but can be observed also in the Legendarium Reconstructionists groups.[548]

#13. Most Tolkien religionists legitimise their use of Tolkien's literary mythology by ascribing esoteric knowledge or visionary charisma to Tolkien.

Tolkien's literary mythology is a work of fiction: it was marketed as fiction and is considered fiction by the general public. This fact constitutes a threat to the plausibility of religion based on Tolkien's narratives, a threat that every Tolkien-inspired religionist must come to terms with. With the exception of those self-identified Elves who solve the problem by denying any connection to Tolkien, Tolkien religionists have developed two strategies of legitimisation that attribute to Tolkien either esoteric knowledge or visionary charisma.

Tolkien religionists who read Tolkien's literary mythology in the binocular mode legitimise this use of fiction by claiming that Tolkien possessed esoteric knowledge, presumably acquired through his study of mythology and ancient languages, which he hinted at in his texts. The esoteric historians Laurence Gardner and Nicholas de Vere both made this claim, and so do many self-identified Elves. It is an extremely clever rhetorical move, for it allows one to enlist Tolkien as ally while keeping the freedom to claim just anything about the 'real Elves', as discrepancies between one's 'true story' and Tolkien's account can be explained by the fact that Tolkien, though he knew the truth, dared only hint at it out of fear of losing his job and reputation.

Tolkien religionists who approach Tolkien's literary mythology in the mythopoeic, mytho-cosmological, or mytho-historical modes tend to go further. They may or may not attribute esoteric knowledge to Tolkien, but typically they additionally claim that Tolkien was a visionary and that his narratives are fundamentally based on revelations. For example, Terry Donaldson claimed that Tolkien channelled, and Gareth Knight suggested that Tolkien had read the akashic records, and members of the Legendarium Reconstructionist groups believe that Tolkien had visions of Faery. No group attributes more charisma to Tolkien than the Tribunal of the Sidhe for whom Tolkien is the Bard of the kin folk who had chosen to incarnate to tell the history of his people in mythic form.

#14. If Tolkien spirituality is anything to go by, contemporary religion is* not *experiencing a metaphorical turn.

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[548] This argument is inspired by the cognitive scholar of religion Pascal Boyer (2001), but moves on a different level. Boyer is interested in "religious representations", i.e. what I refer to as first-order beliefs, and argues that a cognitive optimum exists between intuitiveness and contradictions of intuitiveness. My argument concerns consciously evaluated folk rationalisations and posits that a cognitive optimum exists between plausibility and fabulousness.

My third main hypothesis, which reformulated Martin Ramstedt's metaphorical turn thesis, reads as follows: 'In the spiritual Tolkien milieu individuals will tend to (a) consider Tolkien's literary mythology to be fiction and read it in the binocular, mythopoeic, or mytho-cosmological mode rather than in the mytho-historical mode, to (b) rationalise those supernatural agents from Tolkien's mythology which they address in ritual as impersonal powers or psychological principles, and (c) relativise their religious claims rather than seeking to legitimise them.' We are now in a position to assess this hypothesis.

In the groups analysed, Tolkien's literary mythology has been variously approached in the binocular, mythopoeic, mytho-cosmological, and mytho-historical modes. For good reasons, individuals *outside* the spiritual Tolkien milieu proper (Pagans; esoteric historians) approach Tolkien's narratives in the binocular mode, while individuals *within* the spiritual Tolkien milieu apply the mythopoeic, mytho-cosmological, and mytho-historical modes. Within the Tolkien milieu, the mytho-cosmological mode predominates. No matter whether one's Tolkienesque ritual partners are the Valar or characters from *LR*, these beings are typically believed to reside in a spiritual otherworld. Mytho-historical readings of Tolkien's literary mythology are rare and come either in combination with some relativising epistemology (as in the case of Elwin of Ilsaluntë Valion) or they are ignored or explicitly rejected by most other Tolkien religionists (this goes for the historical claims made by Ravenwolf of Indigo Elves). It is very important to add, though, that most of those Tolkien religionists who shy away from a mytho-historical reading of Tolkien's texts readily approach other religious narratives (e.g. pagan mythologies or the Bible) in the mytho-historical mode.

In ritual, Tolkien deities are addressed in a straightforward, literal way. Outside ritual, the Valar are made subject to belief elaborations that reduce their power (as we have seen above) and situate them the on astral plane or in the Imaginal Realm. Only rarely, are the Valar subjected to ontological transformation. As a rule, rationalised Valar beliefs affirm that the Tolkien deities are discrete, spiritual, and personal beings. In the few cases where the Valar (or *LR* characters) are ontologically reduced, they are made subject to theistic transformation and constituted as expressions of other gods (the Goddess; the God and the Goddess) who in turn are believed to exist as discrete, spiritual, and personal beings. No spiritual Tolkien group rationalises Tolkien deities in psychological terms. Something similar can be said about the Elven identity. Through belief elaboration and blending, self-identified Elves construct beliefs about the Elves that go far beyond Tolkien's Quendi, but when it comes to ontology assessment the Elves stand firm. Only a minority of the self-identified Elves hold to the 'cultural' (or metaphorical) rationalisation of Elvenhood as being merely a carrier of the Old Religion. Most self-identified Elves claim to literally possess Elven genes and/or an Elven soul.

The vast majority of Tolkien religionists back up their literal beliefs with legitimisation. Seeking to objectivise and prove their beliefs, they refer especially to subjective experience: ritual encounters with the Valar prove their existence; memories of past Elven lives prove that one possesses an Elven soul. Relativisation, both in the form of subjecti-

visation (recourse to personal feelings) and compartmentalisation (the claim that religious beliefs are true in a non-objective way), occurs, but only rarely.

To sum up: Tolkien religionists as a rule hold literal rather than metaphorical beliefs and they seek to support these beliefs with legitimisation; they do not read Tolkien's texts as history, but in general gladly make claims about supernatural intervention in history. In other words, my analysis of Tolkien religion does not support the claim that a metaphorical turn is taking place in contemporary religion. It also does not support Ramstedt's notion that play and ritual are collapsing into each other (2007a, 3; cf. section 5.3). Although Tolkien religion is obviously based on fiction, it is genuinely religious in the sense that ritual practice is governed by a 'reality contract' rather than by the 'fiction contract' of make-believe. Regarding the less bold claim that a de-historicising turn is taking place in contemporary religion, the material is inconclusive at best, as Tolkien religionists are unwilling to make religio-historical claims based on Tolkien's narratives, but willing to make such claims based on other sources.

The spiritual Tolkien milieu is small and unusual and one can obviously not generalise from this sample to contemporary religion in general. Even so, the findings have some general weight, for intuitively, one would expect that if belief in post-traditional individual religion in general is becoming increasingly metaphorical, this must be even more true of fiction-based religion. Now that we know that belief within the spiritual Tolkien milieu is actually quite literal, it becomes difficult to accept that religion in general, most of which does not draw on fiction as its main authoritative texts, should become increasingly metaphorical in nature.

17.4. The Plausibility Structures of Tolkien Religion

#15. The plausibility threats faced by fiction-based religions are not radically different from those faced by other religions, and they can be overcome by strong plausibility structures.

In chapter 6, I formulated a straightforward hypothesis about the plausibility structures that were likely to lead to success for Tolkien-based religious groups. This hypothesis, the fourth and last of them, reads as follows: 'The perceived plausibility of Tolkien-based religion and institutional stability will be higher in groups in which members (a) have much contact with each other, (b) perform rituals together, and (c) share an explicit identity, and in groups in which (d) capable movement intellectuals have constructed an elaborate local tradition which gives direction and intellectual depth to the group.' Admittedly, the number of groups analysed in this study has been too low to test this hypothesis systematically. Even so, as table 17.5 shows, a comparison of some of the groups that have been studied certainly supports the hypothesis.

Table 17.5. The Plausibility Structures of a Few Tolkien-based Religious Groups						
Group	Location/ Main text	Success indicators	Plausibility structures			
			Contact	Rituals	Identity	Tradition
Tribunal of the Sidhe	Offline *S*	*c*. 150 members, some 2nd generation; growth	X	X	X	X
Tië eldaliéva	Online *S*	Very few members, existing for 9 years	X	X	X	X
Ilsaluntë Valion	Online *HoMe*	Few members, slow growth; existing for 7 years	X	X	-	X
Elven Realities	Online movies	700+ members; collapse after 2-3 years	-	-	X	-
Middle-Earth Pagans	Online movies	No successful community building	-	X	-	-

It comes as no surprise that social contact, a shared identity and tradition, and collective rituals (or at least individually performed rituals following a shared format) all facilitate stable organisation building. That only confirms what we already know about religious organisations. The present study demonstrates one thing, however, which is not so self-evident, namely that these plausibility structures can be achieved also in an *online* environment. Granted, Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion are small groups, but they have about the same size as most grass root groups within the cultic milieu. Their size of five to fifteen active members is comparable, for example, to most Wiccan covens. It is remarkable that these online cults are still going strong, simply because it shows that stable, long-lived online cults are possible. Like religious groups in general, online cults can survive if their plausibility structures are strong enough, and that is very much the case for Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion: these groups are online *communities* (rather than mere networks) held together by extensive communication and social ties; the groups have done rituals together via Skype or phone and continue to do rituals following a shared format and/or to do individual rituals but discuss the experiences afterwards; they have developed a sophisticated repertoire of rationalisations and justifications; and in the case of Tië eldaliéva this is all further supported by a metaphorical Elven identity.

As mentioned in chapter 14, Colin Campbell (1972, 128) has argued that cults which do not codify their teachings and formalise membership and leadership are destined to collapse rapidly. The question is to what extent this is true for online cults. Considering Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion, we can conclude that online cults do not need to develop formal leadership to survive. More to the point, formal leadership – or indeed charismatic leadership – is impossible to realise in online groups. What online cults need

to survive is a considerate and hard-working moderator. Regarding codification of teachings, Campbell is certainly right that if cults, including online cults, wish to survive they must actively counteract the strain to variety and formulate a shared project. Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion were most vibrant and attracted most members in the years 2005 to 2008 when the groups were engaged in collective tradition-building. By contrast, Middle-Earth Pagans collapsed almost instantly, because tradition-building never became a collective project (though that may have been Laurasia's initial intention).

A shared focus is good, but codification of beliefs is no guarantee of success. While the very *process* of finding out together 'who we are and what we stand for' is inspiring and good for social cohesion, the *product*, a set of codified beliefs and ritual formats, can be a double-edged sword. One downside of codified beliefs is that new members are less likely to join when presented with a 'take-it-or-leave-it' package they have not co-created. Also old members can come to feel locked up in their own creation. Normally the good thing about codified beliefs and practices is that they make for social and ritual interaction and a shared identity. We have seen this work in the Tribunal of the Sidhe, but we have also seen how the collective online rituals of Legendarium Reconstructionists were given up after some time. This suggests that online groups, due to the lack of physical co-presence, cannot reap the fruits, so to speak, of institutionalisation. Developing a spiritual path together can work as well online as offline, but practising an existing spiritual path together works much better offline than online. The kind of full-fledged institutionalisation and tradition-building which works well offline cannot be realised online. In other words, online cults cannot evolve into online sects. Even so, online cults can survive for a long time if they provide a semi-institutional, semi-traditionalised environment for individual religion.

#16. Religion based primarily on Tolkien's literary mythology is rare, but fiction-inspired, post-traditional individual religion is a common late modern religious expression.

The membership of all Tolkien-based groups put together numbers only a few hundred individuals. This fact should not mislead us to believe, however, that Tolkien religion is extraordinarily odd and altogether out of pace with contemporary religion. In fact, Tolkien religion expresses three characteristics which are increasingly common within the contemporary religious field.

First of all, Tolkien religion takes place outside of formal religious organisations and thus constitutes a form of *individual* or *sub-institutional religion*. Granted, there exist groups within the spiritual Tolkien milieu of which one can become a member, but these groups lack the characteristics of strong, formal organisations. For example, membership is usually free, multiple memberships are allowed or even endorsed, and there is no strict division between members and leaders. Tolkien religion is also *post-traditional* in nature. In contrast to tradition-bound religion, post- or trans-traditional religion is characterised by extensive and deliberate religious blending, not only of different religious

traditions with each other, but also of religion with science, psychology, and fiction. While trans-traditional, individual religion is perhaps not unique to the late modern West, this form of religion has certainly been on the rise vis-à-vis tradition-bound, institutional religion during the 20th and 21st century in this part of the world. Tolkien religion is part of this trend.

Tolkien-based religion furthermore belongs to a particular *kind* of post-traditional, individual religion, namely *fiction-based religion*. There exist several fiction-based religions, some of which are either numerically stronger than Tolkien religion (Jediism) or older and better organised (Church of All Worlds). Explicitly fiction-based religions are interesting, because they form local traditions and semi-formal organisations that can be studied and compared to religious traditions and organisations that do not base themselves on fiction. It must be stressed, however, that fiction-based religions only constitute the semi-organised top of a much larger iceberg of fiction-inspired religion. Indeed, the post-traditional individual religion (or "spirituality") of many of our contemporaries is inspired and sustained as much by books such as Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* (2003) and Elizabeth Gilbert's *Eat, Pray, Love* (2006) and by movies such as Peter Jackson's *The Lovely Bones* (2009) and James Cameron's *Avatar* (2009) as is it by non-fiction. While Tolkien religion and other fiction-based religions are rare, fiction-inspired, post-traditional individual religion is becoming an increasingly typical late modern religious expression.

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English Summary

The Spiritual Tolkien Milieu: A Study of Fiction-based Religion

This book offers a comprehensive analysis of the history, social organisation, and belief dynamics of the spiritual Tolkien milieu, a largely online-situated network of individuals and groups that draw on J.R.R. Tolkien's literary mythology for spiritual inspiration. It is the first academic treatment of Tolkien spirituality and one of the first monographs on fiction-based religion, a type of religion that uses fiction as authoritative texts. Other fiction-based religions include Jediism (based on George Lucas' *Star Wars*) and the Church of All Worlds (inspired by Robert Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land*).

The first religious practices inspired by Tolkien's narratives appeared in the late 1960s after the publication of a paperback edition of *The Lord of the Rings* in 1965. Hippies married each other in ceremonies based on the book and read passages during LSD trips in order to amplify the spiritual experience. Some readers wondered whether *The Lord of the Rings* was in fact a parable about Faery and joined the emerging Neo-Pagan movement to explore the Celtic and Germanic mythologies from which Tolkien had drawn much of his inspiration. Two significant religious movements, Tolkien religion and the Elven movement, developed out of the post-paperback fascination with Middle-earth and consolidated after the posthumous publication of *The Silmarillion* in 1977.

Tolkien religion focuses on ritual interaction with the supernatural denizens of the Middle-earth universe. Tolkien religionists either evoke these beings or go on Otherworld journeys to visit them in Middle-earth. The Valar, Tolkien's demiurgical pantheon, are the preferred communication partners in these rituals, but Tolkien religionists also work with the Maiar, an order of lesser spiritual beings which includes Gandalf, with the Quendi, the Elves of Tolkien's world, or with Eru Ilúvatar, Tolkien's creator God. Tolkien religionists believe that Tolkien's narratives refer to supernatural places and beings that exist in the real world, and they defend this reading of Tolkien by constructing him as a visionary, an esotericist, or even as an incarnated fey spirit. Most Tolkien religionists are Neo-Pagans who add Tolkienesque rites to an otherwise standard Pagan practice. In the 21st century, however, increasingly purist Tolkien traditions have developed, aided by the emergence of the Internet and the publication of *The History of Middle-earth* (1983-1996), a twelve-volume collection of Tolkien's drafts and writings on Middle-earth.

The Elven movement emerged in the early 1970s when a group of ceremonial magicians began to playfully self-identify as Elves, naming themselves the Elf Queen's Daughters. During the 1980s and 1990s, the Elven movement underwent a profound metamorphosis, as a growing number of 'awakened Elves' made increasingly literal claims about their Elven nature, professing to possess Elven genes or an Elven soul. Tolkien's legacy continues to be felt among the contemporary self-identified Elves, but their turn

to literalism has caused many of them to view Tolkien's fiction as an dubious or even illegitimate source of inspiration.

Fiction-based religion raises questions about the persuasive power of narrative, about religious blending, and about rationalisation of beliefs. How can some readers come to believe that supernatural agents from fictional narratives are real? How do fiction-based religions emerge when their authoritative texts lack important religious building-blocks, such as descriptions of rituals? And how do adherents of fiction-based religions legitimise their beliefs, given the fact that their religion is based on fiction? In short, talking Tolkien religion as a case the dissertation aims to answer the following main research questions: 'which semiotic structures and processes are involved in the construction and maintenance of fiction-based religion, and which social structures support the plausibility hereof?' In the first part of the book, *A Theoretical Framework for the Study of Fiction-based Religion*, I develop an analytical toolkit appropriate for answering these questions. In the second part of the book, *The Spiritual Milieu Based on J.R.R. Tolkien's Literary Mythology*, the theoretical apparatus is employed in a detailed analysis of the spiritual Tolkien milieu.

Part I: A Theoretical Framework for the Study of Fiction-based Religion

The theoretical part falls into five chapters. In chapter 1, "Individual Religion and the Post-traditional Religious Field", I sketch how processes of detraditionalisation, deinstitutionalisation, and dedogmatisation have led to the emergence of a post-traditional religious field in the West. Post-traditional religion is not embedded within one particular religious tradition, but characterised by the blending of elements from various religious traditions which each other and with material from other cultural sources, such as fiction and popular science. Socially, the post-traditional religious field takes the form of a 'cultic milieu' (to speak with Colin Campbell). As such, it comprises both formal post-traditional organisations (such as the Theosophical Society) and post-traditional individual religion (or "spirituality"). The individuals and small groups engaged in Tolkien religion, together with their beliefs and practices, constitute a sub-milieu within the cultic milieu. On the one hand, this 'spiritual Tolkien milieu' constitutes a milieu of its own because individuals and groups, especially in the age of the Internet, are connected through partly overlapping networks that allow individuals to exchange ideas and groups to share members. On the other hand, the spiritual Tolkien milieu constitutes a sub-milieu within the cultic milieu because Tolkien spirituality has emerged through the blending of elements from Tolkien's narratives with existing rituals and beliefs from the wider cultic milieu.

Chapter 2, "Fiction-based Religion", focuses on the category of fiction-based religion, a subtype of post-traditional religion. The chapter is framed as a critical discussion with Adam Possamai who was the first to identify and describe religions based on popular fiction as a new religious form. With reference to Jean Baudrillard, Possamai

coined the term 'hyper-real religion' to denote this type of religion. For Baudrillard, however, *all* living religions are social constructions and therefore hyper-real. Since the notion of hyper-real religion is thus confusing, I propose fiction-based religion as a more precise alternative. Drawing on possible worlds-inspired fiction theory, I define fiction as any literary narrative which is not intended by its author to refer to events which have taken place in the actual world prior to being entextualised. Fiction-based religion thus stands in contrast to religion whose authoritative narratives claim to be historical or non-fictional in the sense of referring to events that indeed *have* taken place in the actual world prior to their entextualisation, either in an historical or mythical past. I then elaborate on Possamai's distinction between hyper-real religions that use popular culture as either a secondary or primary source of inspiration to develop a threefold typology of fiction-based religion. I distinguish between *fiction-inspired religion* (including Neo-Pagans who are influenced by Tolkien's writings in a general way), *fiction-integrating religion* (including the Tribunal of the Sidhe and other groups that integrate elements from Tolkien's literary mythology into an existing religious tradition), and *fiction-based religion sensu stricto* (including 'purist' Tolkien-based religion that takes Tolkien's works as its very foundation). I finally show that while Possamai states that hyper-real religion originated in the 1950s, the history of fiction-inspired religion can be traced back at least to the Theosophical Society's use of Edward Bulwer-Lytton's novels late in the late nineteenth century.

In chapter 3, "The Religious Affordances of Fictional Narratives", I seek a middle-way between the claim that (religious) narratives have one single, inherent meaning that can be reconstructed through careful interpretation, and the contrasting claim that texts themselves are devoid of meaning and that meaning-construction takes place only in the process of reading. Inspired by the American psychologist James Gibson, I coin the term textual affordances to denote the several interpretation possibilities that a text can offer, with various strength, at the same time. Religious affordances, more specifically, are those traits in a narrative that promote a religious reading, i.e. a reading that takes at least some of the supernatural agents, worlds, and processes in the text to refer to supernatural agents, worlds, and processes in the actual world. I identify four types of religious affordances, of which religious narratives tend to possess at least the first three. These are (1) *fantastic elements* which are real (though often non-ordinary) within the narrative world, but supernatural from the perspective of the world of the reader; (2) *narrative religion*, especially in the form of ritual communication with superhuman beings; and (3) textual mechanisms that thematise and assert the text's *veracity*. Sometimes religious narratives also include (4) claims to stem from a *divine source*. Many fictional narratives include both fictional affordances and (less pronounced) religious affordances and hence promote both a (dominant) fictional reading and a (sub-dominant) religious reading.

Chapter 4, "Religious blending in Fiction-based Religion" discusses religious blending, a process which remains curiously undertheorised despite scholarly agreement on

its significance in contemporary religion. Religious blending is particularly central to the study of fiction-based religion, for no fiction-based religion is based exclusively on fiction. They always draw on established religious traditions as well. These traditions typically supply interpretive strategies and ritual scripts which are used to religionise the fiction. For instance, the Neo-Pagan notion that there exist magical otherworlds can be applied to Tolkien's literary mythology and used to claim that Middle-earth constitutes such an otherworld. Neo-Shamanistic ritual techniques can subsequently be used to take one to Middle-earth. Since no standard theory of religious blending exists, I set out to assemble a toolkit for the study of blending processes on different analytical levels in (fiction-based) religion. I make a first distinction between *bricolage*, i.e. religious blending by individuals, and *syncretism*, i.e. the blending of religious traditions. In dialogue with earlier scholarship on syncretism, I then develop a more fine-grained set of analytical concepts, distinguishing forms of syncretism that are either ambiguous and instable (mixture), result in a new stable tradition (synthesis), cause one tradition to be usurped by another (assimilation), or involve the adoption of elements by a small tradition from its cultural surroundings (inward acculturation). Since Tolkien spirituality involves the blending of fictional and religious concepts, such as Tolkien's Quendi with the *álfar* of folklore, I pay special attention to religious blending on the concept level. I distinguish between two forms of religious concept metamorphosis, resemantisation and concept construction, and demonstrate the usefulness of Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner's theory of conceptual blending to analyse such processes. The strength of conceptual blending theory is that it allows one to break up concepts into semiotic elements of a lower order, and to analyse the processes of projection, compression, and so on involving these elements on the sub-concept level.

In chapter 5, "Dynamics of Belief in Religious Traditions", I sketch a semiotic approach to the study of religious belief. I use the term religious belief to refer to any explicit or implicit statement which assumes the existence of supernatural agents, worlds, or processes in the actual world. Adopting a semiotic approach, I consider religious beliefs to be signs. Indeed, religious beliefs constitute a special type of signs which are not only defined by their content, but also by the fact that they, despite possessing no objective reference, insist on referring to real events and states of being in the actual world. I make a fundamental distinction between elemental religion and rationalised religion, two components of religious traditions defined by different types of belief. Elemental religion refers to practices that assume the existence of supernatural agents, worlds, or processes *in a straightforward literal sense*, the assumptions (or first-order beliefs) which underpin these practices, and the experiences which these practices induce. Elemental religion constitutes the basis, indeed a *sine qua non*, for religious traditions. This core can become the object of a process of *religious rationalisation*. This process involves the elaboration and justification of elemental religion, and leads to the formulation of explanations and theories (rationalised religion) that constitute a reflective, second-order kind of religious beliefs. One particular important aspect of religious rationalisation is ontology assessment,

i.e. a process through which a particular type and degree of reference is ascribed to existing beliefs. I draw up a typology of principal ontology assessments, including *affirmation*, which confirms that the belief in question is referential in a literal sense, and *transformation*, which asserts that a merely metaphorical sign relation exists between the belief in question and its alleged referent. I differentiate between various sub-types of transformation. Moving on to the ontology assessment of texts, I identify four religious modes in which religious narratives and supernatural fiction can be read, namely the mytho-historical, mytho-cosmological, mythopoeic, and binocular modes. I count also on two non-religious modes, namely the euhemeristic and the fictionalising modes. A separate section is devoted to justification, i.e. epistemological reflections on the plausibility of belief. I distinguish between two main strategies of justification, namely *legitimisation*, which seeks to prove the objective existence of the alleged referents of beliefs, and *relativisation*, which defends beliefs by de-objectivising them as subjective truths or as expressions of a non-rational mode of thought.

Part II: The Spiritual Milieu Based on J.R.R. Tolkien's Literary Mythology

The second part of the dissertation, *The Spiritual Milieu Based on J.R.R. Tolkien's Literary Mythology*, opens with chapter 6, entitled "Method: Data Collection and Analytical Strategy". In this chapter, I outline my method of data collection (mainly snowballing) and present an overview of my data. The data include sixteen interviews and extensive email communication with members of spiritual Tolkien groups, numerous homepages of groups and individuals, published writings by Tolkien religionists, ritual formats from several groups, and recordings of Skype rituals.

In chapters 7 through 16, I analyse the religious affordances of Tolkien's literary mythology and carry out a number of case studies of groups within the spiritual Tolkien milieu. Taken together, the ten chapters offer a thick description of the spiritual Tolkien milieu. Chapter 7 is entitled "The Religious Affordances of *The Lord of the Rings*". In this chapter, I demonstrate that *The Lord of the Rings* contains numerous fantastic elements (e.g. superhuman beings, otherworlds, magic, visions) and a limited elements of narrative religion (e.g. divine powers and rituals directed at them; morality, cosmology, and eschatology). It also includes a frame narrative that stages the main story as 'feigned history' and thus thematises its veracity. While all this was *meant* by Tolkien to be taken with a grain of salt, *The Lord of the Rings* certainly contains textual and paratextual elements that make a non-fictional reading of the text possible.

The Lord of the Rings was published in 1954-55, but it did not become a bestseller until it appeared in paperback in 1965. This story is told in chapter 8, "An Unexpected Success: Hippies, Neo-Pagans, and *The Lord of the Rings*". I show how hippies adopted the Shire life of the Hobbits as a social model, and demonstrate how Neo-Pagans were moved by Tolkien's enchanted world and considered *The Lord of the Rings* to contain metaphorical references to metaphysical realities. For instance, while Neo-Pagans gene-

rally did not consider Lothlórien to be a real place, some of them saw (and see) the Elven forest kingdom as a metaphorical reference to real otherworldly places very much *like it*. Indeed, for some readers it was *The Lord of the Rings* that first made them wonder about the possible reality of otherworlds and magic, this being their first step towards becoming Pagans.

Chapter 9, "The Religious Affordances of *The Silmarillion*" explores the religious affordances that were added to Tolkien's literary mythology with the publication of *The Silmarillion* in 1977. Compared to *The Lord of the Rings*, the new religious affordances include in particular an elaboration of the narrative religion. In fact, much of *The Silmarillion* discusses the cosmogony, theology, cosmology, and eschatology according to the lore of the Quendi. This new material allows Tolkien's works to be cast as a mythology in its own right, and the Elven point of view in *The Silmarillion* invites readers and Tolkien religionists to identify with the Elves (rather than with Hobbits or humans).

Chapters 10 through 12 describe three cases of Tolkien spirituality centred on the self-identification as Elves. Chapter 10, "The Tribunal of the Sidhe: A Case Study of Religious Blending", introduces the Tribunal of the Sidhe, a Neo-Pagan group that was founded on the American West Coast in 1984 and probably constitutes the largest Tolkien-integrating religious movement today. The Tribunal's members claim to be Changelings, i.e. Elves (or similar beings) from an astral world who have been incarnated in human bodies. They also claim that Tolkien was a Changeling himself and that *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Silmarillion* tell the history of the Changelings in mythic form. I discuss the self-identification as Changeling as an example of religious blending, analysing how members combine elements from Tolkien's mythology with various forms of fairy spirituality and revelations of their own to construct and rationalise the notion that they are Changelings.

Chapter 11 is entitled "The Elven Movement: A Case Study of Construction and Maintenance of Plausibility". In this chapter, I examine the range of semiotic strategies for plausibility construction, i.e. rationalisation, legitimisation, and relativisation, which the Elves use, often in combination, to elaborate upon and justify their core identity claim 'we are Elves'. Special attention is given to the Elves' effort to negotiate a balance between fabulousness and plausibility. The awakened Elves identify with the Elves of legend and fantasy fiction because these beings are near-immortal magicians, but being humans after all, they cannot plausibly claim to possess the same powers as their narrative role models. A balance between fabulousness and plausibility is found, for example, by self-identified Elves who claim to have lived fabulous past lives (among the stars and on Atlantis), but who maintain that their Elven powers in this life are severely tempered because their souls are trapped in weak human bodies. I also analyse the process of 'conversion' (or interpretive drift) which new members of the movement go through to develop their fascination with Elves into the belief and public profession that they really are Elves. Finally, I consider to what extent fiction, Internet communities, and the cultic mi-

lieu function as plausibility structures for the Elven community, and I identify the 'plausibility threats' facing the community.

The construction of the Elves as a superior race is also the concern of the alternative historians discussed in chapter 12, "Esoteric Historians on the 'Truth' Behind Tolkien's Elves". The chapter focuses on Laurence Gardner and Nicholas de Vere who use Tolkien's literary mythology to legitimise their conspiracy theories about a royal, Elven bloodline which includes Christ and Charlemagne. While they do not directly integrate elements from Tolkien's narratives into their religious beliefs and practices, they seek out similarities between Tolkien's texts and bloodline lore and use these similarities to suggest that Tolkien possessed esoteric knowledge which he hinted at in his books. In this way, the alternative historians construct Tolkien as a fellow esotericist and attempt to rub his prestige as a mythologist and philologist off onto their own speculations.

Chapter 13, "Summoning the Valar, Divining with Elves: Tolkien and Western Magic", is devoted to two cases of integration of Tolkien's literary mythology into the Western magic tradition. I first analyse an interesting example of ritual blending, namely the High Elvish Working created in 1993 by the Fifth Way Mystery School. The structure of the ritual was taken from the so-called Supreme Invoking Ritual of the Pentagram of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. The content, including the evocation of the Valar and certain phrases in Elvish, were drawn from Tolkien's literary mythology. The High Elvish Working, which was circulated among Neo-Pagans and published on the group's homepage, has been a major source of inspiration for later groups in the spiritual Tolkien milieu. The second case is Terry Donaldson's *Lord of the Rings* Tarot deck, published in 1997. Especially the accompanying book is interesting, for here Donaldson connects Tolkien's mythology to the elaborate system of correspondences established by the Golden Dawn. He furthermore provides guidelines for visualisation rituals based on the card illustrations and introduces new Tolkien-inspired spreads. It goes for most of the Tolkien-integrating religionists treated in chapters 10 through 13 that they are at pains to decide for themselves whether Tolkien's literary mythology is merely fiction (albeit spiritually advanced and religiously enlightening fiction) or whether it constitutes a real mythology (albeit a relatively inferior or derived one).

Chapters 14, 15, and 16 are concerned with Tolkien spirituality that has emerged online in the 21st century. Chapter 14, "Peter Jackson's Movies and Middle-earth Paganism", analyses the religious affordances of the movie adaptations of *The Lord of the Rings* (2001-2003) and examines a number of online groups which draw (or drew) most of their Tolkien inspiration from these movies. In contrast to the book version of *The Lord of the Rings*, Jackson's movies have no frame story anchoring the narrative world in the world of the reader, and they include no narrative religion whatsoever. Even so, groups of self-identified Middle-earth Pagans have developed rituals directed at characters from the movies. Not only superhuman characters, such as Gandalf and Galadriel, are the object of these rituals, but also human and Hobbit characters, including Aragorn, Éowyn, and Frodo. These characters are either believed to inhabit some non-physical plane of exi-

stence or to be expressions of the Wiccan God and Goddess. Many Neo-Pagans have experimented with movie-based rituals, but Middle-earth Paganism has not been successful in terms of tradition-forming and institutionalisation. Most Middle-earth Pagans lost interest after a short while, some moving on to religious blending involving other movies and TV series. For example, some are now self-identified Vampires.

Chapter 15, "The Religious Affordances of *The History of Middle-earth* and of Tolkien's Letters and Essays", covers the religious affordances of the vast corpus of Middle-earth texts that lie beyond the three well-known books, *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings*, and *The Silmarillion*. In terms of religious affordances, the twelve volumes that make up *The History of Middle-earth* are interesting for three reasons. First, they include the earliest versions of the stories that would evolve into *The Silmarillion*, versions which Tolkien religionists argue are the closest we get to Tolkien's original revelation. Second, *The History of Middle-earth* includes much detailed information about the Valar which can be used to construct for Valar-directed rituals. Finally, *The History of Middle-earth* includes two unfinished 'time travel' stories which are highly autobiographical in character and suggest that Tolkien believed in the possibility of ancestral memory regression. This theme returns in Tolkien's letters in which he describes an uncanny and recurring dream of a Great Green Wave. Tolkien's son Michael had the same dream, and that made Tolkien speculate that they both accessed an ancestral memory of the destruction of Atlantis. Tolkien's letters also add to the religious affordances of his mythology in other ways, as Tolkien often muses on the relationship between his narratives and the historical record and even expresses a feeling of inspiration. Indeed, Tolkien frequently states that he did not invent his stories, but that he rather "recorded" or "reported" what was already there.

Chapter 16, "Legendarium Reconstructionism: A Case Study of Tolkien-based Religion", examines two closely cooperating groups, Tië eldaliéva (The Elven Path) and Ilsaluntë Valion (The Silver Ship of the Valar). Like Middle-earth Paganism, Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion emerged online after the movies, but the two latter groups draw most extensively on *The Silmarillion* and *The History of Middle-earth*. They are interesting because they go the furthest in creating a Tolkien-based spiritual tradition. For example, drawing on Tolkien's narratives, supplemented with their own inventions and revelations, members of Tië eldaliéva have created a complete lunisolar calendar. Drawing on ritual formats from ceremonial magic and Wicca, they have developed elaborate rituals for each moon phase and solar festival. Since physical co-presence has been unattainable, the group carried out its rituals over the phone or on Skype. Ilsaluntë Valion, which broke off from Tië eldaliéva in 2007, has further refined the ritual calendar and gradually purged the ceremonial magical elements from the group's rituals. Supplementing the collective rituals, Ilsaluntë Valion has furthermore developed a freer and more individual ritual approach. In the group's own terms, members do gnostic research using Tolkien's narratives as a means of transportation to the Imaginal Realm or Faery. Based on extensive virtual ethnography of the two groups, the chapter sketches the history of Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion, analyses the modes of religious blending in the groups,

and discusses how members embed their Tolkien-based ritual practices within a sophisticated world-view and religious philosophy.

Conclusions

In the conclusion, I sum up the empirical findings and theoretical implications of the dissertation in sixteen theses on Tolkien religion, fiction-based religion, and religion in general. These theses are not identical to the fourteen propositions ('*stellingen*') accompanying the dissertation. For lack of space I cannot discuss all sixteen theses here, but will restrict myself to a few main conclusions pertaining to the core notions of religious affordances, religious blending, and dynamics of belief in religious traditions.

I assert that a given narrative's usability as an authoritative text for religion depends on the amount and types of religious affordances it possesses. This means two things. First, only texts that include at least *some* religious affordances can become the foundational texts of religion at all. The spiritual Tolkien milieu could only emerge because Tolkien's Middle-earth narratives include some measure of religious affordances. Second, based on the religious affordances of a given text it is possible to predict how religion based on it will look. Within the spiritual Tolkien milieu, we can observe that groups based on *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Silmarillion*, or Jackson's movies differ in ways that reflect the religious affordances of their authoritative narratives. Indeed, groups in the spiritual Tolkien milieu consistently (a) identify with (the race of) the narrator of their main authoritative Tolkien text; (b) direct rituals towards those beings who are divine or at least extraordinary from the perspective of the narrator; and (c) adopt a reading mode that reflects their main text's thematisation of its own veracity. For example, groups based on *The Lord of the Rings* identify as humans or Hobbits, venerate the Elves, and interpret Tolkien's world as connected to the prehistory of the actual world. By contrast, groups based on *The Silmarillion* identify as Elves, venerate the Valar, and consider Middle-earth a spiritual world situated in another dimension.

A comparison of the different cases of Tolkien religion also reveals which kinds of religious affordances are necessary for religion to emerge and which are merely facultative. The very existence of movie-based Middle-earth Paganism demonstrates that religious practices can emerge from a narrative that includes only fantastic elements, but no narrative religion, and which does not thematise its own veracity. It is telling, however, that Middle-earth Paganism was not successful as a movement and collapsed almost instantly, while Tolkien traditions based on more substantial narratives endure. Only groups based on *The Silmarillion* or *The History of Middle-earth* have evolved into stable communities with sophisticated traditions. And only *The Silmarillion* and *The History of Middle-earth* include substantial narrative religion – *The Lord of the Rings* includes some traces of narrative religion, but mostly in the appendices or in the form of hints that only become apprehensible in the light of *The Silmarillion*. This demonstrates that only texts that include narrative religion can become the anchor point of stable fiction-based reli-

gions. As far as the spiritual Tolkien milieu goes, it is not necessary that the main fictional text thematises its own veracity. (*The History of Middle-earth* does so, but *The Silmarillion* does not).

All groups in the spiritual Tolkien milieu engage in religious blending, and this process is patterned. Whenever their main authoritative Tolkien text lacks certain religious affordances, Tolkien religionists adopt building-blocks from other traditions. Concretely, all groups within the spiritual Tolkien milieu borrow ritual elements and rationalisation strategies from established religious traditions. Unsurprisingly, Tolkien religionists draw these building-blocks from traditions with which they are already familiar. For example, many Tolkien religionists are Neo-Pagans and naturally draw on Wiccan circle casting to create Tolkienesque rituals directed at the Elves and the Valar. Besides Neo-Paganism, Tolkien religionists draw on the Western magic tradition, theosophy, and Christianity, in roughly that order of importance.

In their actual practice, *all* Tolkien groups engage in religious blending, but the groups' normative stance on 'syncretism' differs dramatically. Some groups do not give the issue much thought, while others articulate an 'anti-syncretic' ideal of Tolkien exclusivism. In the latter case, there is thus a striking discrepancy between what members do (they blend) and what they claim to do (not to blend). This has far-reaching implications for the study of religion in general. It demonstrates that the study of people's consciously professed attitudes towards syncretism (or indeed the study of religious discourse in general) can tell us little about actual processes of religious blending (or indeed about religious practice in general). The conclusion to be drawn from this is that we must prioritise the study of religious practice (i.e. what religious people do) over the study of religious discourse (i.e. what religious people say that they do).

Tolkien religion normally develops in three steps. As a first step, individuals who are typically both fans of Tolkien's works and practising Pagans or magicians craft experimental and playful Tolkien-focused rituals and/or playfully identify as Elves, for example in the context of rituals or role-playing games. Many individuals never go beyond this point, but some gradually drift towards belief. This second step is marked by the development of what can be termed 'elemental Tolkien religion', i.e. serious ritual interaction with (or self-identification as) the supernatural agents from Tolkien's narratives and the implied belief that the Valar, Maiar, and Elves are real. The third and final step is the construction of rationalised Tolkien religion in the form of belief elaborations, ontology assessments, and justifications. For example, some Tolkien religionists assert that ritual interaction with the Valar is possible because the Valar are not merely fictional entities, but real beings (affirmative ontology assessment), and that one can visit them on the astral plane and gain access to their spiritual knowledge (belief elaboration). More rarely, Tolkien religionists interpret visions of the Valar as contacts with Jungian archetypes. Most Tolkien religionists justify their beliefs by making an appeal to subjective experience. It differs, however, whether they consider their experiences to be proof of the objective existence of the Valar (legitimisation) or whether they bracket the question of

ontology and stress instead that the Valar are real *for them* or real in some non-objective way (relativisation).

All Tolkien traditions, both those focused on Elven identity and those focused on ritual interaction with beings from Tolkien's narrative world, have an onion-shaped belief system. At the centre of the belief system are a few core beliefs which are very stable. These are the beliefs which are expressed, implicitly or explicitly, in elemental practice. In the Elven movement, the most fundamental core belief is the identity claim 'we are Elves'. The core belief of Tolkien religion is that 'Tolkien's literary mythology refers to real supernatural beings, namely the Valar, the Maiar, and the Quendi, who dwell in a world that is different from the physical world, but can be accessed in ritual'. Around these stable core beliefs exists the multitude of rationalisations and justifications that make up rationalised Tolkien religion. Compared to the core of elemental religion, these rationalisations and justifications are strikingly flexible and unstable. It is common for individuals to change their mind about rationalisations and justifications, exchanging, for example, a literal conception of the divine for a depersonalised conception, while holding on to the same core beliefs, elemental practice, and religious identity. It is also common for individuals to hold several, in principle mutually exclusive, rationalisations and justifications to be true at the same time, and to activate the one or the other according to context. For example, many Tolkien religionists will both talk about the Valar as discrete persons and argue that the Valar are personal expressions of non-personal archetypes; they will sometimes argue that their experiences prove the objective existence of the Valar, but at other times say that the Valar feel subjectively real for them and that their possible objective existence is irrelevant. Finally, it is relatively unproblematic for a group to include individuals with conflicting rationalisations and justifications as long as they share core beliefs and elemental practice. All this shows that the function of rationalised Tolkien religion is not to construct a sophisticated doctrine to supplant or trump elemental religious practice, but rather to supply a repertoire of ideas and narratives that together add meaningfulness and plausibility to the elemental religious core.

The relation between elemental religion and rationalised religion that I sketch here is not particular to Tolkien religion or even to fiction-based religion, but is an inherent quality of religious traditions as such. All religious traditions are semiotic systems comprised of a core of elemental religion and a superstructure of rationalised religion. And all religious traditions are subject to belief dynamics, such as ontology assessment, belief elaboration, justification, and religious blending. It is possible to analyse the structure and dynamics of any religious tradition with the conceptual model that I lay out in this study.

The spiritual Tolkien milieu is tiny, but fiction-inspired religion is quite common. This is certainly the case if one counts both members of organised fiction-based religions, such as Jediism, and the many religious *bricoleurs* who find inspiration in books, such as Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*, and films, such as James Cameron's *Avatar*. Martin Ram-

stedt has argued that the increasing religious use of fiction reflects a more general process in contemporary religion, namely a 'metaphorical turn' from literal to metaphorical belief and from ritual to play. Against this background, it is interesting to observe that Tolkien religionists hold strikingly literal beliefs and insist on being categorically different from fans (who play). As a rule, they adopt a mytho-cosmological reading mode, approaching Tolkien's stories as imaginary stories about real supernatural entities. That is to say, they insist that the Valar and the Elves are real spiritual beings who can contact humans on Earth, but whose home world is situated on another plane, in outer space, or in another time. Granted, Tolkien religionists usually do not read Tolkien's narratives as history, but they typically do hold historical beliefs about Atlantis and the peaceful coexistence of Elves and humans in the past. In short, the decline of institutional religion in the West allows for an increasing religious use of fiction, but if Tolkien religion is anything to go by, the rise of fiction-based religion does not indicate that a metaphorical turn is taking place in contemporary religion.

Nederlandse Samenvatting

Het Spirituele Tolkien Milieu: Een Studie van *Fiction-based Religion*

Dit boek bevat een analyse van de structuur en ontwikkeling van het spirituele Tolkien-milieu, een grotendeels online netwerk van groepen en individuen die spirituele inspiratie putten uit de literaire mythologie van J.R.R. Tolkien. Het is de eerste academische studie van Tolkien-religie en een van de eerste monografieën over *fiction-based religion*: religie gebaseerd op fictie. Andere voorbeelden van *fiction-based religions* zijn het Jediisme (gebaseerd op George Lucas' *Star Wars*) en de Church of All Worlds (geïnspireerd door Robert Heinleins *Stranger in a Strange Land*).

De eerste religieuze praktijken die waren geïnspireerd door Tolkiens verhalen ontstonden laat in de jaren zestig, na het verschijnen van de paperbackversie van *The Lord of the Rings* in 1965. Hippies lazen het boek tijdens LSD-trips om hun spirituele ervaring te verdiepen en in 1969 stichtte een groep provo's uit Amsterdam de hippiecommune De Hobbitstee in Wapserveen in Drenthe. Sommige lezers vroegen zich af of *The Lord of the Rings* moest worden gelezen als een parabel over Faery (Elfenland). Zij sloten zich aan bij het opkomende neopaganisme en raakten geïnteresseerd in de Keltische en Germaanse mythologieën waar Tolkien zijn inspiratie mede vandaan had. In de twee decennia na het verschijnen van de paperback, en met name na de postume publicatie van *The Silmarillion* in 1977, ontwikkelden zich twee religieuze bewegingen, Tolkien-religie en de elfenbeweging.

Tolkien-religie focust op rituele interactie met de bovennatuurlijke bewoners van Tolkiens narratieve wereld. De aanhangers van Tolkien-religie roepen deze wezens op of reizen zelf naar Midden-aarde om hen te bezoeken. Bij voorkeur wordt er gecommuniceerd met de Valar (het demiurgisch pantheon van Tolkien), hoewel aanhangers ook zeggen contact te hebben met de Maiar (spirituele wezens van een lagere orde), de Quendi (de elfen van Tolkien) of met Eru Ilúvatar (de schepper-god in Tolkiens wereld). De aanhangers geloven dat Tolkiens verhalen verwijzen naar bovennatuurlijke plaatsen en wezens die echt bestaan en verdedigen deze uitleg door Tolkien te beschouwen als een visionair, esotericus of zelfs als geïncarneerde elfengeest. De meeste aanhangers van Tolkien-religie zijn neopaganisten die door Tolkien geïnspireerde rituelen opnemen in hun paganistische rituelencatalogus, maar in de 21e eeuw zijn er groepen ontstaan die ernaar streven zich exclusief te baseren op Tolkien. De ontwikkeling van Tolkien-purisme werd mede mogelijk gemaakt door de opkomst van het internet en de publicatie van *The History of Middle-earth* (1983-1996), twaalf delen die bestaan uit conceptversies van *The Silmarillion* en veel ander materiaal gerelateerd aan het Midden-aardeuniversum.

De elfenbeweging ontstond in het begin van de jaren zeventig, toen een groep magiërs, de Elf Queen's Daughters, zichzelf op speelse wijze ging identificeren als elfen.

In de jaren tachtig en negentig nam een toenemend aantal 'ontwaakte elfen' (*awakened elves*) hun eigen 'elfennatuur' steeds letterlijker, door te claimen dat zij elfengenen of een elfenziel bezaten. Dit leidde tot een diepgaande metamorfose van de elfenbeweging: hoewel de erfenis van Tolkien nog steeds merkbaar is bij de mensen die zichzelf beschouwen als elfen, heeft de omwenteling naar een letterlijke zelfidentificatie als elf ertoe geleid dat velen van hen Tolkiens fictie nu zien als twijfelachtige bron van inspiratie of zich er zelfs geheel van distantiëren.

Het bestaan van *fiction-based religion* roept vragen op over de overtuigingskracht van verhalen, over vermenging van religieuze tradities en over rationalisering van religieuze overtuigingen. Hoe kan het dat sommige lezers geloven dat bovennatuurlijke wezens uit fictieve verhalen echt bestaan? Hoe kunnen *fiction-based religions* ontstaan terwijl hun gezaghebbende teksten belangrijke religieuze bouwstenen ontberen, zoals de beschrijving van rituelen? En hoe legitimeren aanhangers van een *fiction-based religion* hun religieuze overtuigingen, gegeven het feit dat hun religie gebaseerd is op fictie? Samengevat beoogt deze studie de volgende vraag te beantwoorden aan de hand van Tolkien-religie als casus: welke semiotische structuren en processen zijn betrokken bij het creëren en handhaven van *fiction-based religion*, en welke sociale structuren ondersteunen de plausibiliteit daarvan? In het eerste deel van het boek, *A Theoretical Framework for the Study of Fiction-based Religion*, ontwikkel ik een analytisch kader voor de beantwoording van deze vragen. In het tweede deel, *The Spiritual Milieu Based on J.R.R. Tolkien's Literary Mythology,* wordt het analytisch kader toegepast in een gedetailleerde analyse van het spirituele Tolkien-milieu.

Deel I: Een Theoretisch Raamwerk voor de Bestudering van *Fiction-based Religion*

Het theoretische deel bestaat uit vijf hoofdstukken. In hoofdstuk 1, "Individual Religion and the Post-traditional Religious Field", schets ik hoe detraditionalisering, de-institutionalisering en dedogmatisering hebben geleid tot het ontstaan van een posttraditioneel religieus veld in het Westen. Posttraditionele religie is niet ingebed in een bepaalde religieuze traditie, maar wordt gekenmerkt door de vermenging van elementen uit verschillende religieuze tradities met elkaar en met elementen uit fictie, wetenschap en andere culturele bronnen. Organisatorisch neemt het veld de vorm aan van een 'cultisch milieu' (een begrip van Colin Campbell). Als zodanig omvat het zowel formele posttraditionele organisaties (zoals de Theosophical Society) als posttraditionele individuele religie die losstaat van dergelijke organisaties (vaak aangeduid als 'spiritualiteit'). De individuen en kleine groepen die Tolkien-religie aanhangen, vormen een sub-milieu in het cultische milieu. Aan de ene kant vormt het 'spirituele Tolkien-milieu' een eigen milieu omdat de aanhangers ervan, met name in het internettijdperk, een min of meer samenhangend geheel vormen van deels overlappende netwerken waarbinnen ideeën worden uitgewisseld en waarbinnen individuen lid kunnen zijn van meerdere groepen. Aan de andere kant maakt het spirituele Tolkien-milieu deel uit van het cultische milieu omdat Tolkien-

religie is ontstaan door vermenging van elementen uit Tolkiens verhalen met bestaande rituelen en religieuze voorstellingen uit het bredere cultische milieu.

Hoofdstuk 2, "Fiction-based Religion", focust op de categorie *fiction-based religion*, een vorm van posttraditionele individuele religie. Ik ga in discussie met het werk van Adam Possamai, een pionier in de studie van nieuwe religies gebaseerd op populaire fictie. Hij is degene geweest die deze nieuwe vorm van posttraditionele religie heeft opgemerkt en als eerste heeft beschreven. Hij noemt deze vorm, onder verwijzing naar Jean Baudrillard, *hyper-real religion* (hyper-reële religie). Echter, voor Baudrillard zijn *alle* levende religies sociale constructen en daarom hyper-reëel. De term *hyper-real religion* van Possamai is daarom minder precies dan mijn begrip *fiction-based religion*. Op basis van een stroming binnen de fictietheorie die put uit *possible worlds*-logica definieer ik fictie als 'elk literair verhaal waarmee de auteur niet de intentie heeft om te verwijzen naar gebeurtenissen die hebben plaatsgevonden in de werkelijke wereld voordat ze werden beschreven'. *Fiction-based religion* staat dus tegenover religie waarbij de gezaghebbende verhalen *claimen* historisch of non-fictief te zijn in die zin dat ze verwijzen naar gebeurtenissen die *wel* hebben plaatsgevonden in de werkelijke wereld voordat ze werden beschreven, in een historisch of mythisch verleden. Vervolgens ontwikkel ik vanuit Possamais onderscheid tussen *hyper-real religions* met fictie als primaire dan wel secundaire bron van inspiratie een typologie van drie verschillende vormen van *fiction-based religion.* Ik maak onderscheid tussen *fiction-inspired religion* (waaronder de neopaganisten die zich in algemene zin laten inspireren door de werken van Tolkien), *fiction-integrating religion* (waaronder de Tribunal of the Sidhe en andere groepen die elementen van Tolkiens literaire mythologie integreren in een al bestaande religieuze traditie) en *fiction-based religion sensu stricto* (waaronder de puristische *Tolkien-based religion* waarvan Tolkiens werken het ware fundament vormen). Ten slotte laat ik zien dat hoewel Possamai het ontstaan van *hyper-real religions* plaatst in de jaren vijftig van de twintigste eeuw, het gebruik van Edward Bulwer-Lyttons romans door de Theosophical Society aan het einde van de negentiende eeuw al een vorm van *fiction-based religion* was.

In hoofdstuk 3, "The Religious Affordances of Fictional Narratives", zoek ik naar een middenweg tussen de claim dat (religieuze) verhalen een inherente betekenis hebben die kan worden gereconstrueerd door nauwkeurige interpretatie, en de tegenoverstelde bewering dat teksten zelf geen betekenis hebben en dat betekenis alleen ontstaat in het leesproces. Geïnspireerd door de Amerikaanse psycholoog James Gibson munt ik de term tekstuele *affordances* om de veelvoud aan interpretatiemogelijkheden aan te duiden die een tekst tegelijkertijd meer of minder sterk kan aanbieden. Sommige verhalen nodigen uit tot een religieuze lezing, dat wil zeggen een lezing waarbij in ieder geval sommige van de bovennatuurlijke wezens, werelden of processen in de tekst worden gezien als verwijzingen naar bovennatuurlijke wezens, werelden of processen in de werkelijke wereld. Dergelijke verhalen herbergen dan religieuze *affordances*. Ik maak onderscheid tussen vier typen religieuze *affordances*, waarvan de meeste religieuze teksten tenminste de eerste drie bevatten. Dit zijn ten eerste fantastische elementen (*fantastic elements*), die

in de narratieve wereld reëel zijn – hoewel vaak wel buitengewoon – maar bovennatuurlijk in de wereld van de lezer. De tweede *affordance* is het voorkomen van een narratieve religie (*narrative religion*), vooral als daarin sprake is van rituele interactie met bovennatuurlijke wezens. Ten derde zijn er tekstuele mechanismen die de waarachtigheid van de tekst tot thema maken en bevestigen (*veracity mechanisms*). Ten vierde zijn er religieuze verhalen die claimen van een goddelijke bron afkomstig te zijn (*divine source claim*). Veel fictieve verhalen bevatten naast (dominante) fictieve *affordances* ook (minder sterke) religieuze *affordances*. Deze verhalen stimuleren daarmee primair een lezing van de tekst als fictie, maar maken ook een religieuze lezing mogelijk.

Hoofdstuk 4, "Religious blending in Fiction-based Religion", gaat over religieuze vermenging (*religious blending*), een proces dat onder academici als zeer belangrijk wordt gezien voor hedendaagse religie maar waar de theorie opvallend weinig inzicht in biedt. Religieuze vermenging is bijzonder belangrijk voor de studie van *fiction-based religion*, want geen enkele *fiction-based religion* is uitsluitend gebaseerd op fictie. Zij putten altijd ook uit bestaande religieuze tradities. Deze tradities reiken typisch interpretatiestrategieën en blauwdrukken voor rituelen aan die worden gebruikt om van fictie religie te maken. De neopaganistische idee dat er magische werelden bestaan kan bijvoorbeeld worden toegepast op Tolkiens literaire mythologie om te claimen dat Midden-aarde een dergelijke magische wereld is. Neosjamanistische rituelen kunnen vervolgens worden gebruikt om op zielenreis te gaan naar Midden-aarde. Bij gebrek aan een standaardtheorie over religieuze vermenging ontwerp ik zelf een analytisch kader voor de bestudering van vermengingsprocessen op verschillende analytische niveaus. Ik maak een onderscheid tussen *bricolage*, het individueel in elkaar 'knutselen' van een eigen religieuze lappendeken, en *syncretisme*, de vervlechting van verschillende religieuze tradities. Op basis van eerdere wetenschappelijke inzichten over syncretisme ontwikkel ik meer verfijnde analytische begrippen en maak ik bijvoorbeeld onderscheid tussen vier vormen van syncretisme: *Mixture* staat voor ambigue en instabiele vermenging, *synthesis* resulteert in een nieuwe, stabiele traditie, *assimilation* is de usurpatie van een traditie door een andere, en *inward acculturation* vindt plaats als kleine tradities elementen overnemen van hun dominante culturele omgeving. Aangezien Tolkien-spiritualiteit fictionele en religieuze concepten met elkaar vermengt, zoals de Quendi van Tolkien met de *álfar* uit de Germaanse folklore, besteed ik bijzondere aandacht aan religieuze vermenging op conceptniveau. Ik maak onderscheid tussen twee vormen van conceptmetamorfose, namelijk resemantisering (het wijzigen van de betekenis van een concept) en conceptconstructie (de ontwikkeling van een nieuw concept op basis van een of meerdere bronconcepten). Ik laat zien hoe de *conceptual blending theory* van Gilles Fauconnier en Mark Turner kan worden gebruikt om de metamorfose van religieuze concepten te analyseren. Met behulp van *conceptual blending theory* kan een concept worden opgesplitst in betekeniselementen, en kan worden gekeken hoe de betekenis van die elementen verandert als gevolg van bijvoorbeeld projectie en compressie.

In hoofdstuk 5, "Dynamics of Belief in Religious Traditions", schets ik een semiotische benadering van de bestudering van religieuze geloofsvoorstellingen (*religious beliefs*). Ik gebruik het begrip 'religieuze geloofsvoorstelling' om te verwijzen naar iedere uitspraak waarin impliciet of expliciet het bestaan van bovennatuurlijke wezens, werelden of processen wordt verondersteld. Vanuit een semiotische benadering beschouw ik religieuze geloofsvoorstellingen als tekens. Religieuze geloofsvoorstellingen vormen een bepaald type tekens die niet alleen bepaald worden door hun inhoud, maar ook door het feit dat zij, ondanks dat zij objectief gezien nergens naar verwijzen, wel claimen dat zij naar gebeurtenissen en situaties in de werkelijke wereld verwijzen. Ik maak een fundamenteel onderscheid tussen elementaire religie (*elemental religion*) en gerationaliseerde religie (*rationalised religion*), twee componenten van religieuze tradities. Elementaire religie verwijst naar praktijken die het bestaan van bovennatuurlijke wezens, werelden of processen veronderstellen *in ronduit letterlijke zin*; de assumpties (of geloofsvoorstellingen van de eerste orde) die deze praktijken onderbouwen; en de ervaringen die door deze praktijken worden teweeggebracht. Elementaire religie vormt de basis, sterker nog de *sine qua non* van religieuze tradities. Deze kern kan vervolgens het object worden van een proces van religieuze rationalisering. Dit proces omvat de uitwerking van elementaire religie tot verklaringen en theorieën (gerationaliseerde religie, of geloofsvoorstellingen van de tweede orde). Een bijzonder belangrijk aspect van religieuze rationalisering is *ontologietaxatie* (*ontology assessment*), het reflectieve proces waarmee aan bestaande geloofsvoorstellingen een type en graad van referentie wordt toegeschreven. Ik maak een typologie van de belangrijkste ontologietaxaties, waaronder *bevestiging* (*affirmation*) waarbij wordt bekrachtigd dat de geloofsvoorstelling in kwestie verwijst in de letterlijke zin, en *transformatie* (*transformation*) waarbij er slechts een metaforische verwijzingsrelatie wordt verondersteld tussen de geloofsvoorstelling in kwestie en diens referent. Ik maak onderscheid tussen verschillende subtypen van transformatie. Als het gaat om de ontologietaxatie van teksten maak ik onderscheid tussen vier religieuze manieren waarop religieuze verhalen en *supernatural fiction* kunnen worden gelezen (de mythohistorische, mythokosmologische, mythopoietische en de verrekijkermodus), en twee niet-religieuze leeswijzen, (de euhemeristische en de fictionaliserende modus). In dit hoofdstuk analyseer ik naast de ontologietaxaties ook verschillende vormen van *epistemologische* reflecties op de plausibiliteit van geloofsvoorstellingen, die de vorm aannemen van rechtvaardigingen (*justifications*). Ik maak onderscheid tussen twee rechtvaardigingsstrategieën, namelijk *legitimering* waarbij wordt verwezen naar subjectieve ervaringen, gezaghebbende bronnen etc. om het objectieve bestaan van de referenten van de geloofsvoorstellingen te bewijzen, en *relativering* waarbij voorstellingen worden verdedigd door ze te de-objectiveren als subjectieve waarheden of als uitdrukkingen van een niet-rationele denkwijze.

Deel II: Het Spirituele Milieu Gebaseerd op J.R.R. Tolkiens Literaire Mythologie

Het tweede deel van het proefschrift, *The Spiritual Milieu Based on J.R.R. Tolkien's Literary Mythology,* opent met hoofdstuk 6, getiteld "Method: Data Collection and Analytical Strategy". In dit hoofdstuk beschrijf ik hoe ik mijn data verzameld heb (voornamelijk met de sneeuwbalmethode) en geef ik een overzicht van de verzamelde gegevens. Mijn analyses zijn gebaseerd op zestien interviews en omvangrijke e-mailcorrespondentie met leden van religieuze Tolkien-groepen, de homepages van tientallen groepen en individuen, gepubliceerde teksten van aanhangers van Tolkien-religie, handleidingen voor de uitvoering van rituelen en geluidsopnames van Skype-rituelen.

In hoofdstuk 7 tot en met 16 analyseer ik de religieuze *affordances* van Tolkiens literaire mythologie en voer ik een aantal casestudies uit van groepen binnen het spirituele Tolkien-milieu. Gezamenlijk bieden deze tien hoofdstukken een *thick description* van het spirituele Tolkien-milieu. Hoofdstuk 7 heet "The Religious Affordances of *The Lord of the Rings*". In dit hoofdstuk laat ik zien dat *The Lord of the Rings* ontelbare fantastische elementen bevat (zoals bovennatuurlijke wezens, betoverde werelden, magie en visioenen) en een beperkt aantal aspecten van een narratieve religie (zoals goddelijke machten en rituelen gericht op deze machten; moraal, kosmologie en eschatologie). Het bevat ook een kadernarratief dat het hoofdverhaal presenteert als 'geveinsde geschiedenis' en daardoor de waarachtigheid ervan thematiseert. Hoewel dit alles door Tolkien was bedoeld om met een korreltje zout te worden genomen, bevat *The Lord of the Rings* dus wel degelijk tekstuele en paratekstuele elementen die een niet-fictionele lezing van de tekst mogelijk maken.

The Lord of the Rings werd gepubliceerd in 1954-55, maar was geen bestseller totdat er in 1965 een paperback van verscheen. Dit komt aan de orde in hoofdstuk 8, "An Unexpected Success: Hippies, Neo-Pagans and *The Lord of the Rings*". Ik laat zien hoe hippies het hobbit-leven omarmden, en hoe neopaganisten gefascineerd raakten door Tolkiens betoverde wereld en in *The Lord of the Rings* metaforische verwijzingen zagen naar metafysische werkelijkheden. Zo zagen neopaganisten Lothlórien weliswaar als een fictieve plaats, sommigen van hen zagen (en zien) het bosrijk van de elfen wel als een metaforische verwijzing naar echte betoverde plaatsen die daarop lijkt. Sommige lezers dachten door *The Lord of the Rings* voor het eerst na over het mogelijke bestaan van andere werelden en magie, en dat bleek soms de eerste stap op weg naar een bekering tot het neopaganisme.

Hoofdstuk 9, "The Religious Affordances of *The Silmarillion*", onderzoekt de religieuze *affordances* die werden toegevoegd aan Tolkiens literaire mythologie met de publicatie van *The Silmarillion* in 1977. Dit boek voegt met name een uitwerking van de narratieve religie toe ten opzichte van *The Lord of the Rings*. Een groot deel van *The Silmarillion* bestaat in wezen uit een discussie van de kosmogonie, theologie, kosmologie en eschatologie volgens de overlevering van de Quendi. Dit nieuwe materiaal maakt het mogelijk om Tolkiens werken te beschouwen als een mythologie in zichzelf, en het elfenperspec-

tief in *The Silmarillion* nodigt de lezers en de boefenaren van Tolkien-religie uit om zichzelf te identificeren met de elfen (in plaats van met de hobbits of mensen).

In hoofdstuk 10 tot en met 12 worden drie voorbeelden van Tolkien-spiritualiteit onderzocht waarin de zelfidentificatie als elf centraal staat. Hoofdstuk 10, "The Tribunal of the Sidhe: A Case Study of Religious Blending" onderzoekt het Tribunal of the Sidhe, een neopaganistische groep die in 1984 werd gesticht aan de Amerikaanse westkust en die op dit moment waarschijnlijk de grootste *Tolkien-integrating religion* is. Leden van de Tribunal zeggen wisselkinderen (*Changelings*) te zijn. Daarmee bedoelen ze dat ze elfen (of andere wezens) zijn die thuishoren in een andere wereld, maar in dit leven geïncarneerd zijn in een menselijk lichaam. Zij stellen ook dat Tolkien zelf een *Changeling* was en dat *The Lord of the Rings* en *The Silmarillion* in mythische vorm de geschiedenis beschrijven van de *Changelings*. Ik bespreek de zelfidentificatie als *Changelings* als een voorbeeld van religieuze vermenging, door te analyseren hoe de leden elementen van Tolkiens literaire mythologie combineren met verschillende vormen van feeënspiritualiteit en met hun eigen openbaringen om zo het idee dat zij *Changelings* zijn te construeren en rationaliseren.

Hoofdstuk 11 is getiteld "The Elven Movement: A Case Study of Construction and Maintenance of Plausibility". In dit hoofdstuk ga ik na welke semiotische strategieën voor plausibiliteitsconstructie (rationalisering, legitimering en relativering) de elfen gebruiken, vaak meerdere tegelijk, om hun claim dat zij elfen zijn uit te werken en te rechtvaardigen. Bijzondere aandacht gaat uit naar hoe de elfen een balans zoeken tussen fabelachtigheid (*fabulousness*) en plausibiliteit. De 'ontwaakte elfen' identificeren zich graag met de fabuleuze elfen uit de legendes en fantasy-literatuur omdat deze wezens (bijna) onsterfelijke tovenaars zijn, maar aangezien de zelfgeïdentificeerde elfen mensen zijn kunnen zij niet plausibel claimen dat zij dezelfde capaciteiten bezitten als hun narratieve rolmodellen. De balans tussen fabelachtigheid en plausibiliteit wordt dan bijvoorbeeld gevonden door zelfgeïdentificeerde elfen die beweren eerdere fabelachtige levens te hebben geleid (op andere planeten of op Atlantis), maar die ook zeggen dat hun elfenkrachten in dit leven sterk getemperd zijn doordat hun zielen gevangen zitten in zwakke menselijke lichamen. Ik analyseer ook het proces van 'bekering' of *interpretive drift* dat nieuwe leden doormaken, waarbij hun fascinatie voor elfen zich ontwikkelt tot het geloof en de openlijke claim dat zij daadwerkelijk elfen zijn. Ten slotte bekijk ik hoe fictie, onlinegemeenschappen en het cultische milieu fungeren als plausibiliteitsstructuren voor de elfengemeenschap, en breng ik de plausibiliteitsbedreigingen waar de gemeenschap mee wordt geconfronteerd in kaart.

Naast de Elfenbeweging houdt een aantal alternatieve historici zich bezig met de constructie van het elfenras als een superieur ras. Twee van deze historici, Laurence Gardner en Nicholas de Vere, worden besproken in hoofdstuk 12, "Esoteric Historians on the 'Truth' Behind Tolkien's Elves". Hoe wonderlijk het ook mag klinken, met behulp van Tolkiens literaire mythologie legitimeren zij hun samenzweringstheorieën waarin Christus en Karel de Grote deel uitmaken van een koninklijke elfenstamboom. Zij inte-

greren niet direct elementen uit Tolkiens verhalen in hun religieuze overtuigingen en praktijken, maar gaan wel op zoek naar overeenkomsten tussen de teksten van Tolkien en esoterische bloedlijntheorieën. Ze gebruiken vervolgens deze overeenkomsten om te suggereren dat Tolkien geheime kennis bezat waar hij op zinspeelde in zijn boeken. Op die manier construeren Gardner en de Vere Tolkien als mede-esotericus en proberen zij iets van zijn prestige als mytholoog en filoloog te doen afstralen op hun eigen speculaties.

Hoofdstuk 13, "Summoning the Valar, Divining with Elves: Tolkien and Western Magic", is gewijd aan twee casussen waarbij Tolkiens literaire mythologie wordt geïntegreerd in de westerse magische traditie. Als eerste analyseer ik een interessant voorbeeld van ritueelvermenging, namelijk de *High Elvish Working*, gemaakt in 1993 door de Fifth Way Mystery School. De structuur van het ritueel is ontleend aan het zogenaamde 'Supreme Invoking Ritual of the Pentagram' van The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. De inhoud van het ritueel, waaronder het oproepen van de Valar en het uitspreken van enkele zinnen in Elfentaal komt uit Tolkiens literaire mythologie. De *High Elvish Working* is interessant omdat het een van de meest complexe Tolkien-rituelen is die in het milieu bestaan en omdat het een belangrijke bron van inspiratie is geweest voor de rituelen van latere groepen. De tweede casus is Terry Donaldsons *Lord of the Rings* tarotset, die gepubliceerd werd in 1997. (In 2005 verscheen een Nederlandse vertaling). Met name het daarbij gevoegde boek is interessant, omdat Donaldson daarin Tolkiens mythologie verbindt aan het gedetailleerde systeem van correspondenties opgesteld door leden van de Golden Dawn. Daarnaast geeft hij richtlijnen voor visualisatierituelen gebaseerd op de illustraties op de kaarten en introduceert hij tarotleggingen geïnspireerd door Tolkien. Voor de meeste van de *Tolkien-integrating* groepen en individuen die worden besproken in hoofdstuk 10 tot en met 13 geldt dat zij moeite hebben om voor zichzelf uit te maken of Tolkiens literaire mythologie weliswaar spiritueel gevorderd en religieus verlichtend maar uiteindelijk toch louter fictie is, of dat het een echte mythologie is – maar dan wel een ondergeschikte of afgeleide variant daarvan.

De hoofdstukken 14, 15 en 16 gaan over de Tolkien-spiritualiteit die op het internet ontstond in de 21e eeuw. Hoofdstuk 14, "Peter Jackson's Movies and Middle-earth Paganism" analyseert de religieuze *affordances* van de verfilming van *The Lord of the Rings* (2001-2003) en onderzoekt een aantal onlinegroepen die hun Tolkien-inspiratie voornamelijk uit deze films halen (of haalden). In tegenstelling tot het boek hebben de films van Jackson geen kadernarratief waarin de narratieve wereld wordt verankerd in de wereld van de lezer, en bevatten ze geen narratieve religie. Niettemin hebben groepen van zelfgeïdentificeerde Midden-aardepaganisten rituelen ontwikkeld die zijn gericht aan de belangrijkste personages uit de films. Niet alleen de bovenmenselijke personages, zoals Gandalf en Galadriel, worden aangeroepen in deze rituelen, maar ook mensen en hobbits, zoals Aragorn, Éowyn en Frodo. Midden-aardepaganisten geloven dat deze personages bestaan in een niet-materiële dimensie, of dat ze verschijningsvormen zijn van de god en godin uit Wicca. Veel neopaganisten hebben geëxperimenteerd met ritue-

len gebaseerd op de films, maar de institutionalisering van het Midden-aardepaganisme is niet succesvol geweest. De meeste Midden-aardepaganisten verloren snel de interesse voor Tolkien-rituelen, waarna een deel van hen verder ging met het vermengen van neopaganisme met ideeën uit andere films en TV-series. Een aantal identificeert zichzelf nu bijvoorbeeld als vampiers.

Hoofdstuk 15, "The Religious Affordances of *The History of Middle-earth and of Tolkien's Letters and Essays*", gaat over de religieuze *affordances* van het uitgestrekte corpus van teksten over Midden-aarde buiten de drie bekende boeken *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings*, en *The Silmarillion*. In termen van religieuze *affordances* zijn de twaalf delen van *The History of Middle-earth* interessant om drie redenen. Ten eerste bevatten ze de eerste versies van de verhalen die zich zouden ontwikkelen tot *The Silmarillion*, versies waarvan aanhangers van Tolkien-religie beweren dat ze het dichtst bij Tolkiens oorspronkelijke openbaringen liggen. Ten tweede bevat *The History of Middle-earth* veel en gedetailleerde informatie over de Valar die kan worden gebruikt bij het maken van rituelen gericht aan deze wezens. Ten slotte bevat *The History of Middle-earth* twee onafgeronde 'tijdreisverhalen' die zeer autobiografisch van karakter zijn en die suggereren dat Tolkien geloofde dat je in trance gebeurtenissen kon herbeleven die je voorouders hadden meegemaakt. Dit thema komt ook terug in zijn brieven waar hij beschrijft hoe hijzelf en zijn zoon Michael dezelfde herhaalde enge droom hebben over een enorme groene golf. Tolkien dacht dat hij misschien met deze droom de ondergang van Atlantis herbeleefde zoals die door een voorvader van hem was beleefd. De brieven van Tolkien schrijven ook andere religieuze *affordances* toe aan zijn verhalen, aangezien Tolkien vaak speculeert over de relatie tussen de geschiedenis in zijn verhalen en de geschiedenis van de werkelijke wereld. Hij brengt ook zijn gevoelens van inspiratie onder woorden en stelt daarbij herhaaldelijk dat hij zijn verhalen niet verzon, maar dat hij veeleer optekende ("*recorded*") of verslag legde over ("*reported*") wat er al was.

Hoofdstuk 16, "Legendarium Reconstructionism: A Case Study of Tolkien-based Religion", onderzoekt twee nauw met elkaar samenwerkende groepen, Tië eldaliéva (Het Elfenpad) en Ilsaluntë Valion (Het Zilverschip van de Valar). Net als het Midden-aardepaganisme zijn Tië eldaliéva en Ilsaluntë Valion opgekomen op het internet nadat de films uit waren gekomen, maar deze twee groepen putten vooral uit *The Silmarillion* en *The History of Middle-earth*. Ze zijn interessant omdat ze het verst gaan in het opbouwen van een op Tolkien gebaseerde spirituele traditie. Zo hebben de leden van Tië eldaliéva bijvoorbeeld een complete lunisolaire kalender gemaakt op basis van Tolkiens verhalen aangevuld met hun eigen creaties en openbaringen. Puttend uit rituelen van ceremoniële magie en Wicca hebben zij uitvoerig uitgewerkte rituelen ontwikkeld voor iedere maanstand en ieder van de zes zonnefeesten. Aangezien fysieke samenkomst onmogelijk is voor de groep, werden rituelen uitgevoerd over de telefoon of op Skype. Ilsaluntë Valion, dat zich in 2007 afsplitste van Tië eldaliéva, heeft de ritueelkalender nog verder verfijnd en de rituelen gaandeweg gezuiverd van elementen afkomstig uit het neopaganisme. In aanvulling op de collectieve rituelen, heeft Ilsaluntë Valion daarnaast een vrijere

en meer individuele rituele benadering ontwikkeld. In hun eigen woorden doen de leden van de groep gnostisch onderzoek waarbij ze de verhalen van Tolkien gebruiken als transportmiddel naar de Imaginale Wereld (*Imaginal Realm*) of Elfenland (*Faery*). Op basis van een uitgebreide virtuele etnografie wordt in dit hoofdstuk de geschiedenis van Tië eldaliéva en Ilsaluntë Valion geschetst, de praktijken van religieuze vermenging in de groepen geanalyseerd en besproken hoe de leden hun rituele praktijken inbedden in een geraffineerd wereldbeeld en een religieuze filosofie.

Conclusies

In de conclusie vat ik de empirische onderzoeksbevindingen en theoretische implicaties daarvan samen in zestien theses over Tolkien-religie, *fiction-based religion* en religie in het algemeen. Deze theses zijn niet identiek aan de veertien stellingen die bij het proefschrift zijn gevoegd. Ik bespreek hier niet alle zestien theses, maar volsta met een aantal hoofdconclusies die samenhangen met de kernbegrippen religieuze *affordances*, religieuze vermenging en de dynamiek van geloof in religieuze tradities.

Ik stel dat de bruikbaarheid van verhalen als gezaghebbende religieuze teksten afhankelijk is van het soort en de hoeveelheid religieuze *affordances* die ze bevatten. Dit betekent twee dingen. Ten eerste kunnen alleen teksten die ten minste *sommige* religieuze *affordances* bevatten überhaupt gezaghebbende religieuze teksten worden. Het spirituele Tolkien-milieu kon alleen opkomen doordat Tolkiens Midden-aardeverhalen een zekere hoeveelheid religieuze *affordances* bevatten. Ten tweede is het mogelijk om op basis van het repertoire van religieuze *affordances* van een verhaal te voorspellen hoe een religie gebaseerd op dat verhaal eruit zal zien. Binnen het spirituele Tolkien-milieu is te zien dat de verschillende religieuze tradities gebaseerd op *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Silmarillion* of Jackson's films de verschillen in religieuze *affordances* van deze teksten weerspiegelen. We zien dat groepen in het spirituele Tolkien-milieu a) zich identificeren met (het ras van) de verteller van hun belangrijkste gezaghebbende Tolkien-tekst; b) hun rituelen richten aan die wezens die vanuit het perspectief van de verteller de goddelijke of ten minste buitengewone 'anderen' zijn; en c) Tolkiens literaire mythologie lezen op een manier die reflecteert hoe hun belangrijkste gezaghebbende tekst zijn eigen waarachtigheid thematiseert. Groepen die zijn gebaseerd op *The Lord of the Rings* bijvoorbeeld zien zichzelf als mensen of hobbits, zij vereren de elfen en zien een connectie tussen Tolkiens wereld en de prehistorie van de werkelijke wereld. Groepen die gebaseerd zijn op *The Silmarillion* zien zichzelf als elfen, vereren de Valar en zien Midden-aarde als een spirituele wereld in een andere dimensie.

Een vergelijking van de verschillende vormen van Tolkien-religie laat verder zien welke religieuze *affordances* noodzakelijk zijn voor het ontstaan van religie, en welke facultatief zijn. Het bestaan van Midden-aardepaganisme gebaseerd op de films bewijst dat religieuze praktijken kunnen ontstaan op basis van een verhaal dat alleen fantastische elementen bevat maar geen narratieve religie, en dat bovendien zijn eigen waarach-

tigheid niet thematiseert. Het is echter veelzeggend dat het Midden-aardepaganisme nooit een succesvolle beweging werd maar meteen weer instortte, terwijl Tolkien-tradities die gebaseerd zijn op meer substantiële verhalen zich handhaven. Alleen de groepen die zich baseren op *The Silmarillion* of *The History of Middle-earth* hebben zich ontwikkeld tot stabiele gemeenschappen met een volgroeide religieuze traditie. Die twee teksten bevatten als enige een uitgewerkte narratieve religie – *The Lord of the Rings* bevat wel elementen van narratieve religie, maar deze zijn beperkt en komen alleen voor in de appendices en in sporadische hints die alleen te begrijpen zijn in het licht van *The Silmarillion*. Dit betekent dat alleen teksten die een narratieve religie bevatten kunnen fungeren als ankerpunt van een stabiele *fiction-based religion*. Voor het spirituele Tolkien-milieu lijkt het thematiseren van de waarachtigheid van de tekst geen noodzakelijke *affordance* (*The History of Middle-earth* doet dat wel, *The Silmarillion* niet).

Alle groepen in het spirituele Tolkien-milieu doen aan religieuze vermenging, en zij doen dit volgens een vast patroon. Daar waar de belangrijkste gezaghebbende Tolkien-tekst religieuze *affordances* ontbeert, ontlenen aanhangers van Tolkien-religie de benodigde ingrediënten aan andere religies. Zij nemen rationaliseringsstrategieën en structuren voor rituelen over uit gevestigde religieuze tradities. Vanzelfsprekend gebruiken zij daarvoor tradities waar zij bekend mee zijn. Velen hebben een achtergrond in het neopaganisme en maken rituelen gericht aan de elfen en Valar die geïnspireerd zijn op het trekken van een magische cirkel uit de Wicca-traditie. Andere tradities waaruit wordt geput omvatten de westerse traditie van ceremoniële magie, de theosofie en het Christendom.

Alle Tolkien-groepen doen aan vermenging, maar hun normatieve standpunten ten aanzien hiervan verschillen aanzienlijk. Sommige groepen staan hier niet bewust bij stil, terwijl anderen uitdrukking geven aan een 'anti-syncretisch' ideaal van Tolkien-purisme. In het laatste geval is er dus een opvallende discrepantie tussen wat de aanhangers doen (mengen) en wat ze beweren te doen (niet mengen). Dit heeft vergaande implicaties voor de religiewetenschap in het algemeen. Het toont aan dat de studie van beredeneerde opvattingen over syncretisme ons weinig kan vertellen over de daadwerkelijke processen van religieuze vermenging. Dit leidt tot de conclusie dat de studie van religieuze praktijken (wat mensen doen) prioriteit moet krijgen boven de studie van religieuze 'zelfrapportages' (wat mensen beweren te doen).

Tolkien-religie ontwikkelt zich gewoonlijk in drie stappen. Het begint met praktiserende paganisten of magiërs die fan zijn van Tolkiens werk. De eerste stap is dat zij experimentele, speelse rituelen ontwerpen geïnspireerd door Tolkiens werk en/of dat zij zichzelf op speelse wijze identificeren als elfen in rituelen of rollenspelen. De meesten onder hen komen nooit verder dan dit punt, maar bij sommigen verandert het spel geleidelijk aan in geloof. De tweede stap is derhalve het ontwikkelen van wat ik noem 'elementaire Tolkien-religie', dat wil zeggen oprechte rituele interactie met (of zelfidentificatie als) bovennatuurlijke wezens uit Tolkiens verhalen en het impliciete geloof dat deze wezens echt zijn. De derde en laatste stap is het ontstaan van gerationaliseerde

Tolkien-religie in de vorm van ontologietaxaties, uitgewerkte geloofsvoorstellingen en rechtvaardigingen. Zo stellen sommige beoefenaars van Tolkien-religie dat rituele communicatie met de Valar mogelijk is omdat de Valar niet louter fictionele entiteiten zijn, maar echt bestaan (bevestigende ontologietaxatie) en dat het mogelijk is de Valar te bezoeken in de astrale wereld en toegang te krijgen tot hun spirituele kennis (uitwerking van geloofsvoorstellingen). Een kleiner aantal legt de Valar-visioenen uit als contact met Jungiaanse archetypen. De meeste beoefenaars rechtvaardigen hun Tolkien-geloof door te verwijzen naar hun subjectieve ervaringen.

Alle Tolkien-tradities, zowel de elfenbeweging als de groepen die focussen op rituele communicatie met de wezens uit Tolkiens wereld, hebben een uivormig systeem van geloofsvoorstellingen (*belief system*). De kern van het systeem wordt gevormd door een klein aantal kernovertuigingen die zeer stabiel zijn. Dit zijn de overtuigingen die impliciet of expliciet tot uitdrukking komen in elementaire religieuze praktijken. In de elfenbeweging is de meest fundamentele geloofsvoorstelling de overtuiging 'wij zijn elfen'. De kernvoorstelling in Tolkien-religie is 'Tolkiens literaire mythologie verwijst naar echte bovennatuurlijke wezens, namelijk de Valar, de Maiar en de Quendi, en deze wezens bestaan in een wereld die niet de onze is, maar die wel toegankelijk is in rituelen.' Rondom deze stabiele kernvoorstellingen zit een schil van rationaliseringen en rechtvaardigingen die samen de gerationaliseerde Tolkien-religie vormen. In vergelijking met de kernovertuigingen zijn deze rationaliseringen en rechtvaardigingen opmerkelijk flexibel en instabiel. Het komt zeer veel voor dat individuen van gedachten veranderen over die rationaliseringen en rechtvaardigingen terwijl de kern van hun geloofsvoorstellingen, hun elementaire praktijken en hun religieuze identiteit hetzelfde blijven. Het komt ook vaak voor dat individuen meerdere, in theorie met elkaar tegenstrijdige, rationaliseringen en rechtvaardigingen hanteren en afhankelijk van de context er daar één van activeren. Zo komt het vaak voor dat aanhangers van Tolkien-religie het ene moment hun subjectieve ervaringen zien als bewijs voor het objectieve bestaan van de Valar, en het volgende moment terugvallen op de claim dat de Valar bestaan *voor hen* en dat het irrelevant is of zij ook daadwerkelijk bestaan. Ten slotte is het relatief onproblematisch voor een groep als leden verschillende rationaliseringen en rechtvaardigingen hanteren, zolang zij maar dezelfde kernvoorstellingen en elementaire praktijken delen. Hieruit blijkt dat de functie van gerationaliseerde Tolkien-religie niet ligt in het bieden van een doctrine die elementaire religieuze praktijken moet overtroeven, maar in het bieden van een repertoire aan ideeën en verhalen die tezamen betekenis en plausibiliteit verlenen aan die elementaire religieuze kern.

De hier geschetste relatie tussen elementaire en gerationaliseerde religie is niet bijzonder voor Tolkien-religie of zelfs voor *fiction-based religion*, maar betreft een kenmerk van religieuze tradities als zodanig. Alle religieuze tradities zijn semiotische systemen die bestaan uit een kern van elementaire religie en een superstructuur van gerationaliseerde religie. Alle religieuze tradities kennen ook dezelfde dynamiek van geloof met ontologietaxaties, uitwerkingen van geloofsvoorstellingen, rechtvaardigingen en religi-

euze vermenging. De structuur en dynamiek van religieuze tradities kan worden bestudeerd met dit conceptuele model.

Het spirituele Tolkien-milieu is heel klein, maar *fiction-inspired religion* komt tamelijk veel voor, zeker als daarbij naast de leden van georganiseerde *fiction-based religions* ook de vele religieuze *bricoleurs* worden meegeteld die inspiratie vinden in boeken als *The Da Vinci Code* van Dan Brown en in films als *Avatar* van James Cameron. Martin Ramstedt stelt dat het toenemende religieuze gebruik van fictie een algemene ontwikkeling in hedendaagse religie weerspiegelt, namelijk een *metaphorical turn* van letterlijk naar metaforisch geloof en van ritueel naar spel. Tegen deze achtergrond is het interessant om te zien dat aanhangers van Tolkien-religie verrassend letterlijk geloven en benadrukken dat hun geloof categorisch verschilt van het spel van fans. Doorgaans lezen zij Tolkiens verhalen op mytho-kosmologische wijze: de verhalen zijn volgens hen verzonnen, maar gaan wel over bestaande bovennatuurlijke entiteiten. Zij stellen dus dat de Valar en de elfen echte spirituele wezens zijn die in contact kunnen treden met mensen op aarde, maar wier thuis zich bevindt in een spirituele dimensie, ver in de kosmische ruimte of in een andere tijd. Zij lezen de verhalen zelden als geschiedenis, maar hebben doorgaans wel historische ideeën over Atlantis en de vreedzame co-existentie van elfen en mensen in het verleden. Kortom, de neergang van institutionele religie in het westen staat een toenemend religieus gebruik van fictie toe, maar als Tolkien-religie exemplarisch is voor deze ontwikkeling geeft de opkomst van *fiction-based religion* geen steun aan de these dat een *metaphorical turn* zich voordoet in hedendaagse religie.

Curriculum Vitae

Markus Altena Davidsen was born 15 February 1981 in Aarhus, Denmark. He attended primary school at Svindinge Skole (1987-1993) and Mårslet Skole (1993-1997) and high school at Amtsgymnasiet i Odder (1997-2000) where he specialised in music and natural science. At Aarhus University, Davidsen obtained a BA in the Study of Religion and Supplementary Subject in Cognitive Psychology and Neuropsychology (2006) and an MA in the Study of Religion (2008). He spent the summer semester of 2007 at Karl-Ruprechts-Universität zu Heidelberg as an exchange student under the Erasmus programme and was awarded the Arenberg-Coimbra Group Prize for Erasmus Students in 2009 for demonstrating the added value of the exchange for his MA thesis. During his university studies, Davidsen worked as a deputy student counsellor (2005-2007) and as a tutor for the courses History of Religion, Introduction to the Study of Religion, Studium Generale (Philosophy of Science), and Religion and Modern Media (2005-2008). He was awarded a scholarship as an International PhD candidate by the Danish Council for Independent Research (Humanities), and in 2009 he began working on the project (originally entitled "Fictional Religions: The Morphology and Reception of Invented Religions embedded in Works of Fiction"), being an employee of Aarhus University, but situated and supervised at Universiteit Leiden. Since 2011, he has been employed by Universiteit Leiden also as a teaching associate, teaching BA and MA courses on sociology of religion and new religious movements/new age, and supervising BA and MA theses in these fields. He has been a board member of the Dutch Association for the Study of Religion (Nederlands Genootschap voor Godsdienstwetenschap) since 2009 and is currently (since 2012) the secretary of the association.