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Davidsen, M.A.

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Author: Davidsen, Markus Altena

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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.

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 it is 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

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 from 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 discomfiting 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*

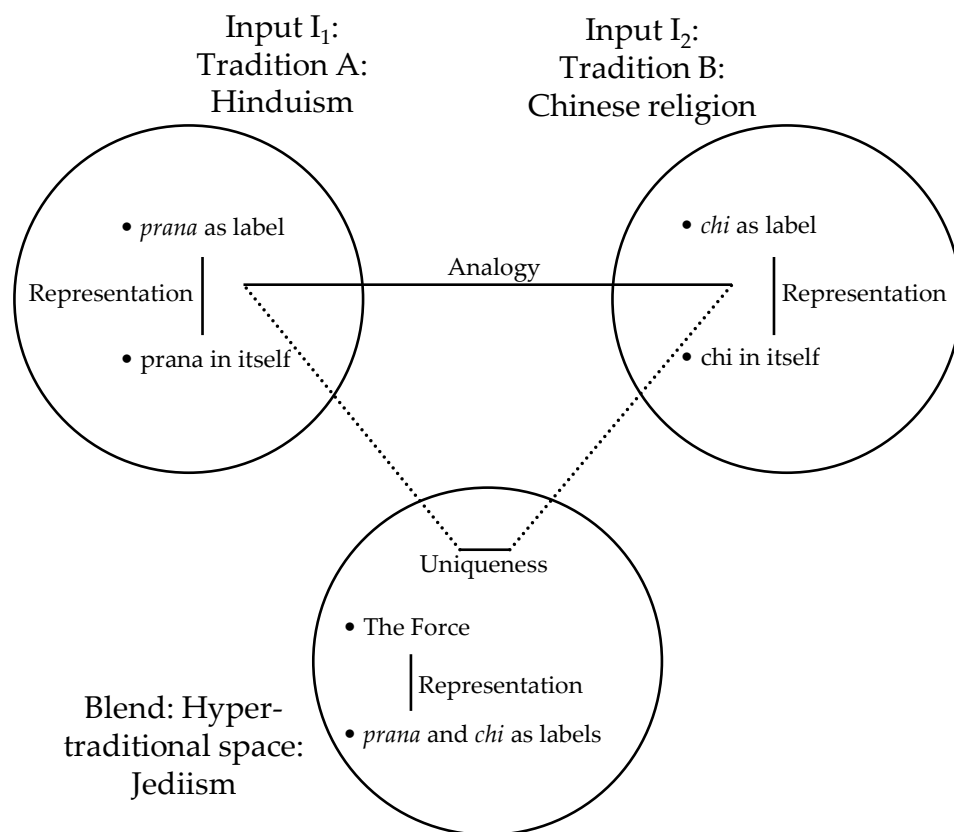
¹⁴⁷ Fauconnier and Turner use the term category metamorphosis, but I prefer to speak more broadly of concept metamorphosis, since CBT can be used to analyse the metamorphosis of concepts (such as 'God') which are not categories.

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

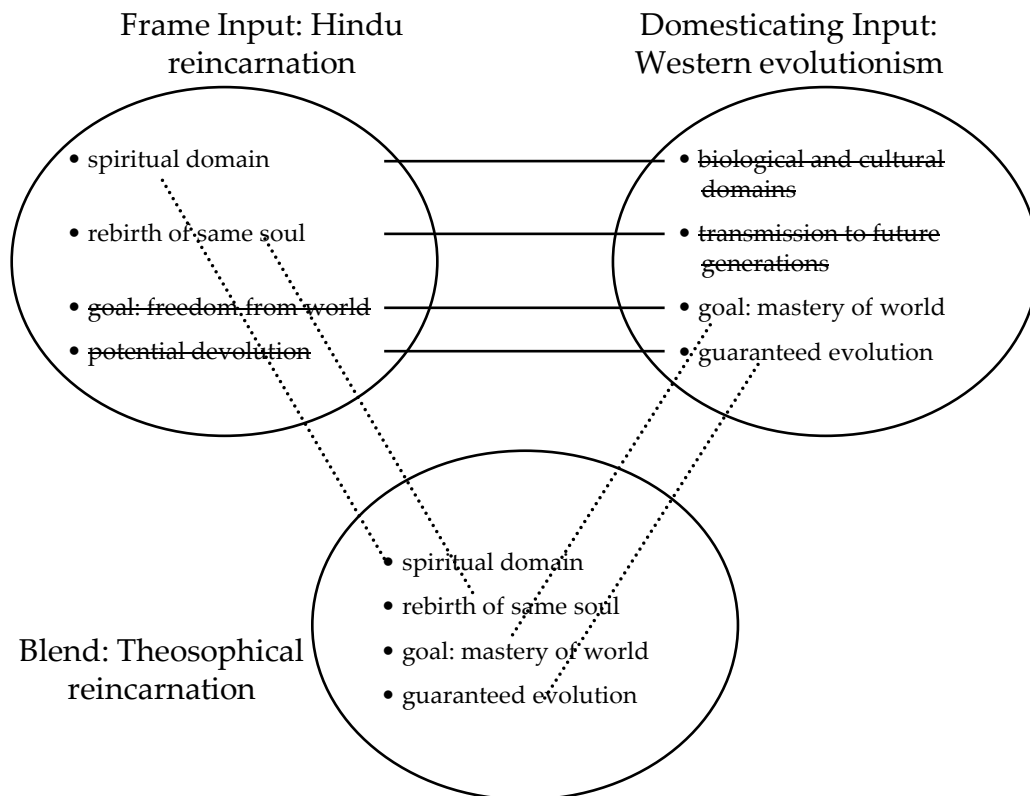


Prana and chi belong to two different input spaces which each include two elements, an object (prana/chi in itself) and a label (*prana/chi*). The two object/label-pairs are connected with each other through an inner-space Vital Relation of Representation. The two spaces are connected to each other through 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 resemantised) 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-semanticisation, 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 theological 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

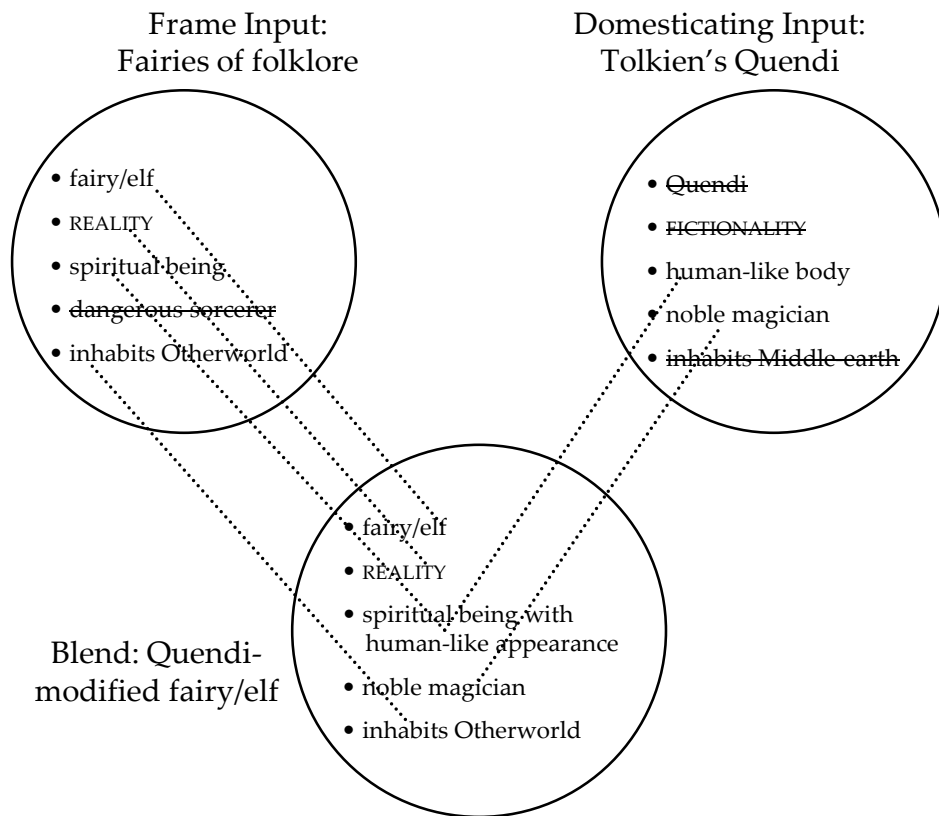
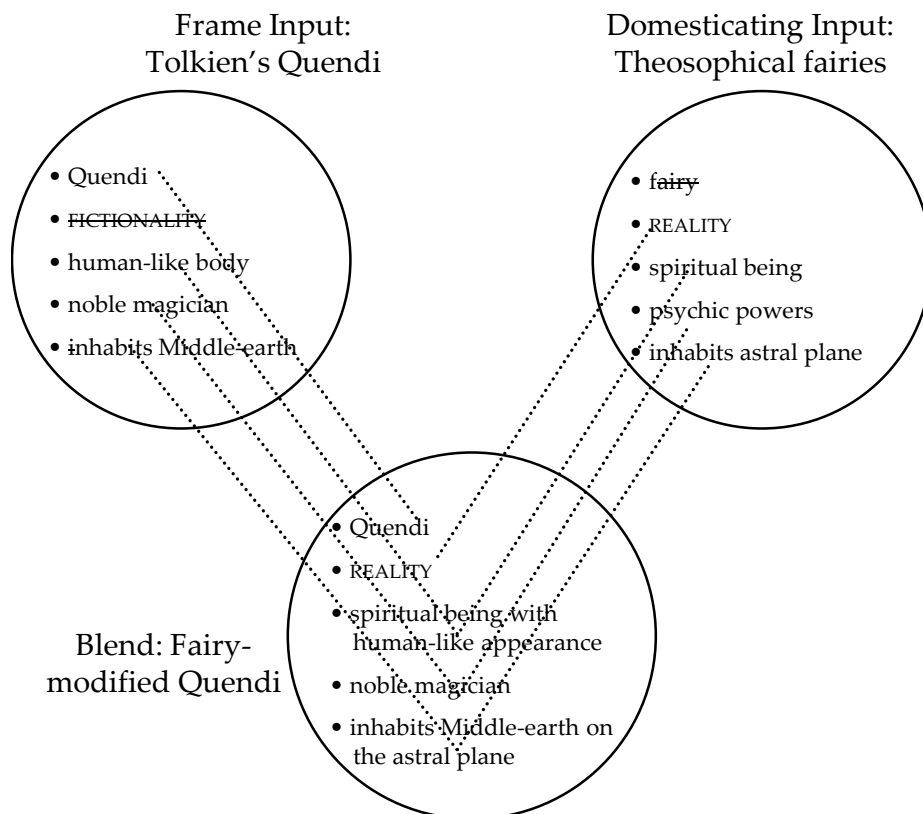


Figure 4.4. Fairy-modified Quendi



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.