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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 from 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 extraordinarily 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

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

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 prophesied 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:

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 *Völuspá*),

and the motif that deep below monsters gnaw at the roots of the world (cf. the dragon Niðhoggr) (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 Númenor¹⁹⁴, 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, except 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. *Völuspá* 59) of a new earth rising from the sea after Ragnarøk.

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

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), Hrivë (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

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 ($IS \neq AS$; $TAW \neq AW$; $TRW \neq AW$). 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 <i>LR</i>				
Book part	Type and aim of communication	Addressor	Addressee	World of communication
<i>Paratext</i>				
Book cover, colophon, notes	Allographic preface	Publisher	Reader	Actual world
	Marketing, explanation of publication history			
Foreword	Authorial preface Guiding reading and interpretation of the narrative discourse	Author (J.R.R. Tolkien)	Reader	Actual world
<i>Narrative Discourse</i>				
Prologue, appendices	Narratorial prefaces Frame narrative constructing the world of the narrate as the prehistory of the world of the narrator/narratee	Narrator (compiler) <i>Enunciative narration</i> Human point of view	Narratee	Textual reference world Narrator's and narratee's present
Main narrative	Narrate (story)	Narrator <i>Utterative narration</i> 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 other-worlds; 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.