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

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Chapter 9. The Religious Affordances of *The Silmarillion*

The many allusions to mythology and history in *H* and *LR* and the complexity of the material presented in the appendices to *LR* made clear that Tolkien had only revealed a small portion of an elaborate body of myth and legend. Indeed, already in the 1910s and 1920s, Tolkien had invented his Elven languages, Quenya and Sindarin, and written the first versions of a set of narratives forming the mythic background for his Middle-earth saga. He referred to these stories as his Legendarium. After finishing *LR*, he returned to the Legendarium with the hope of publishing it, but it was left unfinished at his death in 1973. It would have stayed in the drawer if not Tolkien's son Christopher had felt that Tolkien deserved better. Earning the gratitude of his father's fans, Christopher took it upon himself to edit his Tolkien's drafts and published a collection of the latest versions of the most important tales in 1977 as *The Silmarillion* (*S*).[239] The archaic style and huge gallery of characters made *S* a much tougher read than *LR*, but that did not restrain it from being #1 on The New York Times Best Seller List for 23 weeks during the winter 1977-1978.[240]

Against Tolkien's intentions and to Christopher's later regret (*LT I* 1, 6), *S* was published entirely without frame narrative. There is no compiler voice, and the text (which is only about a fourth of *LR* in length) is presented as the utterative narration of an all-knowing narrator. Also in contrast to *LR*, whose narrator is human and contemporaneous with the reader, *S* is told from a clearly Elven point of view at a time shortly after the events of *LR*. It recounts the entire history of Tolkien's imagined world in five parts. The first part, the *Ainulindalë* or *The Music of the Ainur*, tells of the creation of the world (cosmogony), and the second part, the *Valaquenta* or *Account of the Valar and Maiar according to the lore of the Eldar*, provides information about the Valar (theology). The bulk of the text, the *Quenta Silmarillion* or *The History of the Silmarils*, is concerned mostly with the Elves. It recounts the awakening of the Elves,[241] and tells of their migrations and their wars, especially the wars caused by the three Silmarils, the jewels after which the book is named. The *Quenta Silmarillion* also tells of the awakening of Men who gradually grow

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[239] It has been claimed that Christopher Tolkien did not only edit his father's papers, but also authored parts of *S*. In a meticulous study, comparing Tolkien's drafts with the published version of *S*, Douglas Charles Kane (2006) has demonstrated, however, that Christopher's authorial contributions were limited to the odd deletion of a word or the addition of a few sentences to link text parts together.

[240] *S* topped the list from 2 October 1977 to 26 February 1978. The weekly lists can be found at http://www.hawes.com/1977/1977.htm and http://www.hawes.com/1978/1978.htm [040913].

[241] Both Elves and Men are created by Ilúvatar in the beginning, but only awakened at a later stage.

in prominence. The wars with which the *Quenta Silmarillion* is concerned are wars between the forces of good and evil, indeed wars of cosmic dimensions which result in the reshaping of the world and the gradual withdrawal of the divine powers from mundane affairs. After one such war, a human nation is awarded the island continent of Númenor which is raised from the sea (*S* 311). The fourth part of *S*, the *Akallabêth* or *The Downfall of Númenor*, tells of the rise and eventual destruction of Númenor in much greater detail than the appendices in *LR*. Finally, a short piece entitled *Of the Ring of Power and the Third Age* tells of the forging of the Ring of Power by Sauron and recounts the three wars between Sauron and the forces of good (the third and final war is the one relayed in *LR*). *S* also includes a number of genealogical overviews and maps. The index provides gives English translations of names and key terms in Quenya and Sindarin.

Compared to *H* and *LR*, the religious affordances added by *S* primarily consist of new information about cosmology, theology, afterlife, and the nature of good and evil (narrative religion) and about Elves and humans and unions between them resulting in a mixed bloodline (fantastic elements). Roughly following the structure of *S* itself, I will discuss these two complexes in turn.

9.1. Narrative Religion in *The Silmarillion*

9.1.1. Cosmogony: *The Music of the Ainur*

The *Ainulindalë* recounts the creation of the world according to the lore of the Elves. In the beginning, before the creation of the world, only the supreme creator god exists who in *LR* is referred to as the One. In *S* he is called Eru (Qu: the One, or He who is alone) or Ilúvatar (Qu: All-father). Eru first creates an order of spiritual beings, the Ainur (Qu: Holy Ones; *S* 3), and the Ainur assist Eru in the creation of the world by singing it into existence. The cosmogony proceeds in three steps. First, Eru lets the Ainur sing about the world-to-be (*S* 4-5). Second, Eru shows the Ainur a Vision of what they have sung (*S* 6-7). Finally, Eru in his sovereignty gives Being to the Vision (*S* 9) by sending his "Flame Imperishable" (*S* 9) or "Secret Flame" (*S* 15) into the Void.

The created universe is referred to as Eä (Qu: Let it be), the word by which Eru brings it into existence. Outside Eä are the Timeless Halls, the abode of Eru, and the empty Void. Eä consists of *menel* (Qu: heavens/sky) and the earth or Arda (Qu: The Realm). Arda is flat (*S* 111) and comprised of two landmasses, Middle-earth and Aman (Qu: The Blessed Realm). Some of the Ainur desire to enter Eä as incarnated beings. Upon doing so, they are first disappointed that Arda is not yet like the vision they have seen, but subsequently they accept Eru's charge to shape Arda as demiurges and so to realise the vision (*S* 9-10).

9.1.2. Theology: The Valar and the Maiar

The fourteen most important incarnated Ainur are referred to as the Valar (Qu: Powers). Together they make up a pantheon of 'function gods', each being associated with particular professions and elements. There are seven Valar Lords and seven Queens or Valier[242]. The seven Valar Lords are Manwë (king of Arda; wind), Ulmo (water), Aulë (earth; smith; creator of the Dwarves), Oromë (hunter), Námo/Mandos (doomsman; keeper of the Houses of the Dead), Irmo/Lórien[243] (Mandos' brother; master of visions and dreams), and Tulkas (war). The fallen Melkor/Morgoth is no longer counted among the Valar. The seven Valier are Varda (queen; Manwë's spouse; called Elbereth in *LR*), Yavanna (fertility; Aulë's spouse), Nienna (sister of Mandos and Irmo), Estë (healer; Irmo's spouse), Vairë (weaver; fate; Mandos' spouse), Vána (Oromë's spouse), and Nessa (Tulkas' spouse) (*S* 15-21).[244] Contrary to *LR*, where the cult focused on Elbereth/Varda, i.e. on one of the female Valier, the male Valar dominate in *S*. Even though the Valar and Valier are equal in number, the Valar generally have the more interesting functions, and some of the Valier are presented as little more than the 'spouse of'. Later in *S*, it is mainly the male Valar (esp. Manwë, Tulkas, Aulë, Oromë, and who Ulmo) who act and intervene in the affairs of the world.

The eight most powerful Valar, Manwë, Varda, Ulmo, Yavanna, Aulë, Mandos, Nienna, and Oromë, are referred to collectively as the Aratar (*S* 21). More than the rest, Oromë and Ulmo interact with Elves and Men. It is Oromë who finds and befriends the Elves. The Elves refer to themselves as the Quendi (Qu: Those who speak with voices), but Oromë names them Eldar (Qu: People of the Stars; *S* 45-46, 50). Later, when the Valar have left Middle-earth, the sea-dwelling Ulmo carries messages between Middle-earth and Valinor (*S* 287, 293, 296).

As the Valar enter the world, a number of lesser spirits accompany them (*S* 11, 21). The most powerful of these are the Maiar (*S* 21-23), of whom six are named: Ilmarë, Ossë, Eönwe, Uinen, Melian, and Olórin. Olórin is Gandalf (cf. *LR* 670), so we can infer that also the other Istari in *LR* (Saruman and Radagast) must be Maiar (cf. also *S* 359-360).[245]

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[242] Female Valar are called Valier (Valië in the singular). None of the terms Valië, Valier, Maia, Maiar, and Ainur are used anywhere in *LR*; they are first introduced with *S*.

[243] Námo and Irmo, together the Fëanturi, are often named Mandos and Lórien after their dwellings (*S* 19). I follow the standard practice of *S* and refer to them respectively as Mandos (after the dwelling) and Irmo (the real name).

[244] The names of the Valar and the Valier are rendered in Quenya. Elbereth is Varda's name in Sindarin.

[245] More information about the Istari is given in *UT* (502-520). Here they are explicitly identified as Maiar (*UT* 510).

9.1.3. Cosmology: The Wars between Good and Evil and the Reshaping of the World

Melkor, the mightiest of the Valar, envies Ilúvatar from the beginning and wants power for himself. Already when participating in the Great Music, Melkor intends to co-create and intervenes with a theme of his own, but Ilúvatar does not allow Melkor's designs to come into being (*S* 4-5). Having entered Eä, Melkor desires to dethrone Manwë and rule Arda in his stead (*S* 7). He rebels against the rest of the Valar, becoming Morgoth (Si: The Dark Enemy of the World; *S* 83), and takes a number of Maiar with him in his Fall (*S* 12, 23). These dark Maiar include the Balrogs (cf. the Balrog in Moria, *LR* 329-330) and Sauron, a former Maia of Aulë (*S* 23, 43).

Four wars (and a fifth led by Sauron) between good and evil take place and all do they affect the shape of the world. Considering the events that initiate them, it is clear that these are wars between Light and Darkness. The first war is initiated by Melkor's destruction of the original sources of light in Arda, the two lamps Illuin and Ormal that had been crafted by Aulë (*S* 27). As a result of this war, the Valar withdraw from Middle-earth to Aman, where Yavanna sings two trees of light into being, Telperion and Laurelin (*S* 31). At this point, the Elves awake in Cuiviénen in Middle-earth and are found by Oromë (*S* 45-46). Melkor turns some of the elves into orcs (*S* 47; cf. *LR* 486), evil creatures who cannot stand the light of day. This foul act and Melkor's growing power cause a second war that results in the defeat and imprisonment of Melkor. The Valar summon the Elves to Aman, but some refuse to leave Middle-earth or fail to finish the journey (*S* 49). This leads to the sundering of the Elves (*S* 50-53, 371). From now on the name Eldar is reserved for those Elves who left for the Blessed Realm, while those who stayed behind in Middle-earth are called the Avari (Qu: The Unwilling).[246]

Melkor is released from prison (*S* 60), but treacherously strikes again, destroying the two trees with the help of Ungoliant, a giant spider and ancestor of Shelob (*S* 79). Melkor sets himself up as king of Middle-earth. Rather than fighting, the Valar retreat further and hide Valinor from the rest of the world (*S* 114). The two trees cannot be brought to life again, but give a flower and a fruit respectively, which the Valar insert into two vessels that become the sun and the moon. The sun (*anar*) carries the fruit of Laurelin and is drawn by Arien; the moon (*isil*) carries the flower of Telperion and is drawn by Tilion (*S* 110). Melkor tries to destroy the moon, but is unsuccessful (*S* 112). In Middle-earth, the Elves, occasionally in alliances with dwarves and humans who now enter the scene, resist Melkor's might in the Wars of Beleriand, but gradually Melkor's power grows. The power of the Elves declines and it is increasingly up to the human na-

[246] Of the three Elven tribes, the Vanyar, the Noldor, and some of the Teleri make it to Aman and become known collectively as the Calaquendi (Qu: Elves of the Light). Later in the narrative some of them return to Middle-earth. Those of the Teleri who left for Aman, but did not reach it become the Sindar (Qu: Grey-elves) and the Nandor. These two groups, together with the Avari, are called the Moriquendi (Qu: Elves of the Darkness). They are not evil, but have not seen the light of the two trees in Aman.

tions to oppose Melkor and his armies of orcs. The Valar do not intervene, not even when Turgon of Gondolin (*S* 187) and the Vala Ulmo (*S* 293) plead them to do so, nor when the Elven realms of Doriath, Nargothrond, and Gondolin fall. Only when Eärendil the Mariner succeeds in sailing to Valinor, do the Valar act. The War of Wrath follows, and Melkor is defeated once and for all and chained in the Void (*S* 303, 306). This is the last military intervention of the Valar in Middle-earth. The Valar summon the Elves to Aman once more and most depart (*S* 306, 310). The humans who helped the Elves in the war, the Edain, are rewarded with the land of Númenor which the Maia Ossë raises in the great sea between Aman and Middle-earth (*S* 311). The end of the War of Wrath marks the transition from the first to the second age.

Melkor's most powerful servant, Sauron, escapes and establishes a stronghold in Middle-earth where he forges the Ring of Power (*S* 320, 344). Throughout the second age, wars rage between Sauron and the Númenóreans. The majority of the Númenóreans grow estranged from the Valar, neglect their offerings to Eru, and outlaw the Elvish tongues (*S* 318-320). When the Númenórean king Ar-Pharazôn defeats Sauron and brings him back captive, this only causes increased corruption. Sauron becomes the king's advisor and persuades him to make war upon the Valar, breaking the ban of the Valar which forbids humans to sail west from Númenor (*S* 329). The Númenóreans land in Aman, the Elves flee, and the Valar ask Ilúvatar to aid them. Ilúvatar interferes and sinks the Númenórean fleet and Númenor itself (S 334, 347). Aman and Tol Eressëa[247] are "taken away and removed beyond the reach of Men for ever" (*S* 334). The cosmological change is even more far-reaching, for the earth (Arda), which was flat, is made round (*S* 338). A straight but hidden road to Valinor still exists, which Elven ships can take from Middle-earth (*S* 338).

A few faithful Númenóreans escape the destruction, but so does Sauron's spirit (*S* 335-336). Sauron is soon able to wage another war in Middle-earth, but is defeated by an alliance of men and Elves (*S* 353). This event marks the end of the second age. Sauron's final war, whose resolution marks the end of the third age of Middle-earth, is the one told of in *LR*. At the end of *S*, the last Elves leave Middle-earth (*S* 366).

9.1.4. On the Nature and Power of Evil

There is a tension in *S* between two conceptions of the nature of evil. In the literature, these conceptions are often referred to as the Augustinian and the Manichaean view of evil. According to the Augustinian view, evil is understood simply as the absence of good, while the Manichaean vision sees evil as something in itself, as the positively *anti-*

[247] In *LR* the relation between Aman, Valinor, and Eldamar remains unclear. In *S* it is specified that the Undying Lands in the West are comprised of the continent Aman and the island Tol Eressëa just east of it (*S* 58). Valinor, the abode of the Valar, is located on Aman; Eldamar, the Elven realm in the West, is located partly on Tol Eressëa and on a part of Aman (*S* 61).

good. Those who are evil in the Augustinian way are 'good on the bottom' and can be turned back to the light. Manichaean malevolence is a part of one's very being.

The evil of the various races is either Manichaean or Augustinian in character. Melkor himself is absolutely evil as are the Orcs, Trolls, and Maiar who serve him. The metaphysical evil of these beings is emphasised by their intolerance to light. They were not always evil in the Manichaean sense, however. Melkor and the other Maiar were created good (for all of Eru's creation was good), but in their Fall (which was chosen out of free will), they changed their very being and became demons (*S* 43). Similarly, the Orcs were originally elves, but Melkor turned them into demons.[248] Other creatures are evil only occasionally and only in the Augustinian way. When humans, dwarves, or elves act in the service of evil, it is always because they have been deceived or influenced by true evil. Therefore, after the battle of Helm's Deep in *LR*, the wild men of Dunland who had been deceived by Saruman are allowed to go home without punishment and their fallen are properly buried. By contrast, the dead orcs are referred to as "carcasses" and left to rot in piles (*LR* 454).[249]

Besides the tension between two visions of the *nature* of evil, we also see glimpses of a tension between a Manichaean and an Augustinian vision of the *power* of evil. The question here is whether an absolutely evil being commands power *equal* to (Manichaean) or *inferior* to (Augustinian) the absolutely good being. The Augustinian view dominates. Eru's sovereign act of creation and his ability to ignore Melkor's attempt to co-create shows clearly that Melkor is inferior to Eru. This reinforces the Augustinian hints in *LR* where Gandalf often refers to a divine power guiding the events of the world (cf. section 7.2.1). There are glimpses, however, of a Manichaean vision of the power of evil in *S*. The "Darkness" that spreads after Melkor's destruction of the two trees is said to be "more than loss of light"; it was "a thing with being of its own" (*S* 80). What is more, the darkness is not of Melkor's making; he has "called upon some aid that came from beyond Arda" (*S* 84). This suggests the existence of an evil entity or power outside Eä, mightier than Melkor and perhaps equal to Eru.[250]

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[248] According to Tolkien, the Old English word orc literally means demon.

[249] Given this general view of the Orcs, Faramir's profession that he "would not snare even an orc with falsehood" (*LR* 664) reveals a truly exceptional and superior moral.

[250] Shippey (2003) and Rosebury (2003) are among the many Tolkien scholars who have written on ethics, the metaphysics of evil, and free will in Tolkien's literary mythology. Shippey holds that the evil in Tolkien's Legendarium must ultimately be understood in Manichaean terms, Rosebury contends that it is Augustinian. See also the essays in Bassham and Bronson (2003), especially the contribution by Hibbs (2003). I shall not go further into the debate here since references to Melkor or other evil beings are very rare in the spiritual Tolkien milieu.

9.1.5. Rituals

Even though *S* focuses on the Elves, we hear very little about Elven rituals or religion. The only reference to Elven religion falls *en-passant* when we hear that Morgoth attacks the city of Gondolin during the Gates of Summer festival (*S* 291). Given that we know from *LR* that the Elves in Middle-earth in the Third Age frequently invoked Elbereth and observed a weekly Valar-day of ritual (cf. section 7.2.4), the absence of reference to Elven rituals in *S* is puzzling. Like with *LR*, Tolkien may have consciously avoided explicit rituals as not to produce a pagan pseudo-religion, but a text-internal reason can also be inferred: The Elves in *S* have seen the Valar and many have lived with them. Therefore, the Elves of *S* do not see the Valar as divine beings to be worshipped. Valar-rituals make more sense for the Sindar in *LR*, for these Elves have not lived in Aman and long for the Valar whom they have not seen for thousands of years since their last intervention in Middle-earth.

The relation between humans and Valar is different. Though the Valar appear to humans in the War of Wrath (*S* 302) and when the Valar appoint Elros first king of Númenor (*S* 312), the short lifespan of humans makes the preservation of knowledge of the Valar tenuous. Contrary to the Elves, most humans have never seen the Valar, but have to *believe* in them. As a consequence, most humans wrongly think that the Valar are gods (*S* 167). The Númenóreans, who from the Elves know the truth, worship Eru Ilúvatar rather than the Valar (*S* 312). From this we may infer that also the Elves at the time of *S* worshipped Eru rather than the Valar.

Even though the Númenóreans are the purest of the races of Men, they can become corrupted. While Sauron is in Númenor, he turns the Númenóreans away from Eru and has them worship Melkor with human sacrifice (*S* 325-327). Later he has them direct the cult at himself as a god (*S* 332).

9.1.6. Eschatology and Afterlife

S says little about eschatology, but the notion, present in *LR*, that this world has an end and that a better world will be created after this one, is repeated (*S* 4). More information is given about the different post-mortal dooms of humans and Elves. The spirits of both humans and Elves are collected in the Halls of Mandos after the death of the body (*S* 95, 117, 120, 220). The final fate of the Elves is uncertain, but they seem unable to leave Eä. Human spirits, on the contrary, leave the Halls of Mandos to go out of the created world to be with Ilúvatar in the Timeless Halls (*S* 220, 316). Therefore, human mortality is a gift and not a curse, as an envoy from the Valar explains to the Númenóreans (*S* 316).

There are a few instances of resurrection within the world. After the human Beren is slain and lingers in the Halls of Mandos, his Elven wife Lúthien journeys there and is allowed to bring him back to life at the price of her own immortality (*S* 220). This story seems to contradict the notion that human mortality is a gift, for here it is Elven immortality which is deemed the attractive post-mortal doom which can be bargained with. On

the whole, *S* does not single out the human or Elven afterlife as most desirable, but simply describes the two as different. While the Elves are immortal in Aman, they cannot stay in Middle-earth. Repeating a theme from *LR*, it is emphasised in *S* that Elves who are not slain and do not travel to Aman on their own account, will fade and become like a shadow (*S* 95).

9.2. Fantastic Elements in *The Silmarillion*

Like *H* and *LR*, *S* includes magic, otherworlds, non-human races, and special bloodlines. Especially Lúthien is a great enchantress (*S* 202, 206, 212, 213), but also the dragon Glaurung casts spells (*S* 255). The most colourful magical object is Gurthang, a cursed and talking sword (*S* 271). Another magical motif is that the oath taken by Fëanor's sons to recapture the Silmarils from Melkor is metaphysically binding (*S* 88-89). Concerning otherworlds, we hear much more about Valinor and Eldamar, and in Middle-earth the Elven realm of Doriath is much like Galadriel's Lothlórien in *LR* (*S* 106, 281). Given the Elven point of view of *S*, all of this seems less extra-ordinary than in *LR*. The *LR* motif complex of intuitions and dreams as sources of knowledge plays no role in *S*, with the exception of Melian's foresight (*S* 101).

9.2.1. Beings, Races, and Bloodlines

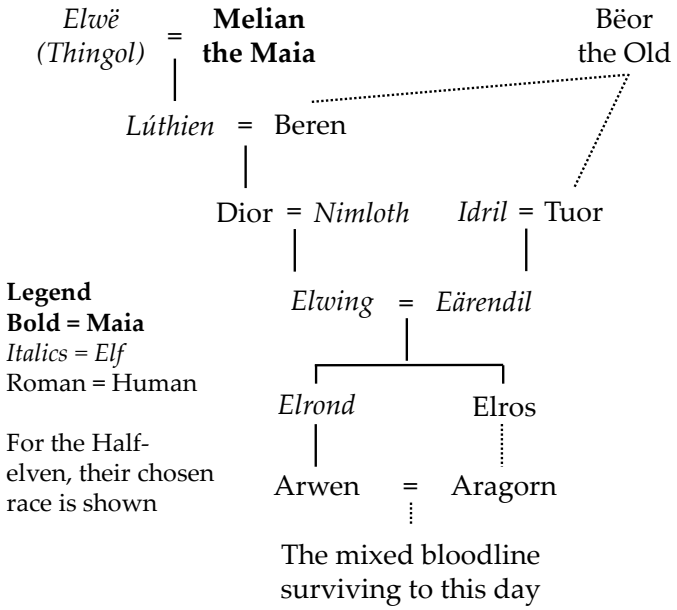
We get some more information about the nature of various races. It is specified about the Dwarves that they were created by the Vala Aulë without Ilúvatar's permission (*S* 37), but that Ilúvatar subsequently sanctified them with his Being and gave them free will (*S* 38). This is Ilúvatar's only major intervention in the created world apart from the destruction of Númenor. Still, the Dwarves are not counted among the children of Ilúvatar, a title reserved for Elves and humans. As already mentioned, we hear about the Orcs that they were elves once, but that they were corrupted and turned evil by Melkor (*S* 47). The Elves are somewhat disenchanted compared to *LR*. We learn that Elves are not always wise and good, but that they can also be greedy, be seduced by evil, and even go to war against each other.

More elaborate information is given about the various higher and lesser races of Men and about the mixed Maiar-Elven-human bloodline. Humans (called Atani or Hildor by the Elves) are created by Ilúvatar in the beginning, but only awakened later, simultaneously with the creation of the sun (*S* 115). After this they spread across Middle-earth. Some come under the influence of Melkor and refuse to believe what the Elves tell them about the Valar (*S* 169, 309). Others befriend the Elves and learn from them. These are the Edain or Elf-friends (*S* 164, 309, 313). The Edain are granted Númenor as a gift as well as a longer life span than other humans. They are also immune to sickness and have the ability to die at will when old and weary. They begin to lose these privileges when

they fall under Sauron's influence (*S* 328), but we know from *LR* that Aragorn, a Dúnedain and descendant of the Númenóreans, has retained both a long lifespan and the ability to die at will.

Aragorn, of course, is no average Dúnedain, but of royal blood. For not only are the Edain/Númenóreans/Dúnedain special as a collective, their royal line is more special still for it includes both Elven and Maian blood. *LR* includes allusions to this special bloodline, but in *S* things get clearer. The so-called Line of Lúthien is shown in figure 9.1.

Figure 9.1. The Line of Lúthien



One royal Elven house includes Maian blood due to the union of Melian the Maia and the Elf lord Elwë (*S* 54-55). Elwë and Melian rule the Sindar and get a daughter, Lúthien (*S* 99). Lúthien, in turn, marries the human Beren and bears a son, Dior (*S* 222). Dior has Maian, Elven, and human blood (*S* 284), but being born after Lúthien has given up her own immortality, Dior is born with a human doom. The union of Lúthien and Beren is only the first of a number of unions between humans and Elves. Dior marries the Elf Nimloth and together they get Elwing (*S* 283). Elwing marries Eärendil (*S* 295), himself the offspring of a union between the Elf princess Idril and the human Tuor (*S* 289). Elwing and Eärendil get the sons Elros and Elrond whom we know from *LR* (*S* 295). Elwing, Eärendil, Elros, and Elrond are known as the Half-elven and are given the choice between an Elven and a human doom. Elwing, Eärendil, and Elrond choose the Elven doom (*S* 118); Elros, and Elrond's children, including Arwen, choose mortality. Through Elros and Elrond and their descendants, "the blood of the Firstborn and a strain of the spirits divine that were before Arda" have come among Men (*S* 306).

9.3. Note on Veracity

Unlike *LR*, *S* does not include a frame narrative explicitly anchoring the narrative world in the actual world. Nevertheless, there is something in the text's structure that lends it to a non-fictional reading. There are some striking intertextual connections, however, between *S* and those mythologies that Tolkien drew on. Consider, for instance, that Tolkien's Númenor is called Atalantë in Quenya (*S* 337) – and hence near-equated with Atlantis; and that Avallónë, the name of the port city on the island of Tol Eressëa (*S* 338), clearly owes its name to the Arthurian Avalon. This intertextuality promotes a reading of *S* as referring, directly or indirectly, to supernatural states of affairs in the actual world. At least this is the case for readers who already believe that (some of) Tolkien's source mythologies contain a core of historical truth, and that goes for most Tolkien religionists. Consider, for example, all those individuals who believe in the historical core of the Atlantis myth and/or the Noah Flood myth and/or the tale of the lost Celtic continent of Lyonesse. For this group, Tolkien's account of the destruction of Númenor affords three more or less referential readings. The Númenor passages can be read either (a) in the binocular mode as a fictional reference to other sources giving a reliable, historical account, (b) as a mytho-historical description which is equally accurate as its Theosophical, Biblical, and Celtic counterparts, or (c) as the true (or relatively more true) account or proto-story behind the other myths.

9.4. The Combined Religious Affordances of *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Silmarillion*

For a reader with both *LR* and *S* at his disposal, *LR* continues to supply two kinds of religious affordances: fantastic elements (magic, otherworlds, visions etc.) and a frame narrative that thematises the text's historical veracity. *S* adds two things in particular. First, *S* gives the reader much more information on the narrative religion of Tolkien's world. Though we still lack ritual descriptions that can serve as models for rituals in the actual world, we get details about the creation and constitution of the world (cosmogony and cosmology) and about the names, functions, and abodes of the Valar (theology). Significantly, the theological information is not limited to the Valar; we also hear about Eru, the supreme, one God who in striking likeness with the Biblical God creates the world *ex nihilo* with a word. Second, *S* offers more and different information about the Elves. Indeed, as Tolkien wrote in a letter to his publisher, Milton Waldman, "[t]he legendary *Silmarillion* is peculiar, and differs from all similar things that I know in not being anthropocentric. Its centre is not Men but 'Elves'. […] These are the *First-born* […]; and the *Followers* Men" (*S* xv). The narrative is told from an Elven perspective, the main protagonists are Elves, and the Elves are described as ordinary people who can err and be as proud, resentful, and greedy as any human. The construction of a mixed Elven-

human bloodline further diminishes the distance between the two races. Together, the disenchantment and humanisation of the Elves makes it much easier for the reader to identify with them.

From these observations of the religious affordances of *LR* and *S* flow four hypotheses about how post-*S* Tolkien religion might differ from Tolkien religion based only on *LR*. First, we can assume that the availability of a pantheon will lead to the development of specifically Valar-directed rituals. Possibly, Tolkien religionists after *S*, especially those of a Pagan bent, will consider the Valar comparable to the pantheons of pre-Christian mythologies and treat Tolkien's literary mythology as a (near) equal to those mythologies. If the Valar, rather than the Elves, indeed become the focus of ritual attention, this may be expected to go along, second, with a change in how Tolkien's narratives are read. Whereas the Neo-Pagans read *LR* in the binocular mode as a text that indirectly helped them appreciate the real elves or fairies (as a *class* of spiritual beings), a focus on the Valar can be expected to go together with an affirmative reading of Tolkien's narratives that considers the Valar to be real, individual beings and also consider other aspects of Tolkien's world to be real. This could lead either to a mytho-cosmological reading of *LR* and *S* that takes the Valar to be real but brackets the more tenuous question of historicity, or to a mytho-historical reading facilitated by the combined religious affordances of the *LR* frame story and the explicit intertextuality of *S*. While the Valar can be expected to facilitate a more developed Neo-Pagan form of Tolkien religion, one might also hypothesise, as a third point, the rise of a Christian wing of Tolkien religion. It might be that the decidedly Christian flavour of *S*, expressed for instance in Eru as creator god, in the subordination of the Valar to Eru, and in the primarily Augustinian view of evil, could result in more individuals with a Christian background becoming active in Tolkien spirituality. Finally, we can hypothesise that the perspective change from humans/Hobbits to Elves in *S* will not only effect which supernatural beings are engaged with in ritual (Valar/Eru instead of Elves), but also have consequences for people's self-identification. Where the Pagans in the previous chapter considered the Elves to be supernatural others or identified with them only in their aspect of forest caretakers, Tolkien religionists who draw upon *S* might identify spiritually with the Elves. They may either treat the Elves as religious role models or inscribe themselves into the Line of Lúthien and consider the Elves to be their spiritually significant ancestors. In the four following chapters we shall see whether Tolkien religion after *S* indeed went in the directions I have hypothesised here.