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

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Chapter 10. The Tribunal of the Sidhe: A Case Study of Religious Blending

In this and the following three chapters, I discuss a number of religious groups that came into being in the 1970s through 1990s and drew their inspiration from both *LR* and *S*. I refer to these groups, which took form before the emergence of the Internet and the movie adaptations of *LR*, as the first wave of Tolkien spirituality. That is not to say, however, that these groups belong to the past. On the contrary, the first wave of Tolkien spirituality includes a number of solid groups that have now been active for three or four decades, are as vigorous as ever, and have successfully socialised the second generation.

In chapters 10 through 13, the history of the first wave groups will be treated from their formation until the present day. Since the groups developed independently of each other and still operate quite autonomously, I will not attempt a chronological treatment of first wave Tolkien spirituality *en bloc*, but rather analyse one group at a time. This allows for a thematic organisation of the material. In what follows, chapters 10 through 12 make up a set of chapters dealing with religious groups that identify to some extent with Tolkien's Elves, the Quendi. In chapter 13 I treat two examples of how Tolkien's mythology has been integrated in ritual practices from the Western Magic tradition. The three Elven chapters concern the Tribunal of the Sidhe, the Elven movement, and esoteric historians who link Tolkien's mythology to conspiracy theories about a suppressed Elven/Grail bloodline.

The Tribunal of the Sidhe was founded in 1984 and is probably the largest Tolkien-integrating religious movement. The members of the Tribunal synthesise elements from Tolkien's mythology with Wicca, Celtic mythology, and revelations of their own. They believe to be Changelings, i.e. fairy beings whose spirits have been incarnated in a human body. Their use of Tolkien's works is legitimised by the claim that Tolkien was a Changeling himself and chose to be incarnated to tell the history of the Changelings in mythic form. The Tribunal of the Sidhe is part of a broader 'fairy spirituality milieu', a sub-milieu of the cultic milieu focused on investigating fairies, interacting with fairies, and identifying with fairies (or with equivalent fey creatures such as elves and Sidhe). The fairy spirituality milieu includes solitaires, various organisations, such as the Tribunal of the Sidhe and the Faeid Fellowship (founded 2000)²⁵¹, and a loose network of self-identified Elves.²⁵²

²⁵¹ <http://www.technogypsie.com/faeid/fellowship.html> [050812].

²⁵² The now defunct Fairy Investigation Society, cf. footnotes 108 and 267, also belonged to the fairy spirituality milieu.

Chapter 11 focuses on the network of “awakened Elves” which emerged in the early 1970s around the Elf Queen’s Daughters’ (and later the Silver Elves’) magical Elven letters. Especially since the rise of the Internet in the 1990s, this network has constituted a self-conscious community with such online hubs as the Elfinkind Digest (1990-) and the Yahoo! Group Elven Realities (1999-). These awakened Elves share the identification as a fey creature with the Tribunal of the Sidhe, but the Tribunal and the Elven community have developed quite independently of each other and shall therefore be treated separately. To limit redundancy, chapter 10 and 11 focus on different theoretical issues. The present chapter treats the Tribunal of the Sidhe as an example of fiction-integrating religious blending. It charts the religious traditions (and their theories of fairy folk) which the Tribunal uses and synthesises, and analyses how the identity as Changelings has been constructed in a process of conceptual religious blending. The chapter on the Elven movement, by contrast, focuses on plausibility construction and plausibility maintenance. In the Elven chapter, I look at the practices and social structures which support the ‘conversion’ to Elvenhood and I analyse how an identity as Elf, once acquired, can subsequently be rationalised and justified. I furthermore assess the strength of the Elven movement’s plausibility structures.

The third Elven chapter, chapter 12, is concerned with references to Tolkien in esoteric historiography. Some authors of what I term ‘conspiracy genealogy’ assume that Tolkien possessed secret knowledge about special bloodlines which he hinted at in his books. They are all eager to point out correspondences between Tolkien’s mythology and their own constructed genealogies and etymologies, and consider such correspondences to legitimise and back up their own claims. One of them even claims to be a royal descendant of the Dragon/Elven/Grail bloodline himself.

The three Elven chapters all concern individuals who claim to belong to a non-human species or to a non-ordinary, human bloodline. These individuals furthermore suggest that Tolkien possessed knowledge about this racial phenomenon and its spiritual importance, and that his Quendi were intended as veiled, but conscious references to it. In other words, the fascination with Tolkien’s Elves as special and powerful beings (already afforded by *LR*) and the invitation to identify *with them* (introduced with *S*) are here translated into an identification *as Elves* and the development of a complex of beliefs around this identity.

10.1. The Tribunal of the Sidhe as Tolkien-integrating Religion

The Tribunal of the Sidhe was founded in 1984 by three Irishmen and three Americans studying magic together in Sacramento, California. Later the Tribunal spread over the world, especially over the American West Coast. Today, the group has well over a hundred members, many of them second-generation, making it the largest Tolkien-integrating religious organisation. The description of the Tribunal of the Sidhe in this chapter is

based mainly on an interview and subsequent email correspondence with Lady Danu, one of the founding members of the Tribunal and now the leader of the Circle of the Coyote (together with her husband, Lord Coyote). I also draw on the homepage of Lady Danu's group, the Circle of the Coyote, and an information pamphlet about the Tribunal (Rose 2009) which Ivy Rose had written on the occasion of a Pagan pride day. Rose is a member of Danu's circle.²⁵³

The Tribunal understands itself as a Pagan organisation (Danu 290909) and most of the group's concerns, beliefs, and practices conform to a Pagan standard model: The Tribunal considers itself "environmentalist" (Danu 290909), and is basically a Wiccan group. Members "honor the ways of the Goddess and God" (Rose 2009) and observe the Wiccan Wheel of the Year with celebration of equinoxes, solstices, and the four Celtic cross-quarter days. Like in most such groups, the Wiccan ritual baseline is combined with various other forms of magic (e.g. Tarot, astral travelling) and mythologies (*in casu* Celtic, Norse, and Tolkienesque).

Two characteristics make the Tribunal of the Sidhe stand out among other Pagan groups: (1) the belief that the members are "Changelings" who "hail from a place on the astral plane [they] call "Home"" (Rose 2009), and (2) the use of Tolkien's narratives as a mythology on a par with other mythologies. Members of the Tribunal believe that their astral home is populated by various forms of spiritual beings, including the Elvyn and the Sidhe, and refer to these beings collectively as the "kin folk". The most powerful of the kin folk are the Elvyn who created (or participated in the creation of) the lesser races. It is further believed that Changelings (i.e. incarnated kin folk) have co-inhabited the earth throughout all of history and that myths and folklore about elves, fairies, and other such beings reflect this historical fact. They thus approach myth in general in the mytho-historical mode. They believe that the historical core of myths has been overlaid with a layer of mythic hyperbole, but their view is not euhemeristic in the reductive sense of offering naturalistic explanations for the supernatural aspects of myth. They do not explain the myths about *álfar* and *sídhe* as mythologised references to human peoples, as Margaret Murray and Gerald Gardner did (cf. section 8.3.1). Instead, they explain the mythic *álfar* and *sídhe* as a more or less correct representation of the real and historical existence of Changelings. While the Tribunal reads Celtic and other mythology as mytho-history, they are more ambivalent in their view on Tolkien's literary mythology (cf. section 10.2.2 below).

The members of the Tribunal identify as Changelings, but of course they *look* human and certainly do not physically resemble pixies, dwarfs, and elves of fable. That can be explained, however. According to the Tribunal, the non-human appearance of kin folk in folktales is simply due to the fact that kin folk in earlier times *chose* to be incarnated in non-human forms. Only after the "great strife" with the humans, did the kin folk "adapt" their form to be more human (Danu 290909). The members of the Tribunal of the

²⁵³ The homepage of the Circle of the Coyote can be visited here: <http://thechangeling.ning.com> [180712].

Sidhe hence claim to be kin folk who have chosen to be (re)incarnated *in human form*. Obviously, the Changelings are bound to their physical bodies and unable to ‘outcarnate’ and return home permanently at will, but the Changelings believe to be able to visit their Home temporarily by way of astral projection. They also believe that their Changeling spirit or soul returns to its astral Home after physical death.

This spiritual identification with the kin folk does not rule out a parallel belief in Changeling descent: When changeling parents procreate, their offspring will also be Changelings. Whether by physical descent, reincarnation, or a combination of the two, the members of the Tribunal believe that they are the descendants of a particular tribe of historical changelings, namely the Tuatha Dé Dannan (The People of the Goddess Danu) of Irish legend. Rose can therefore finish the pamphlet by pointing out that all circles of the Tribunal, however different they may otherwise be, share the “belief in the Shining ones as our foremothers and forefathers” (2009).²⁵⁴

Like the Pagans discussed in chapter 8, members of the Tribunal of the Sidhe are fascinated with the fantastic elements (otherworlds, magic, Elves, etc.) in *LR* (cf. section 7.1) and most have read *LR* or seen the movies before joining. The Tolkien material which is actually integrated in the teachings and rituals of the Tribunal, however, comes from *S*. Drawing on the cosmogony and theology of *S* (cf. section 9.1), members identify their Home on the astral plane with the Blessed Realm and consider the kin folk of that place and hence themselves as well to be (the equivalents of) Valar, Maiar, and Quendi. Lady Danu also told me that besides the God and the Goddess, her circle honours the gods of both the Norse, Celtic, and Tolkienesque pantheons in ritual. For instance, the members have performed rituals in honour of the Valië Yavanna (Danu 290909).

As has become apparent, the Tribunal of Sidhe engages in religious blending. On the level of tradition, the Tribunal draws on mythology and folklore about the *sídhe* and other fey beings, on Wicca, and on Tolkien’s narratives to construct a unique constellation of beliefs and practices. Since the Tribunal’s syncretism is thorough and stable, it can be qualified as religious synthesising, in contrast to religious mixing, i.e. ambiguous and temporary syncretism (cf. section 4.1.2 above). On the conceptual level, the Tribunal draws on earlier notions of fey creatures and their interaction with humans to create the notions of kin folk and Changelings. The traditional and conceptual levels are connected. On the one hand, the notions of kin folk and Changelings are constructed out of bits and pieces from earlier traditions. For instance, the notion of kin folk is introduced as a handy hypernym that allows members to refer to *sídhe*, elves, and other fey creatures collectively. On the other hand, the notions of kin folk and Changelings govern the Tribunal’s interpretation of the mythological traditions that it draws upon. For example, the *álfar* in Germanic mythology were not originally believed to spirits from an Other-world who had incarnated in human bodies. Perceiving the *álfar* through the interpretive

²⁵⁴ The Tribunal of the Sidhe uses the terms Sidhe, Shining Ones, and Tuatha Dé Dannan more or less interchangeably.

lens of their own Changeling concept, however, the Tribunal holds the old myths about the *álfar* to reflect that Changelings like themselves existed in prehistory.

Neo-Pagans are often described as “eclectic” (e.g. Pike 2004a, 26), indicating that while their religious blending is creative and imaginative, it is also rather unsystematic. I believe that religious blending is never completely random, but that regulating patterns can always be discerned. While I cannot speak for Paganism in general, I hope at least to make plausible in this chapter that the religious blending of the Tribunal of the Sidhe is not random, but patterned.

The rest of this chapter falls in three sections. The first two of these are concerned with religious blending. In section 10.2, I analyse the Tribunal as a religious synthesis, charting those traditions from which the Tribunal has adapted beliefs and practices. Section 10.3 zooms in on the conceptual level of religious blending and analyses the construction of the Tribunal’s identity notions of kin folk and Changelings. A short final section treats the social organisation of the Tribunal of the Sidhe and the group’s place within the spiritual Tolkien milieu in general.

10.2. Religious Blending on the Tradition Level: The Tribunal of the Sidhe as Religious Synthesis

The Tribunal of the Sidhe synthesises elements from four religious traditions: (1) the Irish mythological tradition about the *sídh*e and the Tuatha Dé Dannan, received through the writings of Robert Graves; (2) an early twentieth century tradition of spiritist and theosophical ‘research’ on the reality of fairies, including in particular the work of Walter Yeeling Evans-Wentz; (3) Tolkien’s literary mythology, especially the parts about non-human beings and their otherworldly abodes; and (4) Wicca.²⁵⁵ Directly or indirectly, Celtic mythology and folklore play a role in all these traditions.²⁵⁶ This is particularly true for the first two traditions, the Tuatha Dé Dannan tradition and the fairy research tradition, which seem to have formed the original basis of the group’s beliefs. This Celtic emphasis of the Tribunal can be explained by the fact that it originated as a study group,

²⁵⁵ Possibly, C.J. Cherryh’s duology *The Dreamstone* and *The Tree of Swords and Jewels* (1983a; 1983b) played a role as well. In any case Cherryh’s novels, which constitute the first successful pieces of fantasy focusing particularly on the *sídh*e, were published just one year before the Tribunal was founded.

²⁵⁶ The beliefs and practices of the Tribunal and especially the members’ identification with the Tuatha can be seen as an example of religious Celticism, i.e. the religious fascination of and/or identification with the Celts. Religious Celticism is expressed variously in the formation of Druid orders (Lewis 2009); in attempts to reconstruct the religion of the Celts (NicDhàna 2007); in historical readings of legends formed around the grail romances, such as the story of Joseph of Arimathea’s visit to Glastonbury (cf. Wood 2000); or in the adoption of the pseudo-Celtic Wiccan Wheel of the Year and the equally pseudo-Celtic lunar calendar developed by Graves. The Tribunal observes this lunar calendar, the so-called Celtic Tree Calendar. On religious Celticism in general, especially as it is tied to the key location of Glastonbury, see Bowman (1994; 1996; 2007; 2009), Prince and Riches (2000), and Ivakhiv (2001).

the Circle of Phooka,²⁵⁷ which was led by the Irishman Sean P. Murphy and half of whose six members were Irish. The two other traditions, Tolkien's literary mythology and Wicca, seem to have been added at a later stage by Murphy's American students after Murphy had returned to Ireland. At least these traditions gained importance after his departure. In what follows I shall introduce the two 'Celtic' traditions before moving on to the Tribunal's integration of Tolkien's mythology. Since my emphasis here is on the various traditions' contribution to the Tribunal's ideas about kin folk and Changelings, this section includes no separate sub-section about Wicca.

Before moving on, let me mention that the information given in this section on the Tribunal's source traditions is not only essential for an analysis of religious blending in the Tribunal of the Sidhe. The information given here also provides necessary background for the chapters on the Elven movement (ch. 11) and on esoteric historiography involving Tolkien's mythology (ch. 12). Both Elves and esoteric historians draw on Robert Graves' ideas about the Tuatha Dé Danann, and like the Tribunal, the awakened Elves are also inspired by Evans-Wentz' notion that fairies are really astral spirits. Furthermore, Tolkien's himself is likely to have been inspired by some of the works discussed in this section.

10.2.1. Robert Graves' Tuatha Dé Danann and Theosophy's Astral Fairies

The *sidhe* or the *áes síde* are a group of Irish mythological beings. Their name means the "the people of the hollow hills", i.e. the people of the Otherworld (Borsje 2009, 54).²⁵⁸ The *sidhe* appear both in early medieval literature and in living folklore. After the English colonisation of Ireland these beings came to be referred to as "fairies". The Tuatha Dé Danann, the "children/people/subjects of Danu", also feature in both the early literature and in later folklore, and the sources agree that the Tuatha are in some way related to the *sidhe*.

The early literary sources contain two different traditions about the Tuatha Dé Danann and their relation to the *sidhe*. In the first of these, the Tuatha Dé Danann appear as a kind of pantheon of majestic *sidhe* inhabiting a magical Otherworld. In this tradition, the Tuatha can visit the world of humans from their otherworldly home, and humans can access the Otherworld through certain hidden entrances, for instance in mounds. In the so-called invasions tradition, however, the Tuatha are no gods, but a tribe of humans in possession of magical powers. This tradition goes back to the *Lebor Gabála Éirenn* (*The Book of the Taking of Ireland*, often referred to as *The Book of Invasions*) which was compiled in the 11th century as a great synthesis of mythology, legend, folklore, history, and Biblical material. *The Book of the Taking of Ireland* traces Irish history back to Biblical times and claims that the Tuatha Dé Danann, after having learned magic on the northernmost

²⁵⁷ A phooka (or púca) is a creature of Irish folklore comparable to a goblin.

²⁵⁸ *Sid* means hollow hill or mound, but can be used as shorthand for the beings inhabiting those mounds.

islands of the world, were the fifth people to conquer Ireland. The Milesians, from whom the contemporary Irish are claimed to descend, took the land from the Tuatha Dé Dannan and forced them into the underground Otherworld, thus transforming them into *sídh*e – people of the hollow hills.²⁵⁹

The idea that the Tuatha Dé Dannan were an historical people who actually possessed magical powers and indeed conquered Ireland entered the teachings of the Tribunal of the Sidhe (and the cultic milieu in general) through Robert Graves' *The White Goddess* (1948/1997).²⁶⁰ In this work, Graves developed three ideas that have greatly influenced the Tribunal and Paganism in general. First, he claimed that a matriarchal culture worshipping a supreme Goddess had dominated pre-historic Europe and Middle East, and that this Goddess was a "Triple Goddess" with the three aspects of maid, mother, and crone.²⁶¹ Second, Graves believed that all myths and legends were originally factual accounts that had subsequently been distorted, by omissions, additions, and metaphorical projections etc. As witnessed by the subtitle of his book, *A Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth*, Graves furthermore believed himself able to reconstruct this historical core. He therefore intended his book to be read as "an authentic work of history" (Hutton 1999, 42). Drawing on myth and intuition, Graves sought to demonstrate that matriarchy was the original and natural way of organising society. He stated, for instance, that the "Tuatha dé Danaan were a confederacy of tribes in which the kingship went by matrilineal succession", and he characterised the *Book of the Taking of Ireland* as "archaeologically plausible" (1997, 45). Inspired by Margaret Murray, Graves considered the *sídh*e, who "are now popularly regarded as fairies", to be "in fact Picts" (1997, 202). He thus agreed with Murray (and Gardner) that an old religion had existed, that it had survived at the outskirts of European civilisation, and that the beings of folklore were euhemeristic references to these people and their religion.²⁶² Where Murray and Gardner claimed that the old religion had been duotheistic, however, Graves insisted that it had been directed at a single goddess. He believed in the actual existence of this goddess and hence in the essential truth of the old religion. If Graves' first two main ideas were his belief in original matriarchy and his euhemeristic view on myth, the

²⁵⁹ On the *Lebor Gabála Éirenn*, see Carey (1993; 2009) and Scowcroft (1987). Since the only written sources about the *sídh*e and the Tuatha Dé Dannan stem from Christian times, it is impossible to say for sure how the Tuatha were conceptualised in pagan times (Borsje 2009, 54). A heated debate rages between "nativists" (earlier the dominant position) and "anti-nativists" (e.g. McCone 1990) over the question whether the early Irish literature has preserved a home-grown, pagan tradition or whether it reflects a synthesis of imported (Biblical, Classical, and non-Irish Celtic) material (cf. Carey 1992; Hutton 1991, 150-152).

²⁶⁰ The first edition was published in 1948, but it was the publication of an American paperback in 1966 which earned Graves a broad readership in the cultic milieu and in the emerging Neo-Pagan movement.

²⁶¹ These ideas were not new, but synthesised motifs from Jakob Bachofen, Eduard Gerhard, and Jane Ellen Harrison (Cusack 2009b, 337-339; Hutton 1998, 93, 99; 1999, 37, 41).

²⁶² According to Lindop, Graves corresponded with Murray while writing *The White Goddess* (Lindop 1997, ix). Graves and Gardner refer approvingly to each other's work.

third concerns his method. It is striking that Graves in *The White Goddess* always refers to the myths themselves and never to scholarly editions of texts or commentaries. This is because he believed myths to be “True poetry” inspired by the Goddess in her aspect of the Muse. By definition, the myths themselves were thus truer than any academic interpretation of them. Graves furthermore believed himself to be an inspired poet and therefore considered his intuited ‘reconstruction’ of the myths’ historical core to be superior to what other scholars could achieve with their blunted patriarchal rationality (cf. Lindop 1997, ix-x; Hutton 1999, 41).

The Tribunal of the Sidhe approves of Graves’ reliance on intuition and inspiration and shares his belief that myths include an historical core, but the group combines these notions with standard Murray-Gardner duotheism. The Tribunal’s most important loan from Graves is the insistence on the historicity of the Tuatha Dé Dannan. It construes the Tuatha differently from Graves, however, in two ways. First, the Tribunal reinterprets the consequence of the defeat of the Tuatha at the hands of the Milesians. According to the Tribunal, the Tuatha were not driven out of the physical world as a result of “the great strife”, but merely adapted their physical appearance so that they came to look like humans. In doing so, they preserved their special ancestry and some of their magical abilities, including the ability to travel home astrally. The second reinterpretation regards the connection of the Tuatha to the Otherworld. Turning the idea that the Tuatha were physical beings who were forced into the Otherworld upside down, the Tribunal believes that the Tuatha *originated* from the Otherworld (i.e. the astral plane) and only subsequently incarnated on the physical plane.

The second tradition which the Tribunal of the Sidhe draws upon developed at the intersection of the parapsychological and Celticist milieus in the early 20th century. A key figure in this tradition was the French astronomer and spiritist Camille Flammarion who not only believed in life on Mars and in communications with the dead, but also claimed to have proven the existence of fairies. In *Mysterious Psychic Forces* (1909) Flammarion suggested that non-human spirits (“gnomes, spirits, and hobgoblins”) were real, or that they at least constituted phenomena that we have no “scientific absolute right to reject” (1909, 35). After having presented the mediumistic research of himself and others, he writes in his conclusion:

Two inescapable hypotheses present themselves. Either it is we who produce these phenomena [e.g. apparitions] or it is spirits. But mark this well: these spirits are not necessarily the souls of the dead; for other kinds of spiritual beings may exist, and space may be full of them without our ever knowing anything about it, except under unusual circumstances. Do we not find in the different ancient literatures, demons, angels, gnomes, goblins, sprites, spectres, elementals, etc? Perhaps these legends are not without some foundation in fact (Flammarion 1909, 431).

Flammarion's ideas influenced the anthropologist, Celticist, and theosophist Walter Yeeling Evans-Wentz.²⁶³ In his book *The Fairy-Faith in Celtic Countries* (1911), Evans-Wentz presented material on the living folklore of the *sídh*e that he had collected in the Celtic countries, especially in Ireland. Evans-Wentz considered this fairy-faith to be based on fact and advocated the scientific study of fairies. Evans-Wentz' interpretation of the *sídh*e was not only indebted to Flammarion, but also drew heavily on Alfred Trübner Nutt, an English publisher, amateur Celticist, and former president of the Folklore Society. Nutt had introduced the idea of a "Celtic doctrine of Re-birth", namely the "belief, probably widespread, among the ancient Irish that divine personages, national heroes who are members of the Tuatha De Danann or Sidhe race, and great men, can be reincarnated, that is to say, can descend to this plane of existence and be as mortals more than once" (Evans-Wentz 1911, 368).²⁶⁴ Evans-Wentz adopted this idea from Nutt, but went one step further and defended the truth of the Celtic doctrine of Rebirth on theosophical grounds.

Evans-Wentz assumes the reader of *Fairy-Faith* to believe in the existence of a theosophical "astral plane" overlaying the physical plane. This is apparent, for example, when he explains apparitions as the appearance of an "astral double" of the physical body, and when he describes spirit communications as contact with dead spirits who linger on the astral plane. Evans-Wentz presumes, however, that his reader does not yet believe in fairies and attempts to persuade him by recasting fairies in supposedly well-

²⁶³ Evans-Wentz introduces Flammarion as one of the pioneers of psychic research in his introduction to *The Fairy-Faith* (1911, xxxv). He also quotes Flammarion's concluding passage (which I have also quoted in the main text), some of it with emphasis (Evans-Wentz 1911, 481). To this quote Evans-Wentz adds in brackets that the first hypothesis, i.e. the hypothesis that experiences of spirits constitute a purely human product, "is not reasonable" (1911, 481).

²⁶⁴ Nutt's contributions to folkloristics and Celtic studies were taken seriously in his own time. Besides the theory of an original Celtic doctrine of Re-birth, he also formulated the thesis that a grail myth existed among the Celts prior to the romances. In his book *The Holy Grail with Especial Reference to its Celtic Origin* (1888), Nutt attempted to reconstruct the original grail tradition, suggesting for instance that the grail, sword, dish, and lance featuring in the romances were echoes of the four treasures which the Tuatha Dé Dannan had brought with them from the northernmost islands, namely Dagda's cauldron, Náuda's sword of light, the Fál stone, and Lug's spear (cf. Wood 1998, 18). Other scholars, especially R.S. Loomis, continued to champion Nutt's ideas until the 1960s. Also Evans-Wentz was taken seriously as a scholar in his own time, and his *Fairy-Faith* was published on Oxford University Press.

The work of Nutt and Evans-Wentz was known to Tolkien and still possessed academic authority when Tolkien began writing his literary mythology in the late 1910s. It is therefore likely that Tolkien's fictional Quendi were inspired by Nutt and Evans-Wentz. In any case, the Quendi in some texts hold a belief in reincarnation that is very similar to Nutt's Celtic doctrine of Re-birth (cf. section 15.2.4 below). Furthermore, while Tolkien's Elves are different from humans, they are not purely spiritual beings, but incarnate beings that are able to procreate with humans. In this respect they resemble the Tuatha Dé Dannan who are also humans, but special humans who can wield magic and reincarnate what normal humans cannot. Finally, the theme in Tolkien's literary mythology that the Elves used to live among humans, but that this unity cannot be retained, is inspired by the tradition from the *Book of Invasions*.

known terms. Evans-Wentz basically argues that fairies or *sídhe* are a form of astral entities, and that their Otherworld is the astral plane (1911, 29, 167). Since Evans-Wentz' work is not only interesting as background for the Tribunal of the Sidhe but for the Elven movement as well, let me quote his conclusion at some length. Says Evans-Wentz,

(1) Fairyland exists as a supernormal state of consciousness into which men and women may enter temporarily in dreams, trances, or in various ecstatic conditions; or for an indefinite period at death. (2) Fairies exist, because in all essentials they appear to be the same as the intelligent forces now recognized by psychical researchers, be they thus collective units of consciousness like what William James has called 'soul-stuff', or more individual units, like veridical apparitions. (3) Our examination of living children said to have been changed by fairies shows [...] (a) that many changelings are so called merely because of some bodily deformity or because of some abnormal mental or pathological characteristics capable of an ordinary rational explanation, (b) but that other changelings who exhibit a change of personality, such as is recognized by psychologists, are in many cases best explained on the Demon-Possession Theory, which is a well-established scientific hypothesis (1911, 490-491).

In this context, Evans-Wentz' final comments on "changelings" are particularly interesting. It is beyond question that the Tribunal is indebted to Evans-Wentz who here introduced the notion that fairy souls can find their way into human bodies. The Tribunal, however, goes beyond Evans-Wentz when they equate the changelings, whom Evans-Wentz values negatively, with the positively valued reincarnated Tuatha Dé Dannan.

In the works of Graves, Nutt, and Evans-Wentz we find the four main building-blocks needed to construct the Tribunal's Changeling beliefs: the Tuatha Dé Dannan were humans with magical abilities (Graves); the old Irish believed that the Tuatha Dé Dannan could reincarnate (Nutt); the legends about the Tuatha Dé Dannan and the *sídhe* in general reflect the real existence of various spiritual beings living on the astral plane (Evans-Wentz); and Changelings are humans who have happened to become possessed by an astral spirit (Evans-Wentz). It is possible, however, that members of the Tribunal have also been inspired by Dion Fortune's more well-known work *Psychic Self-Defence* (1974) which was first published in 1930 and which promotes ideas very similar to Evans-Wentz'.²⁶⁵ Fortune was a theosophist like Evans-Wentz and hence interested in reincarnation and the existence of various spirits and lines of evolution. In *Psychic Self-Defence*, she touches upon the topic of changelings. According to Fortune, the "psychic vortex" created by a human sexual union normally draws forth a human soul "from the

²⁶⁵ Many of my informants explicitly referred to Evans-Wentz while none brought up Fortune's work. That can easily be explained by the fact that Evans-Wentz is concerned with fairies and changelings in particular, while Fortune's treatment of the topic of changelings is embedded within a general treatise on psychic self-defence. Nevertheless, Fortune's more well-known work may have been more instrumental than Evans-Wentz' in spreading the idea within the cultic milieu in general that humans can sometimes come to possess a non-human soul.

astral plane” that “is ripe for incarnation”. But sometimes it goes wrong and the vortex may

be deflected, as it were, out of the normal line of human evolution, so that it opens and extends into the sphere of evolution of another type of life. Under such circumstances it is theoretically possible for a being of parallel evolution to be drawn into incarnation in a human body (Fortune 1974, 79-80).²⁶⁶

Fortune differentiates between the unfortunate calling forth of a non-human soul (in which case the individual will not feel at home among humans) (1974, 80-81) and the more dangerous incarnation of a positively evil elemental spirit. She referred to incarnated elemental spirits as “changelings” and accused two acquaintances of this condition (Fortune 1974, 145-146). The Tribunal of the Sidhe agrees with Fortune that Changelings are non-human souls in human bodies, but twists the meaning of the term Changelings in two ways. In the Tribunal, the accusation of *others* for being dangerous changelings is substituted by a *positive* self-identification *as* Changeling. Furthermore, the term Changeling is used to refer to the incarnations of merely non-human (fey) spirits rather than to evil elemental spirits.²⁶⁷

10.2.2. The Integration of Tolkien’s Literary Mythology

After Murphy and the two other Irish members of the Circle of Phooka returned to Ireland in 1985, the American members founded three new circles. Lady Danu (Linda Hayes) and Rodger Adams founded the Circle of the Queens in Sacramento, James Vincenzo led the Circle of the Quendi in Los Angeles, and Andrew Pembroke started the Circle of the Rainbow Sidhe in Seattle. A second formative phase now followed in which Murphy’s originally Celtic emphasis was reduced and his teachings on Changelings were elaborated in various ways. As the members say themselves, in this phase the three circles further co-operated in the “recreation” of the tradition of the Tuatha. According to Rose, the Quendi wrote and “refounded” the history of the Tribunal, the Queens “wrote of the teachings of Home”, and the Rainbow Sidhe “wrote the

²⁶⁶ I am indebted to Joseph Laycock (2012a, 70) for pointing out this passage.

²⁶⁷ Evans-Wentz and Fortune were not the only ones to promote a theosophical understanding of fairies. Another important figure was Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, who is best known as the creator of Sherlock Holmes, but who was also a Theosophist and, as it happens, a believer in the existence of fairies. In response to a public debate about a set of photographs that apparently show two young girls from Cottingley playing with fairies, Doyle published *The Coming of the Fairies* (1922) in which he asserted the veracity of the photographs and defended fairy belief in general. On the background of the “Cottingley Fairies” photographs, see Lynch (2006). Furthermore, an organisation named the Fairy Investigation Society was active in Britain from 1927 to around 1990 and counted Walt Disney among its members in its heydays in the 1950s (Young 2013). Long-time secretary of the society, Marjorie Johnson, put together a collection of fairy encounters, most of which were penned down in the 1950s. The collection was only published in the year 2000 (Johnson 2000).

languages and stories of the many races that are from our Home" (2009). Three interrelated developments seem to have taken place in this process: Graves was pushed somewhat to the background and equivalent Wiccan ideas came more to the front; the focus on the Tuatha Dé Dannan lessened in favour of a broader identification with also other kinds of kin folk, especially elves; and Tolkien lore was increasingly integrated into the beliefs of the Tribunal.

The integration of Tolkien material was championed by two of the three original American members, Lady Danu and James Vincenzo. Danu describes Vincenzo as a "Tolkien enthusiast", and the "refounding" of the Tribunal's history carried out by his Circle of the Quendi included a harmonisation of the existing Changeling lore with *S*.²⁶⁸ According to Danu, the members of the Tribunal believe to be "Elvyn or Faerie", the Elvyn corresponding to the Valar²⁶⁹ and the Faeries to the Quendi (290909). The Elvyn are the "firstborn" and are said to have "had a hand" in the creation of the Faeries, something which corresponds more or less to the relation between the Valar and the Quendi in Tolkien's literary mythology. It is a matter of debate in the Tribunal, however, whether the Elvyn created the lesser kin folk or whether these simply belong to subsequent and less powerful generations. In any case, the distinction between the Elvyn and Faeries is not cut in stone. In our communication, Danu also used "the Elvyn" to refer to kin folk in general and sometimes equated the Elvyn with the Elves, while at other times considering the Valar to be a pantheon set apart from the lesser kin folk.²⁷⁰

The Tribunal of the Sidhe has developed rationalisations and justifications for their integration of Tolkien's fiction into their religious practice and beliefs. A central notion is that Tolkien is the Tribunal's historian. Indeed, Danu told me that "after many months of talking and reading [in or around 1985] it dawned on us that Tolkien was our historian, but that he had to change some things to make the story less controversial. [... He told the] *history* of our people through his form of *myth*" (290909; emphasis added). Clearly, Danu here ascribes more reference authority to Tolkien's literary mythology than the

²⁶⁸ One might speculate that the Circle of the Quendi puts a stronger emphasis on Tolkien's lore than other circles of the Tribunal. I therefore tried to get in touch with Vincenzo through Lady Danu, but unfortunately the Circle of the Quendi wished to remain closed.

²⁶⁹ And perhaps to the Maiar as well.

²⁷⁰ It might be that the terminology of the Tribunal is just shaky, but there is another imaginable explanation. Given that the Tribunal of the Sidhe was founded in 1985, it is possible that the group not only read *S*, but also studied Tolkien's *Lost Tales* (*LT I*; *LT II*), the first two volumes of *HoMe* that had been published in 1983 and 1984. Coincidence or not, the Tribunal's terminology is more similar to that of *The Lost Tales*, Tolkien's first version of his mythology, than to the final version of the *Legendarium* published as *S*. For example, the Elves are sometimes referring to as "fairies" in the early texts (e.g. *LT I* 19), an equation also made by Danu. Also like Danu, Tolkien used the term Valar both in a narrow sense referring to the pantheon and (at least on one occasion; *LT I* 65) in an expanded sense that included numerous lesser spirits, including sylphs and pixies, which had entered Eä together with the greater Valar (*LT I* 66). Many of these lesser spirits are furthermore nature spirits associated with Yavanna who plays a significant role in the Tribunal's rituals.

Neo-Pagans treated above (in section 8.3.2). However, Danu also pointed out to me that the Tribunal's reading of Tolkien differs from that of Tië eldaliéva (cf. ch. 16) in that "we do not take Tolkien's works *verbatim*" (Danu 290909).²⁷¹

In practice, the Tribunal approaches Tolkien's literary mythology in a mytho-cosmological mode. That is to say, the group uses a strategy of selective reference ascription that attributes greater referentiality to the supernatural inventory of Tolkien's narrative world than to its history. Let us look, in turn, at the referentiality ascribed to the Valar, the Quendi, and the narrative world's history. The Tribunal members consider the Valar and lesser spirits of Tolkien's world to refer quite literally to the existence of such beings in the actual world. This literal affirmation of the Valar underlies the rituals directed to Yavanna and other members of the Tolkienesque pantheon. The Tribunal also considers Tolkien's Quendi to refer to real beings in the actual world, but this reference is not literal. It rather has the character of 'inverted euhemerism', in so far as Tolkien's relatively human-like Quendi are taken to refer to the relatively less human-like and essentially spiritual astral kin folk. This interpretive move underpins the assertions of those members who claim to be Changeling Quendi. Even though Danu describes Tolkien's as the group's historian, the Tribunal actually does not integrate any of the events in Tolkien's literary mythology into their own religious historiography. It is rather from Graves's account of the Tuatha de Dannan that the Tribunal has the belief that the kin folk used to live with humans until the great strife. Tolkien's narrative shares two motifs with Graves, namely that the Elves/*sídh*e used to rule the world and that the Elves constitute a superior race, but Tolkien lacks the motif a war between humans and Elves. When Danu says that Tolkien is the group's historian that should not be taken to mean that the Tribunal members believe that there is any overlap between the string of events in Tolkien's narrative world and the string of events of the actual world. The point is instead that Tolkien's literary mythology is an imagined story about real supernatural beings: the Valar and the Quendi as examples of the kin folk.

The Tribunal of the Sidhe further legitimises its use of Tolkien's mythology by granting Tolkien himself supernatural power, wisdom, and purpose. Says Danu,

With magickal research we found that [...] JRR Tolkien was a Bard of the Kin Folk [...]. Tolkien was/is a changeling himself. [...] He is known to the people [=the Tuatha; the Changelings] as Tymmedyn Green, a Lord of the elemental North (290909).

I propose to refer to this move as a *source-product reversal*.²⁷² Rather than admitting that they themselves drew on Tolkien (source) to develop their beliefs in Changelings (pro-

²⁷¹ As we shall see in chapter 16, the main difference between Tië eldaliéva and the Tribunal of the Sidhe is actually not that Tolkien is read *verbatim* by the former and not by the latter, but rather that Tolkien's mythology is used more exclusively by Tië eldaliéva while the Tribunal synthesises it with and subordinates it to other material.

duct), they claim that Tolkien was himself a Changeling (product > source) who chose to incarnate and write the Changelings' history (source > product). Actually, not only Tolkien is cast in this hagiographic way. Members of the Tribunal believe that Graves "had kinship with us", and Danu speculates that "Marion [Zimmer Bradley] and her brother Paul could be changelings though they have not been open about it yet" (Danu 290909).

Let me sum up the discussion so far. The beliefs and practices of the Tribunal of the Sidhe combine elements from several traditions: Wicca (duotheology; ritual formats and ritual calendar); Graves (the historicity of the Tuatha Dé Dannan); a spiritist and theosophical tradition with Flammarion, Evans-Wentz, and Fortune (the reality of astral fairies and changelings); and Tolkien's literary mythology (Quendi and Valar). The result is a new tradition of 'Changeling religion'. The Tribunal's Changeling religion is a religious synthesis, for it has emerged, through the creative and selective combination and reinterpretation of elements from various source traditions, as a new, independent, and stable tradition of its own. As we have, elements from Tolkien's literary mythology have been integrated on all levels: into the ritual practice of the group (Valar rituals), into the identity of the members (especially those who identify particularly as Quendi), and into the legitimisation strategy of the group (Tolkien as bard of the kin folk). For this reason, the religion of the Tribunal of the Sidhe can further be categorised as Tolkien-integrating (or broader: fiction-integrating) religion.

10.3. Religious Blending on the Concept Level: Domestication and Compression in the Tribunal of the Sidhe

The Tribunal's synthesis of ideas from Graves, Evans-Wentz, Tolkien, and others into a Changeling mythology of their own revolves around the two key notions of 'kin folk' and 'Changelings'. It is therefore worth looking closer at these two notions and the conceptual blending processes through which they have been constructed. In the first of the two sub-sections that follow, I look at how the Tribunal of the Sidhe has constructed the new category of 'kin folk' as a hypernym for all kinds of fey creatures and how this entails a change in the conceptualisation of the individual kinds of fey creatures, such as the *sidhe*. In the second sub-section, I analyse how the members have developed their identity as Changelings in two steps, first by 'compressing' the earlier notion that one can communicate with fairies into the conviction that some humans are Changelings

²⁷² The source-product reversal is a very common rhetoric move. The term is inspired by Michael Barkun's notion of fact-fiction reversal. Barkun uses this term to denote an interpretive move among conspiracy theorists in which "the commonsense distinction between fact and fiction melts away [...] [and] the two exchange places, [...] [so that it is claimed that] what the world at large regards as fact is actually fiction, and [...] that what seems to be fiction is really fact" (2003, 29). Note that Barkun here uses the term fiction in a broader and more colloquial sense than I do.

possessing fairy souls, and second by claiming that they are themselves in fact Changelings.

10.3.1. *Sídhe*, Satyrs, and Elves as ‘Kin Folk’: Domestication through Categorisation

The Tribunal of the Sidhe believes that the stories about *sídhe*, *álfar*, satyrs, and so on from various mythologies refer to real spiritual beings. Members of the Tribunal furthermore identify with many different types of fey creatures: the group has *sídhe* members, satyr members, and so on (Rose 2009). This is possible, because the ‘true nature’ of the various mythological beings (and of the Quendi and Valar as well) is understood through the Tribunal’s own notion of ‘kin folk’. In other words, the mythological races and (allegedly) historical peoples whom Tribunal members believe in and identify with become subject to a form of *domesticating categorisation*.

This domesticating categorisation combines the two main processes of religious conceptual blending that I discerned in chapter 4, namely concept construction and resemantisation. Most obviously, ‘kin folk’ is a newly constructed category, indeed an over-category encompassing elves, *sídhe*, phookas, and so forth. Furthermore, while the Tribunal continues to reckon with the existence of various fey beings, these beings undergo a process of resemantisation in two ways. First, the classification of the individual few species as kin folk forces them to lose many of their distinctive features. For instance, in Greek mythology, satyrs are goat-like male companions of Pan. In the Tribunal, satyrs are also and primarily a form of kin folk, i.e. spirits who hail from the astral plane and who can choose to reincarnate in human or non-human form on the physical plane. Second, the categorisation as kin folk causes the loss of the exclusivity which the various fey creatures enjoy within their own traditions. For instance, in Tolkien’s literary mythology the Valar, Maiar, and Quendi are the only benign, super-human beings, but as members of the kin folk category their exclusivity is diluted by the co-presence of satyrs, fairies, *sídhe*, gnomes, and so on. This also means that the differences and the hierarchy between different super-human races which exist within the Tribunal’s individual source traditions – such as that between the Valar and the Quendi in Tolkien’s literary mythology – becomes blurred and reduced. In Tolkien’s literary mythology, there is a categorical difference between the divine Valar and created Quendi. In our communication, Danu sometimes maintained this distinction, counting the Valar but not the Quendi among the Elvyn, i.e. among the ‘divine’ kin folk with creative powers to whom rituals are directed. At other times, however, this distinction seemed less important to her, and she told me that some members of the Tribunal identify with the Elvyn, thus indicating that they are not categorically different from other kin folk after all.²⁷³

²⁷³ The process of domesticating categorisation is similar to the process of synonymisation discussed in chapter 4 above. Both processes involve the compression of several notions into one, and hence cause a re-

If the Valar/Elvyn at least sometimes are taken to constitute a special kind of divine kin folk, the *sidhe* and the Tuatha Dé Dannan take up a special position as well. They do so in a different way. Both designations, 'Sidhe' and 'Tuatha Dé Dannan', can either be used to refer to a special type of kin folk or to refer *meronymically* to the kin folk in general. We have an example of the meronymical use in the very name of the group, Tribunal of the Sidhe, where 'the Sidhe' stand for all kin folk. Lady Danu did not experience the various types of kin folk and the various designations for them to be confusing or problematic. Perhaps this is partly because the exact nature of the kin folk is ultimately not what matters most to the members of the Tribunal. More important is their own identification as Changelings and as members of the kin folk in general.

10.3.2. The Category of Changelings: Constructing an Identity through Compression

Like the notion of kin folk, the notion of Changelings emerges as a result of religious conceptual blending of elements from existing fairy lore. In the latter case, the process of religious blending is different, however, and can best be described in terms of *compression*. Indeed, members of the Tribunal construct their Changeling identity by compressing theories *about fairies* (which I use here as a shorthand for all kinds of fey beings) into an identity *as Changelings* (i.e. as Fairies in a human body).²⁷⁴ They compress the notion (from Flammarion and Evans-Wentz) that one can communicate with spiritual fairies into the postulate of being themselves Fairy souls in human bodies. And/or they compress the idea (from Murray, Gardner, and Graves) of being the cultural heirs to the human 'fairy' tribes, especially the Tuatha Dé Dannan, into a claim of physical descent from these aborigines.

This compression of fairy communion into Fairy identity, which the Tribunal of the Sidhe shares with the Elven movement, is the result of a gradual, semiotic process within the 'fairy spirituality' segment of the cultic milieu, a process which has stretched over most of the twentieth century. While the self-identification as Fairy is the most extreme claim one can make within fairy spirituality, a number of less far-reaching claims have been made previously, each of which has increased the plausibility of a subsequent and slightly bolder claim. I have sorted the principal fairy spirituality claims below according

semantisation of the compressed notions. Furthermore, like domesticating categorisation also synonymisation can lead to the construction of a new religious concept. That is for example the case when Jediists claim that chi, prana, Vril, and so forth all refer to the same *real* power, namely the Force. There is also a crucial difference between synonymisation and domesticating categorisation. Where synonymisation entails the complete *equation* of two or more concepts, domesticating categorisation merely fits the source notions into a new over-category. *In casu*, elves, *sidhe*, and phookas are classified as members of the same category, kin folk, but they are not identified with each other.

²⁷⁴ I capitalise the word Fairy when referring to an individuals who identify themselves as fairies.

to increased compression (and boldness). People involved in fairy spirituality have variously claimed,

- (1) to be able to see or sense fairies
- (2) to be able to communicate with fairies
- (3) to have a privileged relationship with fairies (e.g. to have a fairy teacher, protector, or spirit guide)
- (4) to have been possessed (either unwillingly or as a medium) by a fairy
- (5) to have been taken to Faery by the fairies
- (6) to be able to travel to Faery at will
- (7) to share in some way the Fairy nature, essence, or spirit
- (8) to have a Fairy soul or Fairy soul-part co-existing with one's own
- (9) to be oneself a Fairy in a spiritual sense (i.e. being a Fairy soul in a human body)
- (10) to be oneself a Fairy/Elf in a physical/genetic sense

Flammarion, Evans-Wentz, and others claimed in the early twentieth century to be able to communicate with fairies; and many modern Pagans maintain that they are able to see or sense or work with fairies or that they have a fey creature as their personal spirit guide (claims 1-4). At least since the 1960s, members of Feraferia (cf. Ellwood 1971, 135-136) and likeminded Pagans and Neo-Shamans have gone one step further by claiming to be able to travel to Faery/Otherworld and meet the fairies in their own world (claims 5-6). From the 1970s onwards, people have claimed to be themselves Fairies or Elves, such as we have seen it in this chapter and shall see it again in the next (claims 7-10). It is a striking feature of fairy spirituality that new beliefs have been added without giving up the old ones. For example, self-identified Elves continue to see fairies in their garden.²⁷⁵ In other words, modern fairy spirituality appears as a cumulative tradition which has slowly realised an endogenous drive towards Fairy identification.²⁷⁶

²⁷⁵ The angel movement constitutes a similar case. So-called Earth Angels who claim to be incarnated angels continue to invoke their personal guardian angel and the cosmic archangels when practicing angel healing. Also here, the same mythological being simultaneously occupies the position as special self and supernatural helper/other. The Earth Angel movement is large an audience cult centred on Doreen Virtue's books (2002; 2005; 2006; 2007). Virtue's homepage can be visited at <http://www.angeltherapy.com/> [210812].

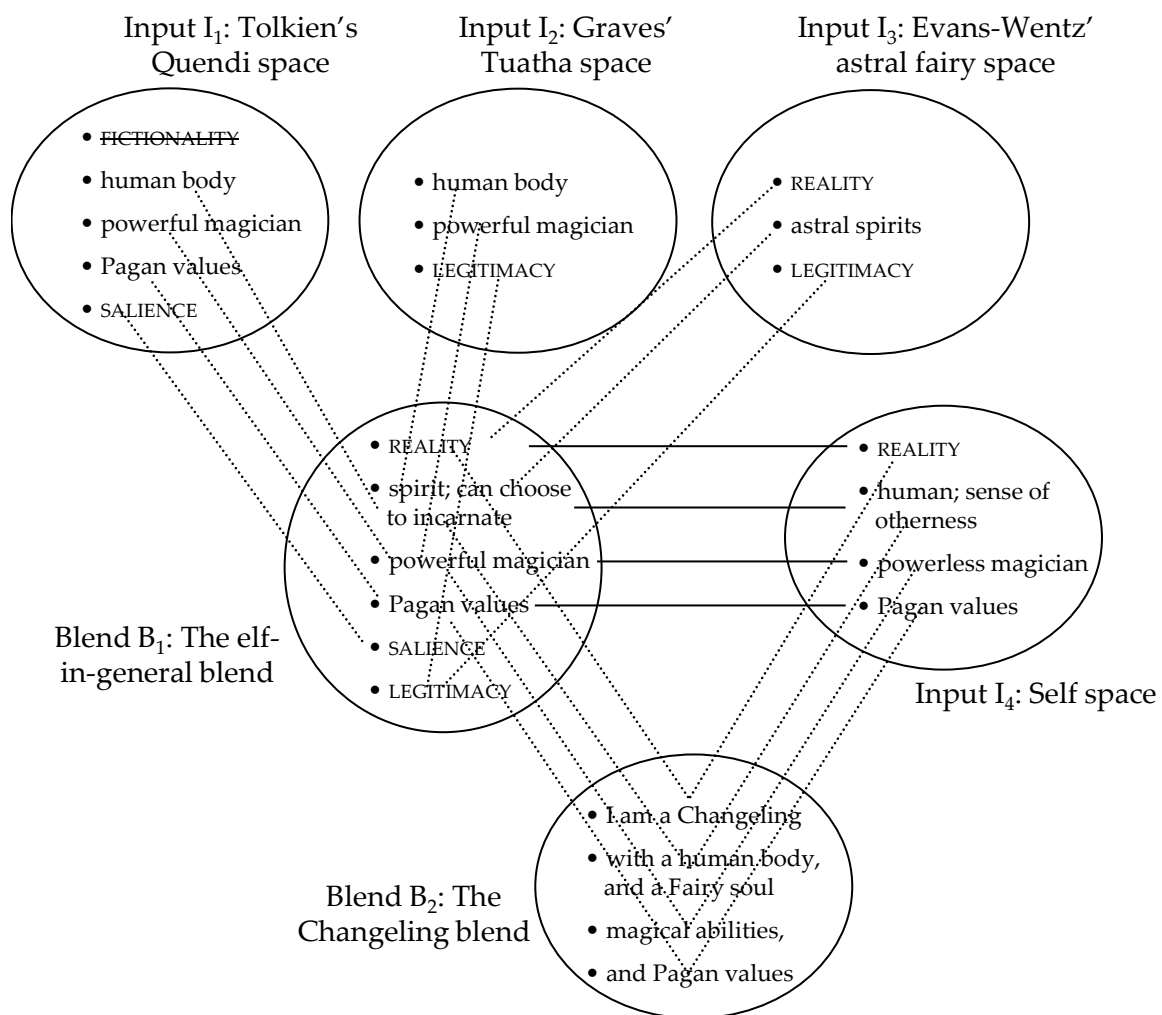
²⁷⁶ Over the course of her own life, Lady Danu had drifted from fairy belief to Fairy identification in the same way as the fairy spiritual milieu. Already as a child, Danu could "hear and see the people, Fey folk" (290909). First she "was not sure who they were", but it clicked when her great grandparents spoke of "the garden friends" and when she at the age of eight began to borrow her own books on mythological beings at the library (Danu 290909). When she was introduced to the notion of Changelings later in life, that idea seemed plausible because she already believed firmly in fairies. Other self-identified Elves I have talked to, reported similar experiences of imaginary childhood friends which they either then or later interpreted as fairies. Perhaps that is not so surprising, for Sarah Pike has noted that recollections of childhood interaction with an imaginary world, including spirits, fairies, and other beings drawn from folk tradition, are very common among Pagans in general. In Pike's words, many adult Pagans used to be "magical children" (2001, 157).

Exogenous factors have also contributed to the emergence of self-identified Elves and Fairies, however. The most important factor has been the humanisation of non-humans in fantasy fiction, a process which was initiated by Tolkien. Indeed, *LR* swept away earlier images of cute Victorian fairies, malicious mound-dwellers, and Santa's little helpers and recast the elf as a wise, powerful, nearly immortal, beautiful, and environmentally aware magician *with a human appearance*. In other words, Tolkien made the elf an attractive role model for contemporary Pagans and magicians. As such, *LR* and *S* greatly facilitated the emergence of the self-identification as Elf (and Changeling), even when this identification got much of its meaning and most of its legitimacy from its integration with more prestigious traditions of fairy spirituality. Indeed, in the Tribunal of the Sidhe, Tolkien's literary mythology seems to supply the imaginary *salience* on which the Changeling identity is founded, while the traditions from Graves and Evans-Wentz supply the lion's share of this identity's *legitimacy*.

It is illuminating to draw on conceptual blending theory (cf. section 4.2.2) to illustrate how the Changeling identity is semantically composed. A graphic illustration of the Changeling Identity Blend is given in figure 10.1.

The Changeling identity emerges as a result of two semantic operations. First, an image of the 'elf-in-general' is constructed through the selective projection of elements from Tolkien's Quendi, Graves' Tuatha, and Evans-Wentz' fairies into a new, semantic space. From Tolkien's Quendi are taken their character (powerful magician, Pagan values), ontology (human body), and imaginary salience – but not their fictionality. These features are combined with the alleged reality of the Tuatha Dé Dannan and the astral fairies and with the legitimacy and prestige enjoyed by Graves and Evans-Wentz in the cultic milieu. All this is projected into a new blended space. It is this blended image of the elf/*sidhe*/Tuatha-in-general which members of the Tribunal (and the Elven movement) identify with, rather than Tolkien's Quendi or Graves' Tuatha specifically. In a second move, features that are considered to be shared between the self and the elf-in-general (e.g. Pagan values, magical practice, and the sense of being psychologically or socially in some way different from most humans) can be projected into a second blended space of the Changeling self.²⁷⁷ These shared features are connected via the Vital Relations of Analogy and Similarity, but are compressed into Identity (I am a Changeling) in the blend.

²⁷⁷ Due to the semiotic focus of this thesis I do not discuss the psychology of those involved in Tolkien religion. It must be noted here, however, that those of my informants who feel to be Changelings or Elves typically report that they as children and young adults had unusual experiences and did not fit in well socially. For these individuals, the adoption of a none-human identity provides explanation and empowerment: Rather than being odd, they are in fact very special. I will touch upon this theme briefly again in section 11.3.3 on conversion to Elvishness and in section 14.3.3 on the Tolkien-affirming Elven group, Indigo Elves.

Figure 10.1. The Changeling Identity Blend

The Changelings furthermore legitimise their identity and this legitimisation has the character of source-product reversal. Rather than admitting that they have constructed the identity as Changelings (product) by drawing on Graves, Evans-Wentz, Tolkien, and pre-Christian mythologies (sources) as sketched above, they claim that the Changelings existed originally (product > source) and that the pre-Christian fairy folklore and the writings of Graves, Evans-Wentz, and Tolkien all constitute historiographical or literary interpretations of this real phenomenon (source > product). This source-product reversal intends to create a semiotic effect of veracity by postulating a 'true story behind the legend'.

10.4. The Social Organisation of the Tribunal of the Sidhe and the Group's Place within the Spiritual Tolkien Milieu

A few years after the formation of the Tribunal, Lady Danu and six other Changelings formed the Circle of the Sidhe, the first "open circle" that reached out to the public with

“open Sabbats” and a formalised “learning and recognition” system (Rose 2009). Other circles continued to hive off, and according to Danu the Tribunal now consists of more than 20 circles worldwide.²⁷⁸ These circles differ in size and openness. Lady Danu’s current circle, the Circle of the Coyote, was founded in 1999 and is both the largest and the most open, hosting eight open Sabbats each year. While most circles have between 3 and 20 members, the Circle of the Coyote had 25 active members when I talked to Lady Danu in 2009. It presently has 115 registered users on its homepage (per 180712, not counting myself).

The data that I have collected about the Tribunal of the Sidhe reveal little detail about the nature of the organisation. I do not know, for instance, how the circles relate to each other, how great the membership turnover is, or how power is negotiated and distributed within the movement. But I do know that the circles are organised as (offline) communities rather than as mere networks, that members meet regularly for both social and ritual purposes, and that they share an explicit identity as Changelings. The plausibility of this identity is maintained through collective activities and a body of Changeling mythology about the astral Home, the great strife, and Tolkien as the kin folk’s bard. Members share these beliefs and new members are systematically instructed in them. The growth of the Tribunal shows that this is an effective cocktail. Especially important is the fact that some of the movement growth can be accounted for by the socialisation of the second generation. Lady Danu pointed out that James Vincenzo’s son, James Vincenzo, Jr., leads a circle that is made up mostly of children of first-generation Changelings.

Since the Tribunal of the Sidhe was founded as an offline group, outreach has taken place mostly in the local areas of the circles. Online outreach is quite new and the Tribunal is therefore poorly integrated with the Internet-based Tolkien milieu. More strikingly, the Tribunal and the Elven movement seem to have developed in parallel and with little mutual contact despite the obvious similarities between the two and despite the fact that the Elven movement and the Tribunal emerged from the same milieu of American West Coast Pagans and magicians.²⁷⁹ I am not sure why that is so, but it might have to do with differences in organisation, the Tribunal having adopted a Wiccan-style organisation with coven-like circles and a study programme for new members, while the Elven movement is a looser network of solitaires. In any case, it is to the use of Tolkien’s literary mythology in the Elven movement that we turn in the following chapter. Before

²⁷⁸ Many of these circles have their own ‘group’ with members, information, and discussions on the homepage of Danu’s Circle of the Coyote. See <http://thechangeling.ning.com> [180712].

²⁷⁹ It was not until 2008 that Danu’s group was found by Calantirniel of Tië eldaliéva and a link became established between the Tribunal of the Sidhe and the online Tolkien milieu. A further indication of the isolation of the Tribunal from the Tolkien milieu and the Elven movement is the fact that Orion Sandstorm (2012) does not refer to it in his ‘Otherkin Timeline’ which, by contrast, covers the early years of the Elven movement quite comprehensively.

doing so, let me illustrate the diversity of the Pagan appropriation of *S* with a brief discussing of two individuals who developed Tolkien-integrating Pagan paths in the 1980s and who still stick to them.

10.5. Some Other Tolkien-integrating Pagan Paths

Morcelu Atreides is a particularly interesting Tolkien-inspired Pagan.²⁸⁰ Raised a Mormon, Morcelu encountered *S* in 1986 when he was 14 years old, and helped along by a high school sweetheart who had been raised with Tolkien's works "as a belief", he embraced Tolkien's *Legendarium* as the foundational text for his own spirituality. Like the members of the Tribunal of the Sidhe, Morcelu works rituals with Varda and the other Valar and uses meditational techniques to connect with them. Morcelu made it clear to me, however, that he does not see the Valar as gods, but as "teachers and guiders". Differing from the Tribunal, however, Morcelu considers Eru to be the only real deity in Tolkien's mythology. Being a "Polyfold Dualtheistic practitioner", however, he has felt impelled to equip Eru with a spouse. There is no mention of such a spouse in Tolkien's writings, but Morcelu reasons that you "can't have a father without a mother". Morcelu's literal affirmation of the spiritual beings in Tolkien's literary mythology is mirrored by a mytho-historical reading of Tolkien's narratives as ancient history. Morcelu believes that the events of *S*, *H*, and *LR* "unfolded before Pangaea was broken apart" and reasons that all traces of Middle-earth were swept away by "the flood that is recorded in Genesis" at the end of the Fourth Age, i.e. the age which begins after the destruction of the Ring in *LR*.²⁸¹ Drawing on the appendices in *LR*, Morcelu has furthermore constructed his own ritual calendar. Parallel to his spiritual engagement with the *Legendarium*, Morcelu has been active in the Tolkien language community and taught himself Quenya.

Morcelu is not only interesting because he has developed a synthetic Pagan-Tolkien tradition like that of the Tribunal of the Sidhe, but also because he is teaching the tradition to others. He has taught a handful of people, but only two have completed his instruction program, partly because only those who successfully establish contact with the Valar can proceed beyond a certain step.²⁸² Morcelu told me that of all his students, his own daughter (who was 15 years old in 2010) is most skilled in communicating with the Valar.

²⁸⁰ This paragraph builds on email contact with Morcelu in the spring of 2010.

²⁸¹ Morcelu here departs from the standard mytho-historical reading of Tolkien which equates the Flood in Genesis and the 'historical' event behind the Atlantis myth with the destruction of Númenor (during the Second Age of Arda).

²⁸² Morcelu has no homepage. He told me that he does not actively proselytise for his faith, but simply teaches those individuals who find him. He also told me that he had become particularly cautious after an incident where he and two fellow Pagans were beaten up by Christians who mistook them for Satan-worshippers.

Another Tolkien-integrating Pagan path is Tony “Brian Dragon” Spurlock’s so-called Draconian Pictish Elven Witchcraft. Spurlock’s tradition is an off-shoot of Victor and Cora Anderson’s Feri tradition and integrates elements from Robert E. Howard’s *Conan the Barbarian* series and from Tolkien’s literary mythology.²⁸³ Both Morcelu and Spurlock profess to feel a connection with the Elves, both the elves of folklore and the Quendi of Tolkien’s *Legendarium*, and at least Morcelu believes that Elves are being reincarnated into human bodies in this world at present. As far as I know, neither of the two believes to be Elves themselves, neither genetically so nor soul-wise.

²⁸³ See <http://www.pictdom.org/HidnKing.htm> [041013].