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

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## Chapter 13. Summoning the Valar, Divining with Elves: Tolkien and Western Magic

Two cases of Tolkien-based magic shall be treated in this chapter. The first case is the “High Elvish Working”, an elaborate piece of ceremonial magic in which the Valar are evoked. The Valar ritual was developed in 1993 by a North Carolina group, the Fifth Way Mystery School, and was later widely disseminated in Neo-Pagan circles. It also influenced the rituals of the Legendarium-based groups to be discussed in chapter 16. The second case is the *Lord of the Rings Tarot Deck and Card Game* published in 1997 by British Tarot expert Terry Donaldson. The deck is accompanied by a 200-page long book with card interpretations, new spreads, and guidelines on how to use the deck to induce visualisations of Middle-earth.

The classification of the Valar Working of the Fifth Way Mystery School and Donaldson’s *LR* Tarot deck as magic does not rest on a Frazerian or Durkheimian distinction between magic and religion. Instead it means that the rituals and rationalisations to be considered here are formulated within the Western magic tradition, a stream of Western esotericism which was given almost canonical form by the British *fin de siècle* group the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. The order was founded in 1888 by Samuel Liddell “MacGregor” Mathers and William Wynn Westcott and experienced a short golden age in the 1890s with more than a hundred members. Rivalry among the leading members led to the formation of several splinter groups in which prominent former members continued to develop the Golden Dawn tradition. These members included Arthur Edward Waite, the creator of the standard Rider-Waite Tarot deck, and Aleister Crowley who is probably the most well-known twentieth century occultist.<sup>363</sup>

Like the Tribunal of the Sidhe and the Elven movement, both the Fifth Way Mystery School and Donaldson’s *LR* Tarot can be considered instances of *Tolkien-integrating religion*. Tolkien material is integrated into a framework of Golden Dawn-inspired ceremonial magic (FWMS) or Golden Dawn-inspired Tarot (Donaldson). The Valar Working and the *LR* Tarot differ from the rituals of other Tolkien-integrating groups (considered in chapters 11 and 14) because they were never intended to form the core of a new religious tradition. The Valar Working was a playful experiment and never

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<sup>363</sup> For a short overview of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn and of Aleister Crowley’s offshoot, the Ordo Templi Orientis, see Aspren (2014). The history of the order and the early splinter groups is told in full by King (1970) and Gilbert (1997). For collections of the Golden Dawn’s teachings and rituals, see Torrens (1969), Regardie (1989), and King and Skinner (1976).

a part of the Fifth Way Mystery School's standard practice. And while Donaldson seeks to correlate Tolkien's mythology with other esoteric traditions, the *LR* deck itself is but a religious optional which Tolkien religionists and other individuals within the cultic milieu can combine freely with other practices. In other words, while both the Valar Working and the use of the *LR* Tarot are 'blended rituals' that merge elements from Tolkien's mythology with other material, they are not parts of new religious syntheses on the level of tradition.

Since the material analysed in this chapter constitutes prescribed rather than actualised rituals, I cannot say anything conclusive about how ritualists have rationalised the Tolkien entities evoked in the Valar Working or in meditations based on the *LR* Tarot. Although literal affirmation is possible (or *afforded* by the ritual formats), both the Fifth Way Mystery School and Terry Donaldson seem to intend some form of transformative rationalisation hovering between the dynamistic and the Jungian (cf. ch. 5). Underlying this is a reading of Tolkien's literary mythology in the mythopoeic mode, i.e. as stories in which real powers, be they cosmic or psychological, reveal themselves in mythically transfigured forms.

## 13.1. The Valar Working of the Fifth Way Mystery School

### 13.1.1. Steeped in Tolkieniana: The Valar Working as Tolkien-integrating Magic

The Fifth Way Mystery School (FWMS) was a North Carolina initiative, founded in 1988 and devoted to various kinds of ceremonial magic and occult mysteries, including the Kabbalah, Enochian Magick, the Grail, Earth mysteries, Elven Magick, and more.<sup>364</sup> Members shared an interest in magic, but combined this with different religious commitments as testified by the fact that former FWMS members in the 1990s founded both the Christian "non-denominational interfaith church" Red Grail Ministries, and a Pagan organisation called Order of the Red Grail: Church of Transformational Wicca, in Nebraska (Bridges 030310).<sup>365</sup> Among the persons instrumental to the creation of the FWMS was Vincent Bridges, a magician and (co-)author of several books and articles on alchemy, eschatology, UFOs, the Grail, and other esoteric subjects.<sup>366</sup> Led by Bridges, a group of FWMS members who were all "steeped in Tolkieniana" decided in 1993 to create a Tolkien-based ritual (Bridges 030310).

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<sup>364</sup> The homepage of the FWMS went offline in 2013, and had by then not been updated for several years. At the time of writing (late 2013), the group seems defunct in its original constitution, but its initiators are still active in other groups and projects. The "overview" page, which describing the founding of the FMWS, was captured for the last time by the Internet Wayback Machine on 30 August 2013. See <http://web.archive.org/web/20130430165925/http://www.fifthwaymysteryschool.org/overview.html> [050314].

<sup>365</sup> The Red Grail Ministries can be visited at <http://www.redgrail.org/> [050314]. The Order of the Red Grail: Church of Transformational Wicca in Nebraska can be visited at <http://orderoftheredgrail.org/> [050314].

<sup>366</sup> Vincent Bridges' homepage can be found <http://www.vincentbridges.eu/> [050314].

Despite being both Tolkien fans and fascinated by elves, none of the members of FWMS had been in contact with any self-identified Elves or other groups integrating elements from Tolkien's literary mythology. According to Bridges, the FWMS did not even know that any such groups existed (030310). They composed from scratch an Elven magical ritual in which ceremonial magic provided the structure and form, while the content was made up by elements from the narrative religion of *LR* and *S*. From *LR* was lifted Arwen's hymn to Elbereth (*LR* 238) which is the closest we come to an Elven ritual in *LR* (cf. section 7.2.4). From *S* was taken a great deal of information about the Valar (cf. sections 9.1.2 and 9.1.3), not only from the *Valaquenta*, but from the entire book. As a consequence, familiarity with *S* is required to comprehend and enjoy the ritual. Furthermore, an exchange of greetings was taken from one of the books of *HoMe*, and phrases were composed in Quenya for the ritual. Like in all the *S*-based instances of Tolkien spirituality considered so far, religionists take the perspective of the Elves, not of the Hobbits.

### 13.1.2. Summoning the Valar: The High Elvish Working as Religious Blending

The prescribed format for the "High Elvish Working Based Upon J. R. R. Tolkien's Mythic World" proceeds in the following seven phases.<sup>367</sup>

1. No Form, breathing, OMs
2. Meta-programming protocol (Lesser Banishing Ritual of the Pentagram, Cross of the Elements, Middle Pillar, Caduceus)
3. Elvish Supreme Invoking Ritual of the Pentagram
4. Rending of the Veil/Hymn to Elbereth
5. Calling the Lords of the Valar
6. Silent Communion with the Valar
7. Closing/Hymn to Elbereth

As preparation for the ritual, the FWMS produced various Tolkien paraphernalia (banners, tablets, etc.). Every participant took on a role, impersonating one of the Elven characters of *LR* during the ritual.

The first two phases of the Valar Working are identical to the standard opening of the rituals of the group.<sup>368</sup> The "No Form" exercise is a basic bodily exercise aimed at "calming and comforting the physical body so that it can access higher energies". It is followed by a breathing exercise and the repeated intonation of the sacred Sanskrit syllable 'Om'. The second phase consists of the group's elaborate "Meta-programming

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<sup>367</sup> <http://web.archive.org/web/20130430174512/http://www.fifthwaymysteryschool.org/valar.html> [050314]. This page has been captured for the last time by the Internet Wayback Machine on 30 April 2013.

<sup>368</sup> Therefore information about these phases is found on the page with overviews of the "FWMS Exercises & Basic Rituals" rather than in the Elvish ritual format itself. Also this page has been captured on 30 April 2013 by the Internet Wayback Machine. See <http://web.archive.org/web/20130430154434/http://www.fifthwaymysteryschool.org/fwmsx.html> [050314].

protocol" aiming to create and purify a magical space within which contact can be sought with the spiritual realm. In the characteristically pseudo-scientific and geomantic terminology of the FWMS, the protocol is described as employing a "series of ortho-rotational processes" to create a "metaxic monad" in which "space/time is folded back into an embedded hyper-sphered cube", allowing "spiritual energy, or psions, to be stepped down through the orthogonal layers of the Omni-verse directly into our DNA".<sup>369</sup> The meta-programming protocol is a sequence of preparatory rites built around the Lesser Banishing Ritual of the Pentagram and includes a total of seven sub-phases:

1. The Cross of the Elements
2. The Middle Pillar
3. Formulation of the Pentagrams
4. Hailing of the Archangels
5. The Cross of the Elements
6. The Middle Pillar
7. The Caduceus

The central phase of the meta-programming protocol is The Formulation of the Pentagrams, in which each cardinal point and corresponding element is contacted in turn (East/Air, South/Fire, West/Water, North/Earth) while intoning the corresponding names of God (IHVH, ADNI, AHIH, AGLA). The banishing pentagram of Earth is drawn for each cardinal point. This phase is followed by the hailing of the four Archangels, Raphael, Gabriel, Michael, and Auriel, and of "Shekinah El, the presence of God itself".<sup>370</sup> The Pentagram Ritual (sub-phases three and four) is both preceded and followed by the Cross of the Elements and the Middle Pillar Exercise. The aim of the Cross of the Elements is to draw the qualities and powers of the elements into the magician. In the Middle Pillar Exercise, the magician visualises himself as the middle pillar (of Balance) of the Kabbalistic Tree of Life and intones the names of the pillar's five *sefirot* in order to draw down the power of Spirit through the five corresponding chakras. The Caduceus, named after the staff of Hermes, is a visualisation sequence.<sup>371</sup>

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<sup>369</sup> See footnote 368.

<sup>370</sup> See footnote 368.

<sup>371</sup> The meta-programming protocol is a variation of the preparatory rites used by the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn to ready the magician and the space for magical work. The FWMS follows roughly the formats and instructions published by Golden Dawn members Aleister Crowley (1929a), Israel Regardie (1989; 1998), and Robert George Torrens (1969) and by later ceremonial magicians in the Golden Dawn tradition, such as Francis King and Stephen Skinner (1976).

The FWMS breathing exercise is probably a variation of the "Four Fold Breath" prescribed by Regardie as preparation for any mediation or magic (1989, Vol. 1, 105). The No Form exercise has roughly the same form and function as the basic "Meditation No. 1" (Regardie 1989, Vol. 1, 105), and the OM exercise of the FWMS might be based on another basic meditation of the Golden Dawn centred on OM (spelled AUM; Regardie 1989, Vol. 1, 133). The presence of The Lesser Banishing Ritual of the Pentagram is to be expected, as this ritual should, according to Regardie, "precede every phase of magical work, elementary as

The elaborate introductory rituals focusing on the cardinal points and elements are continued in phase three of the Working with a Supreme Invoking Ritual of the Pentagram. In the Golden Dawn system, the Supreme Ritual of the Pentagram differs from the Lesser Ritual by having four different invoking pentagrams drawn, corresponding to the four elements, rather than simply the banishing pentagram of Earth for all cardinal points. In addition, one of the pentagrams of Spirit is formulated for each cardinal point.<sup>372</sup> In the Valar Working, the FWMS simplifies the Golden Dawn format, using only the four invoking pentagrams of the elements, but not the pentagrams of Spirit. They also fill the format with Elven content. Instead of vibrating the names of God, two vibrations are made in Quenya for each cardinal point/element. For East is vibrated "Palanquen lom luineil aglar rom!" (Qu: "Far and wide, the echoes speak of the Blue light's brilliance at the moment of its arising!"), and after drawing the invoking pentagram of Earth is intoned "Romen" (Qu: "The Eastern Way!").<sup>373</sup> The standard order

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well as advanced" (1989, Vol. 1, 75; cf. Vol. 3, 15; cf. King and Skinner 1976, 204). The standard banishing ritual proceeds in four phases: 1. Qabalistic Cross, 2. Inscription of Pentagrams, 3. Invocation of the Archangels, 4. Qabalistic Cross (Regardie 1989, Vol. 1, 107; King and Skinner 1976, 205-206). The FWMS follows the Golden Dawn format fairly close in phases 2 and 3 (cf. Crowley 1929a, 379-380; Regardie 1989, Vol. 1, 106-107; Vol. 3, 9-17; 1998, 47-67; Torrens 1969, 155-156; King and Skinner 1976, 207-208), though the hailing of "Shekinah El" is an unusual addition. The Cross of the Elements used by the FWMS in phases 1 and 4 as a substitute for the Qabalistic Cross is basically a de-Christianised and elaborated version of the latter. The Lesser Banishing Ritual of the Pentagram is widely known in the cultic milieu because it was among the rituals taught to non-initiated aspirants by the Golden Dawn, and because it was transformed by Gerald Gardner into the basic circle-casting ritual of Wicca by substituting the hailing of the Archangels with the de-Christianised hailing of the "Watchtowers" or "Guardians" of the four cardinal points.

The Middle Pillar Exercise (cf. Regardie 1998, 69-83; 209-219; also Regardie 1989, Vol. 1, 181; Torrens 1969, 171-172; King and Skinner 1976, 236-237) was originally a ritual for the Inner Order, being the "practical exercise that accompanied the Portal grade" (Regardie 1989, Vol. 1, 79). Regardie considers it to be "one of the most important practical systems employed by the Order" (1989, Vol. 1, 80), and one that can be performed as alternative to the Pentagram Ritual (1989, Vol. 1, 180). The FWMS follows Torrens' advise to use the Middle Pillar exercise in combination with the Pentagram Ritual (1969, 189). In Regardie's elaborations on the Middle Pillar Exercise, it is always concluded with a "circulation of the light" or a "circumambulation" of the raised energy through one's body (1998, 85-100, 218-219). The Caduceus of the FWMS can be seen as a variation of this phase.

<sup>372</sup> The Golden Dawn sources use different names for this ritual. Crowley calls it the "Greater Invoking Ritual of the Pentagram" (1929a, 380-382), a practice followed by King and Skinner (1976, 209). Regardie refers to it as the "Supreme Invoking Ritual of the Pentagram" (1989, Vol. 3, 18). FWMS follows Regardie. All sources agree that this ritual can only be performed after clearing the space with a Lesser Banishing Ritual of the Pentagram (cf. King and Skinner 1976, 209). In the Golden Dawn system, the Greater/Supreme Invoking Ritual of the Pentagram consists of the same four phases as the Lesser Pentagram Ritual (1. Qabalistic Cross, 2. Inscription of Pentagrams, 3. Invocation of the Archangels, 4. Qabalistic Cross), with only the second phase being different and more elaborate (Regardie 1989, Vol. 3, 18-19; King and Skinner 1976, 214). The FWMS did not repeat their preparatory sequence (Cross of the Elements and Middle Pillar Exercise) around the Elvish Supreme Pentagram Ritual. Nor did they hail the Archangels again, perhaps because the Calling of the Lords of the Valar was seen as substituting that phase.

<sup>373</sup> See footnote 367. The four phrases seem to have been created for the occasion of the ritual.

in pentagram rituals is altered slightly by swapping North and West as to end up facing the Blessed Realm for the following phase, the rending of the Veil.<sup>374</sup>

Having now prepared the magical space, a connection with the spiritual realm can be established by rending the Veil. This is done by reciting Arwen's hymn to Elbereth/Varda from *LR* (238). Adding a touch of ceremonial magic, each of the seven lines of the hymn is accompanied by a specific gesture. The hymn is to be recited in its original Sindarin, but Bridges has supplied a translation in an appendix to the ritual format. It is given here below together with an alternative translation provided by Gwineth of Ilsaluntë Valion:

| <b>Table 13.1. Translations of Arwen's Elbereth Hymn</b>        |  |   |
|---|--|---|
| <i>Sindarin original</i>  | <i>Vincent Bridges' translation</i> <sup>375</sup>                           | <i>Gwineth's translation</i> <sup>376</sup>                           |
| <i>A Elbereth Gilthoniel,</i>                                   | Oh Queen of the Stars, the brilliant<br>Starlight                            | Oh Elbereth starkindler!  |
| <i>silivren penna míriel</i>                                    | (is a) high shining being – a radiant star<br>shone                          | white-glittering, sparkling like a<br>jewel                           |
| <i>o menel aglar elenath!</i>                                   | of heavenly glory – crystallized starlight                                   | slants down the glory of the<br>starry host                           |
| <i>Na-chaered palan-díriel</i>                                  | (nah-chaered) far and wide the starlight<br>shines                           | Having gazed into the distance  |
| <i>o galadhremmin</i><br><i>ennorath,</i>                       | on the tree woven world of this middle<br>land                               | from this tree-woven land of<br>Middle-earth                          |
| <i>Fanuilos, le linnathon</i><br><i>nefaear, sí nef aearon!</i> | (Fanuilos), let the holy beings sing<br>without my holiness, no one is holy! | Snow-white, I will sing to Thee<br>on this side of the Sundering Sea! |

The personal mode of addressing, initiated with the Elbereth hymn, is continued in the fifth phase of the ritual with the calling of the "Lords of the Valar". In seven evocations, the seven male Valar (Lords) and a single Valië (Lady) are called forth and greeted in the following order: Manwë, Varda (Elbereth), Ulmo, Aulë, Oromë, the Fëanturi (Námo and Irmo), and Tulkas. Each is addressed with a spoken "call" (or in Aulë's case a short hymn). Oromë is for instance hailed with these words:

We greet thee now, great Orome, King of the forest and opener of the Way.  
With Vana you have refreshed and served Valinor. In darkness you once  
sought your people, bringing them into the light. You taught them songs

<sup>374</sup> This is no unusual variation (cf. King and Skinner 1976, 204), and follows the Enochian correspondences of cardinal points and elements given by John Dee rather than the correspondences used by the Golden Dawn.

<sup>375</sup> See footnote 367.

<sup>376</sup> Gwineth (030310).



and the secret songs of bird and beast. At the sound of your horn, the trees did grow.

As Tauron you rode forth upon the white steed, pursuing the Enemy to the ends of the Earth. Alone among the Valar you faced him without fear. And in the time of Great Darkness you helped bring forth the two great lights. When we were lost and forsaken, you alone remained among us, your secret songs a light for us all. Come now again to the aid of those who would be your people.

Show us again the secret path to the High Place; teach us again the mysteries of the Wild Hunt; once more bring your light to us.<sup>377</sup>

These calls show that Bridges and associates were well versed in the theology of *S*. We have references to each Vala's epithet (here Tauron), role (hunter), attributes (the horn Valaróma and the steed Nahar), and important deeds (Oromë first found the Elves, "us"/"your people", *S* 40; led them on "the Way" to the West to live with the Valar in the "High Place", *S* 50-51; and helped create the Sun and the Moon, "the two great lights", *S* 110). Often the spouse (here Vána) is mentioned, but not herself addressed. The only exception is Varda, Manwë's spouse.<sup>378</sup>

Each call is followed by an exchange of greetings in Quenya:

Caller: "Eleni silir lumesse omentiemman" (Qu: The stars shine on the meeting of our people).

Rest of group: "Elen sila lumenn' omentielvo" (Qu: A star shines on the hour of our meeting).<sup>379</sup>

This is a variation of the greetings exchanged by Frodo and Gildor in *LR* (81, 85). The answer corresponds to Frodo's salutation (*LR* 81), but the call is found in neither *LR* nor *S*. It comes instead from the sixth volume of *HoMe*, *Return of the Shadow* (*RS*), where we encounter it in an early version of the *LR* passage as "Eleni silir lúmesse omentiemman" (*RS* 324).

The calling of the Valar is followed by a silent communion with the Valar, in which lembas bread and cordial or mead is shared (phase 6). This phase of the ritual seems to be based on the "cakes and wine" ceremony which is common in Wicca after magical work. As the seventh and closing phase of the ritual, the Elbereth hymn is repeated and the summoned Valar are given license to depart.

The Valar Working can be characterised as a blended ritual. It mixes elements from two sources: ceremonial (Golden Dawn) magic and Tolkien's literary mythology. The manner of blending is asymmetric in that one tradition (ceremonial magic) provides the frame, and the other (Tolkien's mythology) merely part of the content. That the Tolkien-

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<sup>377</sup> See footnote 367.

<sup>378</sup> Yavanna and Nienna are not mentioned, even though they are counted among the Aratar, the eight most powerful Valar (*S* 21; cf. section 9.1.2). I cannot explain the focus on the male Valar, which follows no logic inherent to Tolkien's texts.

<sup>379</sup> See footnote 367.

esque ritual was constructed in this way – with Tolkien material being framed, rather than providing the ritual frame itself – was to be expected, as Tolkien’s literary mythology hardly includes any rituals (cf. sections 7.2.4 and 9.1.5).

The FWMS did more, however, than just fitting existing Tolkien lore (the Elbereth hymn and greetings) into a Golden Dawn ritual. The most fascinating thing about this ritual, and a fact that heralds the creativity of later Tolkien-based groups, is that they also created several new ritual elements following the logic of Tolkien’s mythology. These were the callings of the Valar and the vibrations for the Supreme Invoking Ritual of the Pentagram, the latter even being written in Quenya. To some extent, the creators of this ritual asked themselves ‘what would the Elves have done?’ and tried to elaborate on Tolkien’s literary mythology from inside the tradition. In other words, besides the integration of Tolkien material into a ceremonial magical frame, another principle of religious creativity was at work here, namely that of intra-traditional elaboration and invention.

### **13.1.3. The Truth beyond Tolkien’s Created Arda: Rationalisation in the Fifth Way Mystery School**

I do not know which ‘social contract’ governed the performance of the ritual, i.e. whether the participants considered the activity to be play or ritual. As pointed out in section 2.1.3 above, play (or make-believe) is governed by a fiction contract which deems all utterances made in the play mode referential only relative to a fictional play world and not relative to the actual world. By contrast, the utterances made in religious rituals, like the utterances made in all other forms of non-play activity, are recognised by the participants as being intended to refer to states of affairs in the actual world. Religious rituals are thus governed by what I referred to as a ‘reality contract’. Since play can imitate non-play, we do not know for sure whether the members of the FWMS approached the Valar Working as a serious ritual or as a playful imitation of a serious ritual. We also do not know how the participants experienced the ritual, or how they rationalised it *post hoc*. I have asked Vincent Bridges per email about these matters both in 2010 and 2012 and contacted also another member, StormBear, in 2012, but I never received an answer. We will therefore have to make do with a preliminary answer based on hints in the ritual format itself.

In the preamble to the ritual format, it is explained that the Valar Working was set up in order to “explore the Truth beyond J.R.R. Tolkien’s created Arda” with “known and effective magickal techniques and theory”.<sup>380</sup> That Arda is characterised as “created” and not as for instance “discovered” or “channelled” suggests that the FWMS viewed Tolkien’s mythology as fiction rather than as revelation. The fact that each participant identified with a particular Elven character and thus played a role also makes the ritual

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<sup>380</sup> See footnote 367.

look somewhat more like live action role-playing than like serious ceremonial magic. Furthermore, the FWMS considered this ritual particularly appropriate for public performance (Bridges 030310). Clearly, the Valar ritual was seen as more playful and experimental than the group's usual rituals. Nevertheless, the FWMS believes a (capitalised) Truth to hide behind Tolkien's work. It thus seems that Tolkien's mythology is considered to occupy a space between revelation and fiction, as truth camouflaged as myth.

We can say that the Valar Working affords three different rationalisations of itself and of Tolkien's literary mythology. First, it is possible to consider the Valar to be real and distinct spiritual beings with whom real contact can be made during ritual. Such a literal-affirmative rationalisation of the Valar would go together with a mytho-cosmological reading of Tolkien's literary mythology. The ritual also affords the rationalisation of the Valar as mere names for other real divine powers (supernaturalistic transformation), and hence a reading of Tolkien's literary mythology in the mythopoeic mode. Finally, the ritual can be performed entirely in the mode of play, i.e. as a make-believe ritual based on a real ritual format. Even in this case, however, the ritual should probably be considered an instance of 'serious play'. That is to say, while the Valar would in this case be considered entirely imaginary entities, that would not rule out a binocular reading of Tolkien's literary mythology as fiction pointing to real spiritual truths. I do not know in which of these three ways the FWMS originally performed the ritual or intended others to use it.

#### **13.1.4. The Place of the Valar Working in the Spiritual Tolkien Milieu**

The FWMS has occasionally performed the Valar Working at Pagan festivals. When I corresponded with Bridges in early 2010, his group was planning to perform the ritual in May of the same year at a festival in Haluzice in the Czech Republic (Bridges 030310). Bridges further told me that the Valar ritual had circulated in print among Pagans in the United States and New Zealand before it was published online. He also said that he knew of "other magickal and Pagan groups who have worked similar rituals based on our ideas" (Bridges 030310), though he had no overview over exactly which groups had adapted the Valar Working and to what extent. As we shall see in chapter 16, the rituals of *Tië eldaliéva* and *Ilsaluntë Valion*, which are definitely religious in character, are inspired by the FWMS ritual. Even if the Valar Working was originally just a peripheral and playful ritual of the FWMS, it later inspired the central religious rituals of other groups.

## 13.2. Terry Donaldson's *Lord of the Rings* Tarot

### 13.2.1. Divining with Elves: The *Lord of the Rings* Tarot as Tolkien-integrating Magic

In 1997, leading British Tarot developer Terry Donaldson published *The Lord of the Rings Tarot Deck & Card Game* with U.S. Game Systems, the company that also publishes the Rider-Waite-Smith and Crowley-Harris Thoth decks.<sup>381</sup> Peter Pracownik, who had already worked together with Donaldson on the collectible card game *Wyvern*, illustrated the deck. The *LR* Tarot follows the Rider-Waite system and is accompanied by a short booklet (Donaldson 1997b) that briefly introduces *LR* and the general meanings of the Tarot cards. The cards depict artefacts, characters, and scenes from *LR* (and sometimes *H*), but not from *S*. For instance, the seven Palantíri are shown on the Seven of Clubs, and we meet Gandalf (The Magician), Elrond (The Emperor), Gollum (The Fool), and so forth, but not the Valar. Most cards show scenes from the narratives, such as Gandalf's confrontation with the Balrog (Death) and Frodo lying unconscious in Shelob's web (Eight of Swords). In other words, the card illustrations refer to many of the fantastic elements of *LR* (cf. section 7.1), but Pracownik draws little on the narrative religion. This means that the deck can be used by people who are familiar with *LR* (and *H*), but have not read *S* nor studied the appendices of *LR* in detail.<sup>382</sup>

People who have read *S* can get much more out the deck by buying it together with the 268 page long accompanying manual (Donaldson 1997a). In this book – which like the short booklet is dedicated to Gandalf – Donaldson introduces the Middle-earth universe in great detail, relates the meaning of the various cards (especially the Trumps) to Tolkien's mythology, and explains how to use the deck. While the opening chapter of

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<sup>381</sup> Donaldson's homepage can be found at <http://terrydonaldson.com/> [020212]. The Rider-Waite deck was designed by Arthur Edward Waite, a prominent member of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, in cooperation with the artist Pamela Colman Smith. It was originally published by William Rider and Son in 1909 (Waite 1909) and accompanied two years later by Waite's manual *The Pictorial Key to the Tarot* (Waite 1911). Most people consider this to be the standard deck. Aleister Crowley, who like Waite had been a member of the Golden Dawn, created an Egyptian-inspired deck which was illustrated by Lady Frieda Harris. This so-called Thoth deck was created in the early 1940s, but first published in 1969 (Crowley and Harris 1986). The names, meanings, and numbering of several cards in both the major and the minor Arcana differ between the two decks. On the history of the Tarot, see Farley (2009).

<sup>382</sup> I first learned about the *LR* Tarot deck from an article by Martin Ramstedt (2007a) which I have already discussed in section 5.3 above. In this article, Ramstedt uses the *LR* deck to illustrate his thesis that a "metaphorical turn" is taking place in contemporary religion, exemplified by the convergence of Paganism and fantasy fiction. Ramstedt discusses Donaldson's deck at length, and interested readers can compare my discussion with his. Ramstedt provides more background information on Donaldson and Pracownik and compares the *LR* Tarot deck with the collectible card game *Magic: The Gathering* (2007a, 7-10). For a treatment of the *LR* Tarot deck from an art historical perspective, see Auger (2008). Auger's article contains some quite problematic passages, though, because she adopts Donaldson's Jungian framework and interprets both *LR* and Tarot in general as manifestations of the archetypes and as representations of the hero's journey (cf. Campbell 1949) towards Jungian individuation.

the book, “Welcome to Middle-earth”, retells the storyline of only *H* and *LR*, the rest of the book abounds with references to *S*, both to the book itself (e.g. Donaldson 1997a, 32) and to narrative motifs and key cosmological ideas in it. Donaldson uses the name Ilúvatar for the god who in *LR* is only referred to as the One (e.g. 1997a, 32, 147, 248) and he identifies the Wizards Gandalf, Saruman, and Radagast as Istari (1997a, 21, 57, 87, 201, 212; cf. section 9.1.2). Other *S*-motifs referred to by Donaldson include Fëanor as the creator of the Palantíri (1997a, 225), the tale of Lúthien and Beren (1997a, 248), the Vala Ulmo (1997a, 138), and the creation of the Elves (1997a, 159). He alludes several times to the creation of the two Lamps, the two Trees, and the Sun and the Moon (Donaldson 1997a, 32, 159-160, 176).

Donaldson knows *S* very well and his references to this work will be stimulating for those users of the deck who also know it. Nevertheless, the references to *S* all have an *ad hoc* character and it is striking that he never refers to Ilúvatar and the Valar as objects of worship, nor to the rituals, hymns, calendars, and eschatology of *LR* and *S*, i.e. to all that which provides structure to Tolkien’s narrative religion. After all, the deck is not called the “*LR* Tarot” rather than the “*S* Tarot” without reason. Like in Middle-earth Paganism (cf. ch. 14), the fascination with Middle-earth and its fantastic inhabitants, especially the Elves and the Wizards, is the key. The Elves are venerated, not the Valar. As Emily Auger has pointed out (2008, 318-319), the fact that the main Hobbit characters (Frodo, Sam, Merry, and Pippin) are not depicted individually on Donaldson’s cards has the effect of inviting the Tarot querent to identify with the Hobbits, just like a reader of *LR*. A truly *S*-based deck, by contrast, would have taken an Elven rather than a Hobbit point of view, and would have cast Manwë (not Elrond) as the Emperor, Morgoth (not Wormtongue) as the Devil, and Beren and Lúthien (not Aragorn and Arwen) as the Lovers. In short, the Donaldson-Pracownik deck is based on the narrative of *LR*, not on the mythology of *S*, and as such stands in sharp contrast to the FWMS’s Valar Working.

The prescribed uses of the deck are conventional. The deck can be used for readings with classical spreads (such as the Celtic Cross) or by means of one of Donaldson’s two new Tolkien spreads, the Hobbit spread (shaped like an H) and the Gandalf spread (shaped like the Elvish letter G; Donaldson 1997a, 256-259). Next to this classic use of the Tarot deck, Donaldson suggests a solitaire and meditational use in which one is supposed to visualise oneself in Middle-earth:

You may wish to journey to Middle-earth in this way, and “meet” the characters there, such as Gandalf, Sam, Galadriel, the Lady Arwen. In doing so, you will enhance what the characters are able to do for you in the context of your own life. [...] Pick out the relevant card which will act as a doorway, and, either while staring into the card in a relaxed way, or closing your eyes, imagine yourself as being part of the scene. [...] Imagine yourself surrounded by a green light, filtering in through the back of your neck, and filling your body. Then let yourself be transported into the scene you have selected, and “look around.” See what you are wearing. Feel the texture of your clothes in this dimension. Feel what the ground is like under your feet. [...] Let the

character or characters begin to talk to you. They may take you somewhere, or show you something. They may even give you a gift. Look after it. What they show you may pertain to your past, your present situation, or even something which the future holds (Donaldson 1997a, 252).

Using Tarot as a vision-inducing device is certainly not unique to the *LR* deck. The practice of using Tarot and other means to induce magical visualisation was pioneered by the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn whose members practised projections of the “astral body” in order to visit “astral realms” (esp. Moina Mathers 1989; cf. Asprem 2008, 157-159). These techniques were later developed (and Jungianised), not the least by Dion Fortune and her associates in the Fraternity of the Inner Light (Drury 2009, 49). Visualisations are very common among magicians (cf. Luhrmann 1989, 191), Pagans (cf. Hume 1997, 154-155), and Tolkien religionists (cf. ch. 16).

### 13.2.2. Integrating Middle-earth into the Golden Dawn Tarot system: The *Lord of the Rings* Tarot as Religious Blending

The *LR* Tarot deck is a product of a more comprehensive, and practice-removed process of religious blending than the Valar Working discussed above. The logic of the integration of Tolkien material is the same, however, namely that another tradition, *in casu* the Tarot tradition from the Golden Dawn, provides the frame into which Tolkien material is selectively projected and domesticated. Tolkien characters and scenes are depicted on the cards, and in the accompanying book the card illustrations are interpreted in the light of established Tarot lore. The illustrations on the Trumps of the Major Arcana are given in the table below. As can be seen, especially characters but also certain key scenes from *LR* are depicted on the Trumps. (Scenes from *H* are found only in the Minor Arcana). The artwork of the cards refers not only to *LR* (and *H*), but also to various esoteric traditions. The Kabbalistic Tree of Life, for instance, is depicted on the Nine of Coins.

**Table 13.2. The Major Arcana of the *LR* Tarot Deck**

| Trump                  | <i>LR</i> character or scene                           | Trump               | <i>LR</i> character or scene         |
|------------------------|--|---------------------|--------------------------------------|
| I. The Magician        | Gandalf  | XII. The Hanged Man | Faramir on the pyre                  |
| II. The High Priestess | Éowyn  | XIII. Death         | Gandalf facing the Balrog of Morgoth |
| III. The Empress       | Galadriel (flanked by Belladonna Took and Rose Gamgee) | XIV. Temperance     | Frodo sparing Gollum’s life          |
| IV. The Emperor        | Elrond   | XV. The Devil       | Wormtongue                           |
| V. The Hierophant      | Saruman  | XVI. The Tower      | Isengard being destroyed by the Ents |

|                         |                               |                 |   |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------|---|
| VI. The Lovers          | Aragorn and Arwen             | XVII. The Star  | The Star Eärendil and the spirit of Nenya, Galadriel's ring                     |
| VII. The Chariot        | Théoden                       | XVIII. The Moon | Shagrat and Gorbag in front of Minas Morgul                                     |
| VIII. Strength          | The White Tree of Gondor      | XIX. The Sun    | The Sun shining over the Shire  |
| IX. The Hermit          | Tom Bombadil                  | XX. Judgment    | Gandalf and Frodo or Bilbo by the hearth  |
| X. The Wheel of Fortune | The One Ring                  | XXI. The World  | Map of Arda showing the two landmasses Middle-earth and Aman, the Blessed Realm |
| XI. Justice             | The Oathbreakers of Dunharrow | 0. The Fool     | Gollum  |

In his discussions of the individual cards in the accompanying book, Donaldson links the portrayed Tolkien motifs to the cards' established Tarot meanings. He here engages in a rather complicated form of religious blending because he integrates Tolkien material into an existing synthesis of Tarot lore which is itself syncretic in character. Let me illustrate Donaldson's religious blending with his discussion of the Trumps.

Donaldson's discussion of each Trump card includes a description of the character or scene depicted on the card, an elaborate section on the card's "astrological association", and a section in which the character of the card addresses the reader in direct speech. In the sections on astrological associations, Donaldson establishes connections and correspondences between various mythologies and domains of esoteric knowledge, drawing selectively on the correspondence system established by Aleister Crowley.<sup>383</sup>

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<sup>383</sup> Crowley continued a tradition of integrating the Tarot cards with other esoteric systems, building on the work of Éliphas Lévi (1854; 1856) and Samuel Liddell "MacGregor" Mathers. Drawing on Mathers' *Book of Correspondences* without crediting him, Crowley in 1909 published an extensive system of correspondences as *Liber 777* (Crowley 1977, book 2, 1-36), using the 10 *sefirot* and 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet as its foundation. The tables of correspondences include the *sefirot* and paths on the Tree of Life (column XII), the Tarot (c. XIV), Egyptian, Hindu, Greek, and Roman gods (cs. XIX, XXII, XXXIV, and XXXV), colours (c. XV), precious stones (c. XL), planets (c. LXXVII), and the signs of the zodiac (c. CXXXVII). Some of the tables are also given as an appendix to his *Magick in Theory and Practice* (Crowley 1929a, 303-324). Donaldson can draw on Crowley's *Liber 777*-correspondence system because that system still followed the Raider-Waite baseline (apart from the unusual naming of a few Trumps). When Crowley later created his own Thoth deck, he adapted his correspondence tables accordingly (cf. 1944, 278-287).

Crowley's correspondence system was so extremely elaborate that Egil Asprem has referred to it as a project of "programmatically syncretism" (2007, 136). The system involved the synonymisations of similar concepts and deities from various mythologies, and Crowley legitimised this by claiming that he purified the world's spiritual traditions in order to reconstruct the perennial wisdom inherent in them all (Asprem

For instance, the Magician's astrological connection is Mercury. Mercury, in turn, refers not only to an astrological body (the innermost planet of our solar system), but also to an alchemical substance (quicksilver), and to a member of the Roman pantheon. The god Mercury, or an "aspect" or "version" of him, is additionally said to have "appeared in the mythology of every society since the dawn of humanity to educate human beings" (Donaldson 1997a, 61). He appears for instance as the Greek Hermes, as the Egyptian Thoth, as the Aztec Quetzalcoatl, and as the Norse Loki.

Obviously, Donaldson's integration of Tolkien's literary mythology into the Crowleyan correspondence system is a novel addition. It is thus for example Gandalf, rather than Mercury or a generic magician, who is depicted on the Magician card. In the book, Gandalf's deeds, powers, and attributes – he is the teacher, the inspirator, and the gods' messenger – are all discussed in relation to Mercury and his associations (Donaldson 1997a, 59-61). From this context the reader infers that Gandalf is the guise in which Mercury appears in *LR*, or better, that Gandalf is the guise in which that deity or force, which reveals itself as Mercury in Roman mythology, appears in the context of Tolkien's narratives.

Besides the systematic correspondence exegesis drawn from the Golden Dawn tradition, Donaldson's accompanying book also includes many loose references to various esoteric motifs, most of which are popularised versions of theosophical and occult teachings. Like in his discussions of the Tarot, Donaldson often links elements from Tolkien's literary mythology to the esoteric beliefs he expresses. For instance, he seems to believe in the historicity of Atlantis and points out that Tolkien's Númenor or Atalantë must refer to this sunken continent (Donaldson 1997a, 20, 31, 147). Donaldson also explains Gandalf's incarnation in *S* as Gandalf "coming down from the astral plane" (1997a, 21), and he certainly believes in reincarnation and karma (1997a, 131) and in auras (1997b, 25). Donaldson is also convinced that a coming "New Age" of cosmic evolution is near (1997a, 44-45, 115, 162), an age that will "involve the unfolding of such psy-

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2007, 136, 139, 148). Also Donaldson believes that Tarot lore expresses a "tradition of ancient wisdom, some of which has been carried down through the dark ages by esoteric associations, such as the Rosicrucians" (1997a, 38). Donaldson believes that this ancient wisdom is expressed, in symbolic form, in the ancient mythologies, and has been more or less uncovered by the likes of Crowley, Edward Waite, Carl Gustav Jung, and Joseph Campbell.

Crowley considered his correspondence so objective that the veracity of visions and channelled messages could be tested against it (Asprem 2008, 157-162). Others have aimed to expand, refine, and further objectivise the Mathers/Crowley system of correspondences, the most extensive system to my knowledge being the one published by Skinner (2006). Most magicians, however, have used Crowley's system freely and selectively, following Robert George Torrens, a Freemason who published several accessible books on the Golden Dawn teachings and rituals and hence played a central role in the dissemination of Golden Dawn ideas in the cultic milieu. Torrens considered correspondences to be a "personal matter and very individualistic" and taught that those given by others (especially Crowley's) are merely "suggestions" (1969, 114). Donaldson follows Crowley quite closely, though he does not mention his name a single time (nor that of Mathers).



chic abilities as telepathy and astral projection" (1997a, 44-45). These beliefs are all common in the cultic milieu, but foreign to Tolkien's literary mythology. It is clearly not Donaldson's purpose to construct a purist Tarot deck that draws on Tolkien's works and nothing else, but rather the idea to use Tolkien's narratives as pedagogical instruments to explain more serious spiritual matters.

Donaldson's mode of religious blending and his attempt to integrate Tolkien's literary mythology into an existing body of lore is somewhat similar to what we have seen among the alternative historians of chapter 12. Donaldson goes beyond Gardner and de Vere, however, as he does not just affix Tolkien material *post hoc* for reasons of legitimisation, but has created a Tarot deck which invites practitioners and querents to integrate elements from Tolkien's literary mythology into their actual divinatory practice. Because of this Donaldson's *LR Tarot* is Tolkien-integrating, rather than merely Tolkien-affixing.

I have also characterised the Tribunal of the Sidhe as Tolkien-integrating religion, but clearly Donaldson's *LR Tarot*, together with the FWMS's Valar Working, is Tolkien-integrating in a different way. In the terminology of chapter 4, Donaldson and the FWMS's blending of Tolkien's literary mythology with other traditions is of an ambiguous and temporary nature, and hence constitutes instances of religious *mixture*. By contrast, the Tribunal's integration of Tolkien elements is of an affirmative, permanent, and stable nature, and hence constitute an example of religious *synthesis*. Like Donaldson and the FWMS, the Tribunal integrates Tolkien's literary mythology into another frame (i.e. it is also Tolkien-integrating rather than Tolkien-based), but Tolkien elements are integrated into the very core of the group's beliefs and practices. Tolkien's literary mythology plays a stable and important role for the members' identity (some Changelings are also Elves), practices (Valar-directed rituals), and justifications (Tolkien as bard of the kin folk) of the group. By contrast, the High Elvish Working was created as a playful supplement to a more serious magical engagement, not as part of a new tradition based partly on Tolkien's works. Similarly, Tarot practitioners can use the *LR Tarot* occasionally, but the deck is not intended to compete with the standard decks. Nor is Donaldson attempting to found a new divinatory school of Tarot and astrology that takes Tolkien's literary mythology to be equal to other mythologies. While both the Valar Working and the *LR Tarot* themselves constitute 'blended rituals' in which elements from Tolkien's mythology are merged with other material, they are not parts of a 'blended tradition' (i.e. a synthesis) which blends in Tolkien material on a larger scale.

### **13.2.3. Tolkien as Mythopoeic Channeler: Rationalisation and Legitimation in Donaldson's *LR Tarot***

The *LR Tarot* deck is one among a huge assortment of themed Tarot decks, Oracles, and other divination and visualisation tools which have flooded the market since the 1980s. It is one of only very few decks, however, which are inspired by a particular work of

fantasy.<sup>384</sup> That raises three related questions: Why has Donaldson found Tolkien's literary mythology and not some other fantasy work with religious affordances worthy and suitable as a basis for a Tarot deck? Which ontological status or truth value does he ascribe to Tolkien's works? And how does he justify his use of Tolkien? These questions can only be answered together with two additional ones: Which ontological status does Donaldson ascribe to the other mythologies and pantheons (the Roman, Egyptian, and so forth) that he refers to? And does he consider Tolkien's mythology to be on a par with these conventional mythologies or to be inferior in some way?

It is clear that Donaldson considers Tolkien's literary mythology to stand out among fantasy in general. In what amounts to an allographic preface, he asserts that it would be "missing the point" to read Tolkien's works as "a fairy story" (Donaldson 1997b, 7). Tolkien's works have a spiritual quality to them, one which Donaldson wants to uncover. According to Martin Ramstedt, Donaldson does so by reinterpreting Tolkien's mythology "in the light of contemporary Pagan spirituality and Joseph Campbell's take on Jungian psychoanalysis" (2007a, 9).

As far as the inspiration from Jung and Campbell goes, Ramstedt is clearly right. Even though Donaldson never refers explicitly to either of the two, he clearly reads Tolkien's literary mythology and other myths as well in the mythopoeic mode. Deities and members of Tolkien's gallery of characters alike are thus interpreted according to the archetypal hermeneutics of Jungian transformation as expressions of cosmic or psychological forces (cf. ch. 5). For instance, Donaldson does not see Gandalf as an historical person nor as a spiritual entity inhabiting some other plane or world (literal affirmation). Instead he sees him as a metaphorical expression of a more real archetypal force: Gandalf is a "Merlin-type" (Donaldson 1997a, 21) or a symbol of the "inner teacher" (Donaldson 1997a, 21, 59). Galadriel (The Empress) is said to articulate the "wise woman" archetype (Donaldson 1997a, 21), and when Donaldson characterises Saruman as a "shadow self" (1997a, 60), we sense Jung's Shadow archetype. The description of Éowyn and Galadriel as "archetypes" that express the "feminine within us all, men as well as women" (1997a, 21) is reminiscent of Erich Neumann's notion of the archetypal feminine, a force which supposedly underlies both Jung's *anima* and mother archetypes (1963). Drawing implicitly on the work of Joseph Campbell (esp. 1949), Donaldson comfortably moves beyond the Jungian catalogue of archetypes when consi-

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<sup>384</sup> The *LR* deck is the only fiction-based deck analysed in Emily Auger's (2004) extensive review of the aesthetics of more than fifty Tarot decks on the market. The only other fiction-based deck I know of is Donald Tyson and Anne Stokes' *Necronomicon Tarot* (2007), so named after a fictional tome in H.P. Lovecraft's novellas. See Cowan (2012) for a discussion of the *Necronomicon Tarot*. There is also a *Tarot of the Elves* (McElroy 2007). McElroy does not refer to Tolkien's works, but Davide Corsi's artwork is clearly inspired by Tolkien's image of the Elves, especially as they appear in Peter Jackson's movies. I was made aware of this deck by Calantirniel of *Tië eldaliéva*, who pointed out that she is the unnamed "representative of [...] an online organization dedicated to the articulation and practice of an Elven spiritual path [i.e. *Tië eldaliéva*]" whom McElroy refers to in the foreword to the novel accompanying the *Tarot of the Elves* (2007, 7).

dering Gandalf to be a manifestation of the archetype of the “savior or redeemer” (1997a, 37). Furthermore, and reflecting the use of Jung within the cultic milieu, Donaldson does not distinguish strictly between the archetypes in themselves and the archetype images to which they give rise in myths and the personal psyche. For example, he refers to Éowyn and Galadriel as “archetypes” while a strict Jungian would have referred to them as archetypal images.

Donaldson’s Campbellian Jungism seems to take a Pagan twist, such as Ramstedt (2007a) suggests, in the direction of Wiccan duotheism with his identification of Gandalf with “God” (1997a, 37) and Galadriel with “the goddess” (1997a, 42). As far as I can see, however, the references to God and the goddess can better be explained without Wicca. Indeed, while Donaldson obviously refers to several pre-Christian mythologies, he does not refer to a single Neo-Pagan author or organisation, nor to any particularly Neo-Pagan ideas. By contrast, he refers to many theosophical ideas (e.g. the astral plane, Atlantis, reincarnation, and cosmic evolution) and does not refrain from using Christian references either. For instance, Gandalf, who dies and returns, is considered to be “analogous in some ways to Christ” (Donaldson 1997a, 21). Also Aragorn, the uncrowned king, is seen as a Jesus figure (Donaldson 1997a, 21), and Frodo is compared with Moses because they both overcome their weakness and accept their difficult destinies (Donaldson 1997a, 41). Donaldson sees both Sauron and Morgoth as Satan-figures (1997a, 28), and compares *LR* with Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* (1997a, 23). He even quotes John 8:32 (Donaldson 1997a, 56), perhaps the favourite theosophical Bible passage, in which Jesus addresses his disciples with the words: “And you will know the truth and the truth will make you free”. Most significant of all, “God” is capitalised and “goddess” is not, while standard Pagan practice would be to capitalise both. Donaldson’s practice seems to reflect a monotheistic position, probably a form of theosophical Christianity, in which the goddesses of myth refer mythopoeically to the archetypal feminine and not to a real Goddess, while God is a real power or being who is more than such an archetypal principle. In sum, Donaldson can be described as a Jung-inspired theosophist, but there is no reason to describe his take on Tolkien’s literary mythology as reflecting “contemporary Pagan spirituality” as suggested by Ramstedt.

As we have seen in chapter 5, Jung’s own thinking about the archetypes is stretched out between a naturalistic interpretation of them in purely psychological terms and a cosmological interpretation of them as fundamentally extra-psychic cosmological principles or powers. Jungians in the cultic milieu in general tend to emphasise the cosmological position in Jung’s work, but Donaldson is quite cautious. Throughout his book, he professes a quite psychological-reductive view on religious experience and magical efficacy. He believes, for instance, that “past life” experiences in regression therapy do not bring one in contact with previous lives, but can best be explained as archetypal representations (Donaldson 2007a, 132). More importantly, Donaldson has a psychological theory of the effects of magic, including Tarot divination. He states that “[m]agic may or may not work objectively, but it certainly does subjectively, in the sense of getting things

out of your system though a miniaturization of the forces involved in any situation" (1997a, 39). In a later section on how to do a Tarot reading with the deck, Donaldson advises against "casting spells" and using "supernatural nonsense" and "heavy occultism" (1997a, 255). Instead he advises Tarot practitioners to plant "positive seeds" in the querent and he ensures his reader that "most predictions become self-fulfilling" (1997a, 255) – through psychological rather than metaphysical means, that is. Being the author of a book entitled *The Tarot Spellcaster* (Donaldson 2001), the idea of casting spells with Tarot cards is definitely not foreign to Donaldson, but he wants to warn against an overly metaphysical expectation of the working of such spells.

Some readers might want to protest that the passage on the meditational use of the deck quoted in section 13.2.2 goes beyond a Jungian interpretation. Donaldson invites people to travel magically to another world and interact with the characters there, so does he not prescribe a literal-affirmative rationalisation of the experiences generated? Certainly the passage and visualisation practice *affords* such a literal-affirmative and mytho-cosmological rationalisation, but that is not Donaldson's intention. The scare quotes around "meet" in the sentence "you may wish to journey to Middle-earth [...] and "meet" the characters there" (Donaldson 1997a, 252) indicate that Donaldson considers the characters to be symbols or images created by the visualising mind rather than beings with independent existence.

All in all, we can conclude that Donaldson reads both Tolkien's literary mythology and other mythologies (Pagan and Christian alike) in the mythopoeic mode. As a consequence, Donaldson considers Tolkien's literary mythology as being in principle equal to other mythologies. This is possible because the mythopoeic approach simultaneously elevates certain pieces of fiction to mythopoeic status while at the same time reducing myths to stories without literal reference on historical and cosmological matters. Besides Tolkien's literary mythology, Donaldson only refers to one other "modern-day mythology", namely *Star Wars* (1997a, 37). This brings us to the final question: if not all supernatural fiction can pass as "modern-day mythology", why can Tolkien's?

It turns out that Tolkien's literary mythology is special because Tolkien, according to Donaldson, was in some way inspired. As he puts it, Donaldson "feel[s] that, energy-wise, [Tolkien] was linked with the tradition of ancient wisdom" (1997a, 38). This is a variant of the appeal to tradition, but Donaldson goes beyond a merely binocular reading of Tolkien's narratives as rewritings of more authentic sources by stating that Tolkien himself was directly, "energy-wise" linked up with the ancient wisdom. That is to say, Tolkien's texts directly express the ancient wisdom, though they do it figuratively, as myth. Donaldson expresses this view even more clearly when stating that "Tolkien's work was in reality a monumental act of channeling" which resulted in "a symbolic history of the universe and many spiritual lessons for us to apply in our own lives as

well" (1997b, 7). In other words, Tolkien's literary mythology is doubly legitimised as the expression of authoritative tradition (the Ancient Wisdom) and divine revelation.<sup>385</sup>

It is interesting to note that although Donaldson and the FWMS both draw on the tradition from the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, they prescribe ritual contact with the characters of Tolkien's literary mythology in opposite ways: Where the FWMS follows the Golden Dawn formats for invoking spirits, i.e. summoning them to come visit from their otherworld, Donaldson, in the tradition of Golden Dawn astral projection, suggests a journey to the otherworld to meet the characters there. Already in the Golden Dawn, this second technique, requiring a creative imagination and no further paraphernalia, was much more common than elaborate ceremonial magic (Asprem 2014, 2.2). Even more so, this holds true in the cultic milieu today, where all kinds of active visualisation, projection, and travelling techniques – from active imagination via shamanic journeying to regression therapy – are popular and have influenced various strands of Tolkien spirituality (cf. esp. chs. 11 and 16).

The difference between 'summoning' and 'travelling' is not trivial, but crucial for the ways in which the ritual communication can be subsequently rationalised. When summoning spirits, the spirits are conceived of as inhabiting another world which they leave in order to enter the empirical world. This is particularly visible in the Valar Working in which a purified magical space has been prepared for the Valar to enter. In summoning rituals, communication with the spirits is believed to take place in the empirical world and the spirits are addressed by means of linguistic utterances and bodily gestures as if the spirits are present and can hear and see. Because such summon-

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<sup>385</sup> Donaldson's is not the only Jungist take on Tolkien. Others include Timothy R. O'Neill's book *The Individuated Hobbit* (1979) and Robert Ellwood's more recent *Frodo's Quest* (2002). Ellwood's book offers a Jungian-theosophical reading of *LR*, describing the novel as a "tale of every reader's higher consciousness, death and rebirth, and triumph over evil", and explaining that its characters express the "archetypes we can meet in ourselves: a spiritual guide like Gandalf, a friend like Sam, or, heaven forbid, shadows like Orcs or Ringwraiths" (2002, back cover). Throughout, Ellwood approaches *LR* in the binocular mode, describing it as a "mythic novel" (2002, 141) which is true, not "as history, but as a description of the many planes on which the human spirit lives" (Ellwood 2002, 12). Contrary to Donaldson's mythopoeic claim that Tolkien channelled his stories and that the archetypes therefore broke through in his stories by their own volition, Ellwood takes the more careful and binocular view that Tolkien authored his works in an ordinary way, but so doing drew on theosophical sources. Because the "Ancient Wisdom [...] certainly influenced Tolkien in countless ways", *LR* can be read as a palimpsest of that ancient tradition of religious knowledge which finds a contemporary expression in Theosophy (Ellwood 2002, 12). Interestingly, Ellwood reads the theosophical sources, to which *LR* is indirectly taken to refer, in a way that denies them the objective and historical-literal reference which they themselves claim to possess, and which hovers between the mytho-cosmological and mythopoeic. His overall approach is mytho-cosmological, for he asserts that both the cosmos and the individual are constituted by seven "planes" (Ellwood 2002, 149). His reading of Blavatsky's macro-history is mythopoeic, however, for he transforms her history of physical events into a history of the evolution of consciousness, taking Atlantis and the Atlantean root race, for instance, to refer to a stage in this evolutionary process rather than to a physical continent and race (Ellwood 2002, 154).

ing rituals are based on the assumption that the spirits are real entities, it is easy and natural also to rationalise the spirits in literal-affirmative rather than in psychological terms and thus to assert that both the spirits and their otherworldly abodes are real. By contrast, a journey to the otherworld by way of the imagination, as in the case of Tarot-induced visualisations, places the locus of communication in the otherworld and exchanges direct communication (utterances, gestures) with indirect imagined communication. Such rituals are more open for a rationalisation along Jungian lines which deems the spirits to be expressions of archetypes according to either a supernaturalistic-dynamic or reductive-psychological logic.

#### 13.2.4. The Place of the *Lord of the Rings* Tarot in the Spiritual Tolkien Milieu

On the final pages of the book, Donaldson invites interested users to contact him for more information about both a “special personalized training program” and a correspondence course based on the deck which he offers out of his London Tarot Centre (1997a, 267-268). I emailed him (230312) to ask for information about the content and popularity of his training program and correspondence course. I also asked him whether he had integrated the *LR* Tarot into some of the more general courses on Tarot that he also offers, and about how well the deck has sold. Unfortunately, Donaldson never responded to my inquiries.

Lacking precise information from Donaldson himself, it is still possible to say something about the success of the *LR* Tarot deck. It certainly testifies to the success of the original English edition, that deck and book have been translated into both German (Donaldson 2002), Spanish (Donaldson 2003), and Dutch (Donaldson 2005). Also, the *LR* deck must have been successful enough to warrant a sequel. In any case, Donaldson and Pracownik followed it up in 2012 with *The Hobbit Tarot* (appearing without an accompanying book). Given that the *Hobbit* deck appeared roughly simultaneously with the first instalment of Peter Jackson’s movie adaptation of *The Hobbit*, it stands to reason that the main intended audience of the *Hobbit* deck (and by implication of the *LR* deck) are Tolkien fans.

While the two decks indeed seem popular with Tolkien fans and Tarot collectors, they are less popular within the spiritual Tolkien milieu proper. Strikingly, none of the Tolkien religionists I have talked to brought up the deck by themselves.<sup>386</sup> When I enquired with Calantirniel of Tië eldaliéva, whom I knew to use Tarot professionally, she told me that she owned the deck, but would not use it with clients (090710).

It is not difficult to explain why the deck appeals less to serious Tolkien religionists and professional Tarot readers than to fans and collectors. As a piece of art, the deck does not compare favourably with the classics. Furthermore, users reviewing the deck on

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<sup>386</sup> I only learned about the deck after having carried out most of my interviews and therefore did not have a chance to ask systematically whether people knew about it.

amazon.com point out that Pracownik is unfamiliar with Tolkien's works, depicting Orcs with white skin (they are black) and Elrond with a moustache (Elves have no beard).<sup>387</sup> The fact that the deck can also be used to play a card game designed by Mike Fitzgerald (Donaldson 1997b, 28-42) contributes to the impression that it is more a piece of merchandise than a serious Tarot deck. In short, the low style of the deck itself stands in an odd contrast with the very elaborate and well-crafted accompanying book.

To sum up, the *LR* deck must be considered quite successful in the genre of collectible Tarot decks, and certainly one equipped with an accompanying book of a quality far above average for that genre. While the deck is widely disseminated in the cultic milieu and among Tolkien fans in general, it has had no particular impact within the spiritual Tolkien milieu. Contrary to the *Valar Working*, the *LR* Tarot has not provided new ideas or ritual formats that could be integrated into a new tradition of Tolkien-based spirituality. It is not unthinkable, however, that the *LR* Tarot has reinforced sentiments already present in Tolkien religionists who have encountered the deck.

### 13.3. Tolkien Religion Based on *The Silmarillion*: A Summary

At the end of chapter 9, I formulated four hypotheses on how *S*-informed religious activity, given the religious affordances of *S*, might be expected to differ from purely *LR*-based religion. I suggested, first, that the inclusion in *S* of detailed information about the Valar could be expected to lead to Valar-directed rituals. Such rituals would by definition express first-order beliefs in the existence of the Valar, and might therefore lead to literal-affirmative rationalisations of the Valar. In this case, second, *S*-based religion would adopt a mytho-cosmological (or possible even mytho-historical) approach to Tolkien's literary mythology and hence move beyond the binocular approach that dominated *LR*-inspired religion. Third, I speculated that the decidedly Christian flavour of *S* might attract individuals to Tolkien spirituality with a Christian rather than a Pagan background. My fourth hypothesis was that the substitution of the human/Hobbit point of view in *LR* with an Elven perspective in *S* would be mirrored by a change in the self-identification of Tolkien religionists. That is to say, that I expected religionists drawing on *S* to identify, metaphorically or literally, with the Elves.

Now, about a hundred pages later, it is time to assess whether the four predictions held up. For the sake of clarity, I treat the hypotheses in another order than the one in which they were originally formulated. In what follows, I assess first whether *S*-based religion really adopted an Elven perspective (hypothesis 4) before moving on to the issues of Valar-directed rituals (hypothesis 1), affirmative ontology assessment of Tol-

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<sup>387</sup> A note on "artistic interpretation" in the accompanying book shows that Pracownik expected such criticism (1997a, 50-51, also 267). Though he is right to point out that Hobbits sometimes wear shoes and boots in *LR* – they systematically do so in his artwork – it is clear that his artistic freedom on many other cards takes him beyond Tolkien's intentions.

kien's literary mythology (hypothesis 2), and the possible formation of a Christian wing of Tolkien spirituality (hypothesis 3). I have summarised the findings of in table 13.3 at the end of this chapter for easy reference. Besides findings relating to the four hypotheses on *S*-based religion, the table summarises other findings from chapters 10 through 13 pertaining to the main hypotheses formulated in chapter 6.

It is clear that Tolkien religion after *S* substitutes a Hobbit/human perspective with an Elven perspective treating the Valar and/or Eru as supernatural others. In all the cases treated, individuals identify as Elves, either in a supernaturalistic way (Tribunal of the Sidhe; most self-identified Elves), in a euhemeristic way (Nicholas de Vere; some self-identified Elves), or in a metaphorical way (FWMS; some self-identified Elves). The only exception to this pattern is Donaldson's *LR* Tarot deck. That can easily be explained by the fact that the deck itself, in contrast to the accompanying book, is explicitly *LR*-based rather than *S*-based. The fact that the *LR* Tarot takes a Hobbit perspective and makes no distinction between Elves (e.g. Galadriel) and Maiar (e.g. Gandalf) as supernatural others, only serves to stress the principal difference between *LR*-based and *S*-based religion.

Identification with the Elves typically goes together with some extent of ritual communication with the Valar. The Valar are occasionally addressed in the rituals of the Tribunal of the Sidhe, they were evoked in the High Elvish Working of the FWMS, and especially Elbereth/Varda has played a role in the Elven movement, at least for the Silver Elves and the Elf Queen's Daughters. The Valar do not constitute the most important deities for any of these groups, however, but are rather perceived as one legitimate pantheon among others. In other words, none of the groups considered in chapters 10 through 13 are Tolkien-based in the narrow sense of drawing exclusively (or at least primarily) on Tolkien's literary mythology. They are instead *Tolkien-integrating* groups that blend Tolkien elements with more central beliefs and practices.

In the *S*-inspired groups, the centrality of Tolkien elements in actual practice is positively correlated with the degree of reality ascribed to Tolkien's literary mythology. In the Tribunal of the Sidhe, which regularly performs collective rituals directed at the Valar, these beings are rationalised in a literal-affirmative way. In general, the Tribunal reads Tolkien's literary mythology in the mytho-cosmological mode as an imaginary story about real beings (Valar, Quendi). By contrast, those Tolkien religionists who perform Valar-directed rituals only individually (some self-identified Elves) or collectively but rarely (FWMS) tend to rationalise the Valar by way of supernaturalistic transformation. This can take the form of either theistic transformation, as when the Elf Queen's Daughters consider Varda merely a fictional epithet of the real Mother Goddess, or as Jungian transformation, which I assume was intended by the FWMS. Correspondingly, Tolkien's literary mythology is read in the binocular or mythopoeic mode in the Elven movement and the FWMS, i.e. as stories which refer to supernatural realities, but do so only indirectly. Also Terry Donaldson and the esoteric historians, for whom Valar-rituals play no role at all, approach Tolkien's literary mythology in this way. In other



words there is a correlation, and possibly a causal relation, between frequent and collective ritual communication with the Valar and the subsequent literal-affirmative ontology assessment of them and of Tolkien's literary mythology in general.

As we saw in the general introduction (section 0.2.1 above), many Christian spokespersons have pointed out that Tolkien's mythology is Christian in character. Most importantly, a single, male creator god, Ilúvatar, presides over the world. The cosmic dualism of Tolkien's world is an asymmetric moral dualism in which the forces of good/Ilúvatar are more powerful than the forces of evil/Morgoth/Sauron, not a symmetric ontological dualism in which two complementary forces are in balance. The Christian motifs in *S* have attracted the attention of a wide spectrum of Christians, most of whom read Tolkien's literary mythology in the binocular mode, perceiving Ilúvatar as a reference to the Christian God and Frodo and/or Gandalf as transfigured Christs. The theosophical-Christian references in Donaldson's Tarot book fall into this category.

There are individuals in the cultic milieu who both subscribe to some form of Christianity and are deeply into Tolkien, and who want to combine the two commitments like the Tolkien-integrating Pagans do. I have not said much about this group in the preceding chapters because it is very small. Also, I will touch upon both Christian Elves and Christian Tolkien religionists in chapters 14 and 16 below. Let me nevertheless draw some conclusions from the material already at this point.

A severe problem facing Tolkienesque Christians is that it is difficult to create rituals which are both distinctively Christian *and* Tolkien-based. Self-identified Elves and Tolkien religionists with a Christian background sometimes address God as Eru or Ilúvatar in prayer, but this practice is not distinctively different from conventional Christian prayer. To be distinctively Tolkienesque, Christians must engage also with the Valar. This can work as Tolkien has pointed out that the Valar are equivalent to angels rather than gods – interaction with the Valar is thus not at odds with monotheistic Christian worship. Even so, most branches of Christianity have no angel-cult whose rituals can readily be used as models for Valar veneration. By contrast, Neo-Pagans can, due to their polytheistic religion, easily adopt the Valar as an extra pantheon and use their existing ritual formats as the base for Valar-directed rituals. I think that the difficulty of creating distinctively Tolkien/Christian rituals is one of the reasons why there are so few 'Tolkien Christians' and many more Tolkien-integrating Pagans.

The Elven movement includes a minority of Christians, and in chapter 14 I briefly discuss the Indigo Elves who are led by a Biblical literalist. Even so, Christian Elves face problems similar to Christian Valar-venerators. That is because pagan mythologies contain beliefs about Elves, while Christianity has distanced itself from such beliefs. In fact, *S* is the only text that combines an Elven perspective with monotheism. (In *S*, the humans who have contact with the Elves, worship Eru rather than the Valar, and one can infer that the Elves also do so; cf. section 9.1.5). Christian Elves therefore need *S* to sustain their identity, while Pagan Elves can draw on many other texts as well. For these

reasons, Christian Elves are less numerous than Pagan Elves and, it is my impression, more Tolkien-centred.

All in all, the four hypotheses have held up reasonably well. Tolkien religionists after *S* certainly adopt an Elven perspective and in many cases even a self-identify as Elves. As we have seen in chapter 11, the self-identification as Elf, while often initially Tolkien-inspired, can become dissociated from Tolkien with time. Tolkien-dissociated Elves lose interest in the deities of Tolkien's literary mythology, but those who maintain a Tolkien-based Elven identity tend to combine this with rituals directed at the Valar (if they are Pagans) or prayers directed at Eru (if they are Christians). Tolkien-based practices increase the likelihood that Tolkien's literary mythology is approached in the mytho-cosmological mode rather than in the binocular (or mythopoeic) mode. There are not as many Christian Tolkien religionists as one might have expected from the Christian flavour of *S*. That is not because *S* does not afford a combination with Christianity (indeed it affords combined ritual interaction with Eru *and* the Valar), but because monotheistic Christianity discourages such religious blending while Neo-Paganism endorses it.

| Table 13.3. Overview of Tolkien Religion Based on both <i>The Lord of the Rings</i> and <i>The Silmarillion</i> |   |  |                             |                        |              |               |             |                                     |                                   |
|---|---|--|-----------------------------|------------------------|--------------|---------------|-------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
|   | Use of S's Religious Affordances (cf. hypotheses, ch. 9)                          |  |                             | Religious Blending     |              | Reading Modes |             | Legitimation                        |                                   |
|   | Elven identification /Rationalisation   | Valar rituals /Rationalisation                           | Christian wing              | Framing /Domains       | Type         | Myth          | TLM         | Of TLM                              | With Tolkien                      |
| <b>Tribunal o/t Sidhe (ch. 10)</b>  | Yes: Identity as Changelings /Literal affirmation                                 | Occasionally /Literal affirmation                        | No                          | T-integrating /I, R, D | Synthesis    | M-H           | M-C         | -                                   | Tolkien is himself a Changeling   |
| <b>Elven movement (ch. 11)</b>  | Yes: Elven identity /Literal aff. (genetic, spiritual) /Naturalistic T (cultural) | Occasionally /EQD/SE: Theistic T /ER minority: Lit. aff. | Minority of Christian Elves | T-integrating /I, (R)  | Assimilation | M-H M-C E     | B, MP (M-C) | TLM is Elven history in mythic form | -                                 |
| <b>FWMS Working (ch. 13.1)</b>  | Yes: Elven role /Role-playing   | Yes /? (Lit. aff., Supern. T or Lit. disaff.)            | Christian members           | T-integrating /R       | Mixture      | M-C           | MP (M-C, B) | TLM reveals a "Truth"               | -                                 |
| <b>LR Tarot (ch. 13.2)</b>  | No: Hobbit perspective /Elves and Gandalf (not Valar) as supernatural others      | No; visualisations of LR characters /Jungian T           | Christian references        | T-integrating /R, D    | Mixture      | MP            | MP          | TLM's mythic sources                | Tolkien channelled TLM            |
| <b>Esoteric historians (ch. 12)</b>   | Gardner: Elven perspective De Vere: Elven identity /Euhemeristic                  | No /-  | Christian references        | T-affixing /I, D       | -            | E             | B           | -                                   | Tolkien knew about the blood-line |

TLM = Tolkien's literary mythology; EQD = Elf Queen's Daughters; SE = Silver Elves; ER = Elven Realities; Supernaturalistic/Naturalistic/Theistic/Jungian T = transformation (cf. section 5.2.1); T-integrating/affixing = Tolkien-integrating/affixing religion; I/R/D domains = identity, rituals, doctrines; M-H/M-C/MP/B/E reading modes = mytho-historical, mytho-cosmological, mythopoeic, binocular, euhemeristic modes (cf. section 5.2.2).