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

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Chapter 15. The Religious Affordances of *The History of Middle-Earth* and of Tolkien's Letters and Essays

As noted earlier, there are two main forms of second wave Tolkien religion: Middle-earth Paganism and Legendarium Reconstructionism. Middle-earth Paganism, which draws primarily on Jackson's movies, was treated in the previous chapter. Legendarium Reconstructionism still has to be treated in depth.

Before we can move to a discussion of Legendarium Reconstructionism, however, it is necessary to analyse the religious affordances of those texts upon which Legendarium Reconstructionists base themselves. This is quite a task in itself, for a defining characteristic of Legendarium Reconstructionism is that it draws on all of Tolkien's narratives as well as on his letters and other texts in which he reflects on his narratives. We need an analysis of the religious affordances of *HoMe* because Legendarium Reconstructionists consider this corpus more authoritative than *S* and *LR*. And we need to look at the religious affordances of Tolkien's letters and essays because Legendarium Reconstructionists study these texts in search of evidence that Tolkien believed his narratives to be more than fiction.

The task that lies before us is daunting. The 12 volumes of *HoMe* contain more than three times the number of words of *LR* and *S* together, and even Humphrey Carpenter's compilation of Tolkien's letters (*Letters*) is considerably longer than *S*. I draw two conclusions from the sheer size of the material. First, an independent chapter is needed on the religious affordances of *HoMe* and on Tolkien's letters and essays. As a consequence, the analysis of Legendarium Reconstructionism will be postponed to chapter 16. Even so, and second, it would be disproportional to attempt a minute analysis of *HoMe* and *Letters* in their entirety. Dispensing with the comprehensive strategy of earlier chapters and sections on religious affordances, I shall therefore here limit the analysis to the most significant narratives in *HoMe* and to a handful of key letters and essays. This approach is feasible because I can build on the work of others. In my analysis of the religious affordances of *HoMe*, I take a shortcut by concentrating on those texts which Elizabeth Whittingham (2008) has pointed out as particularly central. My analysis of Tolkien's letters and essays similarly benefits from the work of Verlyn Flieger and others who have called attention to those passages in which Tolkien reflects on the veracity of his literary mythology and on his experience of being inspired during the writing process.

The central question of this chapter is *which religious affordances do HoMe and Tolkien's letters and essays add or alter for a Tolkien religionist who is already familiar with LR and S?* The chapter falls into three sections that each provides a part of the answer. In the first section I discuss how Tolkien employs frame narratives to thematise the veracity of *HoMe*. Like *H* and *LR*, most tales in *HoMe* include a frame story, but it differs much how developed it is. It differs also whether the frame story is internal to the narrative universe or whether it anchors the world of the main narrative in the actual world, or at least in a 'frame narrator's world' that is more like the actual world than the world of the main narrative. (As the reader will remember, we have encountered both types of frame story in *LR*: The notion in *LR* that Bilbo authored *S* constitutes *LR* as a frame story for *S* within the narrative world; by contrast, the statement of the ambiguous compiler voice in the prologue to *LR* that the manuscript has been handed down through the ages and is now being published in English translation anchors the narrative world in a world much like the actual world). In terms of religious affordances, the second type of frame narratives is most interesting. In the veracity section, the analysis therefore focuses on those three texts in *HoMe* that most strongly establish a semiotic effect of anchorage, i.e. the notion that the inventories of the textual world and the actual world overlap and that the narrative is therefore a fictional story about real phenomena (or perhaps even about events in the actual world). The three main anchoring texts are *The Cottage of Lost Play (LT I)*, the very first tale in *HoMe*, and two later and unfinished pieces, *The Lost Road (LROW)* and *The Notion Club Papers (SD)*. As we shall see, these texts function as narrative bridges between the world of the reader and the rest of Tolkien's literary mythology and as such afford a reading of Tolkien's literary mythology in the mytho-cosmological or even the mytho-historical mode. In this way, the frame narratives possess substantial religious affordances of a sort which the frameless *S* lacks.

In the section on narrative religion in *HoMe*, I highlight some of the different ideas on cosmogony, theology, cosmology, and eschatology that *HoMe* includes compared to *LR* and *S*. This material is found in two types of texts: in early versions of the tales that eventually became *S* and in descriptive texts that were not included in the appendices to *LR*. To the first group belongs *The Music of the Ainur* (cosmogony), *The Coming of the Valar and the Building of Valinor* (theogony and theology), and *The Hiding of Valinor* (cosmology). All of these are found in the first volume of *HoMe*, *The Book of Lost Tales, Part One (LT I)*. To the latter group belong *Laws and Customs among the Eldar* (eschatology; *MR*), *Quendi and Eldar* (languages, including the language of the Valar; *WJ*), and the dialogue *Athrabeth Finrod Ah Andreth* (eschatology; *MR*). These pieces stem from *Morgoth's Ring (MR)* and *The War of the Jewels (WJ)*, volumes 10 and 11 of *HoMe* which include the ultimate version of the *Quenta Silmarillion* (on which the published version of *S* is based) together with much supplementary material. A full overview of the main pieces in *HoMe* and their chronology is given below:

Table 15.1. Tolkien's <i>History of Middle-earth</i> (after Whittingham 2008, 10)					
Stage	Years	Volume of <i>HoMe</i>		Major Works*	Events in Tolkien's life
1	1914-1920	1	<i>The Book of Lost Tales, Part I</i>	Cottage of Lost Play, Music of the Ainur, [Coming of the Valar and the Building of Valinor], Tale of the Sun and Moon, Hiding of Valinor	World War I, working on Oxford English Dictionary, teaching at Leeds University
		2	<i>The Book of Lost Tales Part II</i>	Tale of Tinúviel, Turambar, Fall of Gondolin. Tale of	
2	1920-1935	3	<i>The Lays of Beleriand</i>	Lay of the Children of Húrin, Lay of Leithian	teaching at Leeds University, teaching at Oxford University
		4	<i>The Shaping of Middle-earth</i>	Earliest Silmarillion, Quenta Noldorinwa, Ambarkanta, Earliest Annals	
3	1937-1938	5	<i>The Lost Road and Other Writings</i>	The Fall of Númenor, The Lost Road , Ainulindalë, Quenta Silmarillion , Later Annals	publication of <i>The Hobbit</i> , before writing <i>The Lord of the Rings</i>
4	1938-1948	6	<i>The Return of the Shadow</i>	<i>The Lord of the Rings</i>	World War II, writing of <i>The Lord of the Rings</i>
		7	<i>The Treason of Isengard</i>		
		8	<i>The War of the Rings</i>		
		9	<i>Sauron Defeated</i>	The Notion Club Papers , The Drowning of Anadûnê	
5	1948-1959	10	<i>Morgoth's Ring</i>	Ainulindalë, The Later Quenta Silmarillion [including Laws and Customs among the Eldar], Athrabeth Finrod Ah Andreth , Annals of Aman, Myths Transformed	publication of <i>The Lord of the Rings</i> , retirement from Oxford University
		11	<i>The War of the Jewels</i>	The Grey Annals, The Later Quenta Silmarillion, Wanderings of Húrin, Quendi and Eldar	
		(12)	<i>(The Peoples of Middle-earth)</i>	Prologue and Appendices to <i>The Lord of the Rings</i>	
6	1960-1973	12	<i>The Peoples of Middle-earth</i>	Late Writings, Unfinished Tales	retirement

*) Boldface indicates works which are central to the analysis below. *The Coming of the Valar and the Building of Valinor* is not included in Whittingham's list of major works.

In the third section I analyse those of Tolkien's letters in which he reflects on the veracity of his narratives and professes to have felt inspired while writing them. Also a few other non-narrative texts will be drawn into the discussion. Chief among these is the famous essay *On Fairy-Stories (OFS)* in which Tolkien argues that true fairy-stories include some measure of divine inspiration and hence a glimpse of absolute truth. This claim is significant since Tolkien's own mythology, though not a collection of prototypical fairy tales, arguably belongs to the category of fairy-stories as Tolkien defines it in his essay. It is worth complementing the analysis of *HoMe* with one of Tolkien's letters and essays because these texts can be read as indirect reading guides to Tolkien's narratives. Significantly, the texts demonstrate that Tolkien incorporated his own religious beliefs and fascinations into his narratives, thus grounding his literary mythology in actual, personal religion. The thematic overlap between Tolkien's personal beliefs and religious motifs in his narratives allows a semiotic effect of authority and anchorage to be transferred from the former to latter, thus transforming Tolkien's narratives from merely fictional tales to fictional stories about real religious phenomena and truths. In this way, Tolkien's belief statements reinforce the religious affordances of his narratives.

15.1. Thematisation of Veracity in *The History of Middle-earth*

"There was Eru, the One, who in Arda is called Ilúvatar; and he made first the Ainur, the Holy Ones, that were the offspring of his thought, and they were with him before aught else was made" (*S* 3). Thus begins the published version of *S*, powerfully and right-on, with the cosmogonic myth presented as the utterance of an all-knowing narrator. Contrary to *H* and *LR*, there is no frame narrative anchoring the narrative world in the world of the reader.

Actually, it was Tolkien's intention to anchor *S* in the actual world, and *HoMe* includes several texts testifying to this fact. In these frame story sketches, Tolkien tried out two main ideas. The original idea was to present the *Legendarium* as a collection of stories told by the Elves to Eriol, a human traveller visiting their lands from Middle-earth. This idea frames the *Book of Lost Tales (LT I; LT II)*, Tolkien's earliest versions of the tales that would become *S*. In its initial form this framing device was internal to the narrative world and accounted only for how the humans of Middle-earth had come to know of the wisdom of ancient times possessed by the Elves of Aman. Later, however, Tolkien added to this version of the frame story that the Elven tales had been handed down through the ages, from the time of the *Legendarium* until the present day, thus constituting the narrative world as the ancient past of the world of the reader. Tolkien's second frame story also aimed to anchor the narrative world directly in the world of the reader, but used a different mechanism to achieve the effect: 'time travel' through ancestral regression rather than a lineage of transmission. Tolkien first tried out this idea in *The Lost Road*, an unfinished story set in contemporary England in which the characters discover

a way to travel back in time and re-experience the memories of their ancestors. Tolkien planned to follow the characters all the way back to a re-experience of the destruction of Númenor. In a later and also unfinished piece, *The Notion Club Papers*, Tolkien developed the time travel motif further; in both *The Lost Road* and in *The Notion Club Papers* he sought to incorporate the Eriol saga from the *Lost Tales*. *The Notion Club Papers* is interesting, not only because it constitutes the most sophisticated (albeit aborted) frame narrative for the Legendarium, but also because it has a strong autobiographical feel to it. In what follows, I take a closer look at each of these three pieces in turn, highlighting how they in various ways thematise the veracity of the Legendarium.

15.1.1. The Initial Frame Narrative: *The Cottage of Lost Play*

The Cottage of Lost Play was written in the winter of 1916-1917, when Tolkien was 24-25 years old (*LT I* 13). It is the first chapter of *The Book of Lost Tales*, and like all other chapters *Cottage* includes both a piece of frame story and one of the Lost Tales. In *Cottage*, we hear that a human traveller, Eriol, arrives from “the Great Lands” (i.e. Middle-earth) to Tol Eresseä, the Lonely Island (*LT I* 13), which is inhabited by Elves (*LT I* 13, 15).⁴³⁷ He wanders inland and arrives at the Cottage of Lost Play (Mar Vanwa Tyaliéva) where the Elves Lindo and Vairë dwell (*LT I* 14).⁴³⁸ The Elves welcome Eriol as a guest, and after dinner he is invited to join his hosts at the Tale-fire (*LT I* 17). The lost tales which constitute the two volumes of *The Book of Lost Tales* (*LT I*; *LT II*) are all presented as tales told to Eriol, mostly around the Tale-fire.

Besides introducing the Eriol-frame, *The Cottage of Lost Play* includes the first Lost Tale, a tale about the Cottage itself and the many children who dwell there (*LT I* 18-20). Vairë tells Eriol that these children are human children who have wandered to the land of the fairies along the Path of Dreams, the Olórë Mallë (*LT I* 18). Some children have gone back to the lands of Men, but others have chosen to stay with the Elves. As Vairë explains, many of those children who went back became great poets among Men, working their memories of the fairy lands into tales and songs: “Of the misty aftermemories of [the returned children], of their broken tales and snatches of song, came many strange legends that delighted Men for long, and still do, it may be; for of such were the poets of the Great Lands” (*LT I* 19). In other words, human legends and poems about elves are not fictional, but reveal the reality of the elves and their world.

The Eriol frame story and tale of the human children in the fairy cottage make clear that within the narrative world Tol Eresseä is accessible from Middle-earth. The island

⁴³⁷ At this point Tolkien mostly referred to the Elves as “fairies” (cf. *LT I* 19). Christopher Tolkien points out that his father’s imagined world already at this time was constituted by two main landmasses, the human lands to the East and a land to the West inhabited by Elves and Valar. In the *Lost Tales*, the human lands are never referred to as Middle-earth, however. This term only entered Tolkien’s writings in the 1930s (*LT I* 21).

⁴³⁸ Vairë the Elf should not be confused with the Valië Vairë, wife of Mandos.

can be reached physically (one can sail there) and by way of the Olórë Mallë whose ontological status remains unclear.⁴³⁹ Although the Great Lands (Middle-earth) of the narrative world are not identified with any real places within the actual world, *The Cottage of Lost Play* thematises its own veracity, and by implication the veracity of all the lost tales, in another, indirect way. Of central importance is Vairë's reference to human poets who have visited Faery. Should this be interpreted as a subtle reference to Tolkien himself (the poet) as having had experiences of Faery which he here recounts (in the lost tales)? Not every reader will jump to such a conclusion, but the autobiographical interpretation is afforded by the text and gains credibility in the light of other of Tolkien's writings.⁴⁴⁰ Furthermore, later versions of the *Cottage* story were anchored much more explicitly in the actual world. In one version Tol Eresseä was even equated with England (*LT I* 24), and Eriol became an Anglo-Saxon named Ælfwine (Elf-friend). Tolkien thus staged Eriol/Ælfwine as a mediator between the Elven past and our human present, i.e. as the one who recorded the ancient Elven stories which have since been handed down through time until written up by Tolkien.

Summing up, the Eriol/Ælfwine frame story includes two veracity motifs, a 'poet's vision' motif and a 'recorder and compiler' motif. Later Tolkien developed both motifs independently. As we have seen in section 7.3.1 above, Tolkien used a variation of the compiler motif when playfully claiming in the prologues to *H* and *LR* that these texts together with *S* had originally been written and compiled by others before coming into his possession. He only settled for this version of the frame story, however, after having failed to develop a satisfactory frame story based on a variant of the vision motif. *HoMe* includes two such attempts, *The Lost Road* and *The Notion Club Papers*.

15.1.2. The Unfinished Frame Narratives: *The Lost Road* and *The Notion Club Papers*

The Lost Road was written in or about 1936 (*LROW* 8-9) after Tolkien had agreed with his friend C.S. Lewis to write a time-travel story while Lewis wrote a story about space-travel (*Letters* 347; cf. *LROW* 7). Lewis' story, *Out of the Silent Planet*, was published in 1938. Tolkien's text was never finished, but a manuscript with four chapters survives. The story opens with two "English chapters" in which we follow a present-day father and a son named Alboin and Audoin. The other two – "Númenórean" – chapters were supposed to be the final chapters of the story. These chapters are set just before the destruction of Númenor, and again feature a father-son pair, Elendil and Herendil. The

⁴³⁹ I return to the Olórë Mallë in the discussion of the cosmology of *HoMe* in section 15.2.3 below.

⁴⁴⁰ Both *The Notion Club Papers* (discussed later in this section) and *Smith of Wootton Major*, one of Tolkien's later short stories (1967; cf. Flieger 2005b), have a strong autobiographical feel to them. Tolkien's letters also includes passages that can be read as conjectural evidence for Tolkien having had experiences of Faery. I return to this point in section 15.3.2 below.

names Alboin and Elendil both mean ‘Elf-friend’ and this is no coincidence, for Alboin is a descendant of Elendil. In the English chapters Elendil appears to Alboin and Audoin in dream visions, and it becomes clear that this is possible because of the blood bond between the characters. Moreover, Alboin and Audoin are able to travel back in time, through a form of ancestral regression, and re-experience the life of Elendil and Herendil in a shared dream vision. The English chapters break off just as Alboin and Audoin fall asleep, anticipating an ancestral regression to occur (*LROW* 53).

Apart from the finished chapters, many sketches, poems, and notes have survived from which Tolkien’s intended composition of the narrative can be reconstructed. Tolkien planned to flesh out the story with a long series of regression steps. He envisioned a “Lombard story?”, “a Norse story of ship-burial (Vinland)”, “an English story – of the man who got onto the Straight Road?”,⁴⁴¹ “a Tuatha-de-Danaan story, or Tir-nan-Og”, a “story concerning painted caves”, “the Ice age – great figures of Ice”, “Before the Ice Age”, “post-Beleriand”, and “the Elendil and Gil-galad story of the assault on Thû [Sauron]” before arriving finally at the “the Númenor story” (*LROW* 77-78). Tolkien wanted to create a great mythological synthesis as testified especially by his inclusion of a Tuatha de Dannaan story and by his explicit equation of Númenor with Atlantis and of Tol Eressëa with Avalon [spelled Avallon] (*LROW* 65).⁴⁴² He intended to link existing mythological traditions (post Ice Age) with his own narratives (pre Ice Age) and to anchor it all in a present-day world immediately recognisable to the reader. In other words, the function of *The Lost Road* was to frame a selection of his legends – and thus by implication his entire literary mythology – as the (feigned) ancient history of the actual world.

Following the success of *H* (published 1937) Tolkien started working on a sequel, *LR*. He hoped to publish *LR* together with a collection of Elven legends (*S*) and was seeking a frame story to tie the two parts together. This was perhaps why he returned, in 1945-1946, as *LR* was nearing its conclusion, to the time travel idea explored in *The Lost Road*. Rather than developing the old piece, Tolkien started afresh, composing a long, but again unfinished piece, *The Notion Club Papers*. The story consists of the fictional minutes from meetings in the Notion Club, a society for male intellectuals, not unlike the Inklings. Indeed, Tolkien establishes several links between the Inklings and the Notion Club characters. For example, he introduces a Professor Rashbold into the narrative (Rashbold

⁴⁴¹ This is the story of Eriol in *The Cottage of Lost Play* or of Ælfwine as this figure was called in later versions.

⁴⁴² Around the same time, in late 1934, Tolkien had begun a poem entitled “The Fall of Arthur” in which he alluded to his Elven legends, just as he now began using Arthurian terms (especially Avallon as an alternative name for Tol Eressëa) within the Elven tales themselves. See Tolkien (2013), in particular the chapter entitled “The Unwritten Poem and Its Relation to *The Silmarillion*” (2013, 123-168).

is a direct translation of the name Tolkien; *SD* 256, 291), and he dates the meetings of the Club to his own present.⁴⁴³

In the secretarial recordings, we read that the members of the Notion Club discuss various paranormal things during their meetings. The members clearly believe in haunted places (*SD* 180), and are convinced that disincarnate spirits exist who can communicate with humans directly through the medium of thought, rather than through language (*SD* 195, 201). The club members also discuss the truth of myths, and though no ultimate agreement is reached on this issue, two theories each receive substantial support. Wilfrid Trewin Jeremy advances a mytho-historical theory, suggesting that while fictional elements have surely been added to legends and myths over the course of time, an historical core can always be discerned. He is convinced, for example, that an historical Arthur existed (*SD* 227; cf. *LR* 1134). Furthermore, Jeremy believes that earlier times *were* more mythical, and that the outlandish tone which myths and legends have in modern ears reflects that thought, society, and the very ontology of the world was different in ancient times. As Jeremy puts it,

[s]ometimes I have a queer feeling that, if one could go back [in time], one would find not myth dissolving into history, but rather the reverse: real history becoming more mythical – more shapely, simple, discernibly significant, even seen at close quarters. More poetical, and less prosaic, if you like (*SD* 227).

Other members advance a mytho-cosmological theory of the otherworldly kind (cf. section 5.2.2 above), proposing that myths are true because they refer truthfully to events and states of being on “secondary planes” (*SD* 228), that is in other worlds outside the ordinary world. Also these members consider myths to be true and referential, but not in the sense of referring to our world’s past.

Central to the club’s discussions is the question whether it is possible to travel in time and to visit other worlds through the medium of visionary “true dreams”. This discussion is initiated when George Ramer, whose recent science fiction novel is the subject of the evening’s conversation, claims that he has actually been to the world described in his work (*SD* 172). Ramer promises to present his views on the topic in a systematic way at the club’s following meeting. A week later he reads a paper in which he argues for the reality of telepathy, precognition, and similar paranormal phenomena. He contends that “a pretty good case has been made out for the view that in dream a mind can, and some-

⁴⁴³ He does so in a complex way, for while *The Notion Club Papers* provides a frame story for Tolkien’s literary mythology in general, it is itself equipped with a very sophisticated frame narrative. The Notion Club frame story is set in 2014 (the distant future from Tolkien’s perspective), two years after some leaves with minutes from meetings in the Notion Club have been found. These leaves have been edited and published by a certain Howard Green who comments on them in a foreword, i.e. in a fictional, narratorial preface, of which Tolkien was so fond (cf. section 7.3 above). Green notes that while the papers are dated to 1986-1987, historians (from Green’s present, anno 2014) have determined that the Notion Club is imaginary and that the papers actually stem from the 1940s, i.e. from Tolkien’s own time of writing (*SD* 155-158).

times does, move in Time: I mean, can observe a time other than that occupied by the sleeping body during the dream" (SD 175). As Ramer explains, the idea is not that the mind (or soul) leaves the body (SD 181), or that the mind activates memories seated in the (racial) unconscious. Also, the mind is not making stuff up. What really happens, according to Ramer, is that the mind, through a mental faculty alike to ordinary perception, imagination, and memory, but different from all three, gains access to Other Space (other worlds) and/or Other Time (past or future) (SD 175-176). The special dreams that access Other Space or Other Time are referred to by Ramer as "true dreams" or "free dreams" (SD 177) or as "serious dreams", as opposed to the "marginal stuff" of normal dreams (SD 184). Ramer recounts several such dreams in which he has travelled to other worlds, including a world inhabited by the En-keladim, a kind of Elves (SD 206).⁴⁴⁴ Other club members have had experiences similar to Ramer's, for example Philip Frankley who at a later meeting recites a Celtic-style poem that he did not author, but which "came to him". This poem mentions a number of motifs from Tolkien's literary mythology, including Elvenhome and the Old Road [that Straight Road to Elvenhome] (SD 265).

Ramer has not only travelled in Space to other worlds, but also in Time, going "backwards in the history of the universe" (SD 185). In particular, Ramer tells of a true dream of a huge Green Wave (SD 194), a dream which is later related to the downfall of Atlantis. Ramer mysteriously says that he knows Atlantis by a different name, but initially refuses to share it (SD 206). Later, it becomes apparent that this name is no other than Númenor, and several of the club's members receive visions and auditions of Númenor (SD 231-232, 249-252).

The identification of Númenor with Atlantis is significant because it links Tolkien's own literary mythology to established *ditto*. This is not a new device, of course, but merely a new take on a core idea already present in *The Lost Road*. By contrast, the inclusion of Ramer's Great Wave dream in *The Notion Club Papers* is a significant autobiographical addition to *The Lost Road*. Tolkien had dreamt of the Great Wave several times and later learned that one of his sons, Michael, had had the same dream (*Letters* 213; cf. SD 217).⁴⁴⁵ Bequeathing his personal dream to Ramer, Tolkien invests this character with an autobiographical aura. This leaves the reader pondering whether Tolkien's own experiences have informed also other parts of the narrative, for example Frankley's poem audition. As the text stands, it requires little imagination to read it as a thinly

⁴⁴⁴ In a draft of *The Drowning of Anadûne*, a Mannish version of the *Akallabêth*, Tolkien used the term Enkeladim as synonym for the Quendi, the Elves of Middle-earth. Further of interest is that Tolkien explicitly anchored *Drowning* in the actual world. One passage goes: "Men 'awoke' first in the midst of the Great Middle Earth (Europe and Asia), and Asia was first thinly inhabited, before the Dark Ages of great cold [i.e. the Ice Age] [...] The Enkeladim withdrew into waste places or retreated westwards" (SD 398).

⁴⁴⁵ I return to Tolkien's obsession with this dream – his "Atlantis complex" (*Letters* 213) – in section 15.3.1 below. Tolkien also built this dream into *LR*. In the book version, Faramir has it (*LR* 962); in the movies the dream is relegated to Éowyn (*RK* 7).

veiled confession of Tolkien's occult beliefs. In particular, the text affords the reading that Tolkien believed (a) in the reality of other worlds and the possibility of visiting them, and (b) in the historicity of Atlantis/Númenor. Following the logic of this interpretation one step further, this could imply that he believed his entire literary mythology to have a true core, either as the history of our world or as the description of another world. In other words, Tolkien's time travel narratives make it possible to argue that Tolkien himself viewed at least parts of his literary mythology in the mytho-historical or mytho-cosmological mode.

In the second part of *The Notion Club Papers*, Tolkien connects the time travel motif to the Eriol/Ælfwine saga from *The Book of Lost Tales*. Focus here shifts from Ramer to another member of club, Alwin [Ælfwine] Lowdham, who after having re-experienced the memories of both Anglo-Saxon and Númenórean ancestors succeeds in finding the Straight Road. In Elvenhome he gets a glimpse of the "Book of Stories" (SD 279), and upon returning he writes down all that he remembers. Tolkien never managed to finish *The Notion Club Papers*, but in a note on how to proceed he wrote: "Do the Atlantis story and abandon Eriol-Saga, with Lowdham, Jeremy, Guildford and Ramer taking part" (SD 281). This shows that Tolkien at this time still hoped to use a time travel narrative as the common frame story for *LR* and *S*. Because the time travel stories grew complicated and unwieldy, Tolkien eventually settled, as we have seen, for a *manuscrit trouvé* frame for *LR* of the same kind as he had used for *H*. Tolkien never finished a frame narrative for *S*, but *The Lost Road* and *The Notion Club Papers* demonstrate that he would have preferred such a frame story to stage the narrator as a visionary rather than as an editor.

15.1.3. Thematisation of Veracity in Tolkien's Frame Narratives: Analysis and Summary

Christopher Tolkien (e.g. *LT I* 22) and several Tolkien scholars with him (e.g. Flieger 2005a; Fisher 2006; Whittingham 2008, 34-36, 107) have pointed out that Tolkien felt that England lacked a body of myth and legend to match that of the Greeks, Celts, and Finns. Tolkien intended to make up for this by constructing a mythology for England. He knew that to achieve this goal, a literary mythology set in a secondary world would not suffice. If his literary mythology were to work as a mythology for England, it had to be connected to England. Tolkien's adoption of the Anglo-Saxon term 'Middle-earth' was part of this anchorage strategy, as were his various attempts to construct a frame narrative connecting his imagined world with the present-day world.

It is debatable whether Tolkien succeeded in creating a mythology for England, but he certainly managed to anchor his imagined world in the world of the reader. Though his frame stories were possibly meant merely as forged visions and feigned history, Tolkien's semi-autobiographical endorsement, especially in *The Notion Club Papers*, of the truth of myth and the reality of true dreams, affords a referential reading. Furthermore, the semiotic effect of anchorage established in the frame narratives spills over to the rest

of *HoMe* and even to *H*, *LR*, and *S*. For example, the *Akallabêth*, the part of *S* dealing with the downfall of Númenor, has no religious affordances of the type ‘thematization of the text’s veracity’. It presents itself as a fictional narrative about the destruction of an imaginary continent. At best it indirectly establishes a connection to the actual world through its hypertextual relation to the Atlantis myth. When *Akallabêth* is read in the light of *The Notion Club Papers*, however, the veracity of the Númenor legend becomes explicitly thematised. *The Notion Club Papers* unequivocally identifies Númenor with Atlantis and affords a reading of the destruction of Númenor-Atlantis as a real historical event. This allows *Akallabêth* to be read as a detailed account, not of a fictional event, but of this historical event. This effect of anchorage, which *The Cottage of Lost Play*, *The Lost Road*, and *The Notion Club Papers* provide for the whole Legendarium, unquestionably constitutes the most significant religious affordance which *HoMe* adds to the already published parts of Tolkien’s literary mythology.

Let me sum up. Together, the three frame narratives promote a repertoire of ideas, some about the ontology of the world and some about Tolkien’s beliefs. Concerning the world itself, they promote the ideas that (1) another world (Faery) or other worlds exist; (2) this world (or one of these worlds) is inhabited by fairies/Elves and Valar; (3) humans can access this world in true dreams, just as beings from this world can contact humans; (4) traces of such experiences are found in fairy-stories and myths; (5) Tolkien himself had had such special experiences; (6) his works bear marks of these experiences and therefore themselves represent a doorway to Faery; and (7) Tolkien can therefore be taken as a role model for travelling to Faery. Concerning Tolkien’s beliefs, they furthermore promote the ideas that (8) Tolkien believed myths and legends to have an historical core; (9) perceived his own literary mythology as being deeply connected with other myths and legends; (10) believed in the existence of ancestral or racial memory; and (11) considered his literary mythology to be informed by such ancestral memory. From the last four propositions it can finally be inferred, with an extra interpretational leap, that (12) Tolkien’s literary mythology has an historical core. Propositions 2, 5-7, and 10-12 promote a religionisation of Tolkien’s imagined world; propositions 1, 3-4, and 8-9 further promote a synthesis of Tolkien’s narratives with other mythologies.

15.2. Narrative Religion in *The History of Middle-earth*

Only a handful of texts in *HoMe* have as their key purpose to thematise the truth of the Legendarium. By contrast, almost all texts include some measure of narrative religion. A different format is therefore needed for the following analysis of the narrative religion in *HoMe*. Rather than analysing a number of key texts in chronological order, the analysis below will focus on four key themes, namely cosmogony, theology, cosmology, and afterlife and eschatology. There will be no sub-section on rituals, for *HoMe* includes no

narrative rituals.⁴⁴⁶ As I make clear in the sub-sections on theology and cosmology, however, *HoMe* provides much information on the Valar and on how to access the world of the Valar, and this information can be used as raw material from which to craft Valar-directed rituals.

This section does not aim to give an exhaustive overview of the narrative religion in *HoMe*. Doing so, would take up too much space. It is also not necessary for the simple reason that the religious affordances of *HoMe* overlap greatly with those of *LR* and *S* (cf. chs. 7 and 9). This is so, because *HoMe* is largely composed of drafts of these two works. In this section, I shall therefore restrict myself to pointing out what *HoMe* adds or alters compared to *LR* and *S*, thus skipping the steps of exhaustive analysis and of systematic comparison of *HoMe* with *LR* and *S*. I focus on the earliest versions of some central tales of *S*, namely *The Music of the Ainur* (cosmogony), *The Coming of the Valar and the Building of Valinor* (theogony and theology), and *The Hiding of Valinor* (cosmology), and on a number of descriptive pieces that were not included in *S* in any form, namely *Laws and Customs among the Eldar* (eschatology), *Quendi and Eldar* (languages), and the dialogue *Athrabeth Finrod Ah Andreth* (eschatology).

15.2.1. Cosmogony in *The History of Middle-earth*

The earliest version of Tolkien's cosmogonic myth, *The Music of the Ainur*, was written between 1918 and 1920 (*LT I* 45) and remained relatively intact as Tolkien later revised his mythology. Indeed, if one compares *The Music of the Ainur* to *Ainulindalë*, the final version of the creation story published in *S* (cf. section 9.1.1 above), the similarity between the two pieces is more striking than the differences. In both versions, the supreme god Ilúvatar creates the Ainur, a class of spiritual beings (*S* 3; *LT I* 52). Guided by the will of Ilúvatar, the Ainur thereafter sing a world into existence. This world exists only as a virtuality or potentiality, however, until it is imbued by Ilúvatar with life and reality (*S* 4-9; *LT I* 53-55). After the creation of the World, some of the Ainur descend into it as Ilúvatar's demiurgical representatives (*S* 9-10; *LT I* 57).

There are also differences between *Music* and *Ainulindalë*, and I shall point out two. First, *The Music of the Ainur* is embedded directly within the frame story established by

⁴⁴⁶ The closest we come are a number of short references to major Elven and Númenórean festivals. In "The Fall of Gondolin", it is mentioned that the Elves of Gondolin celebrated *Nost-na-Lothion* (Qu: Birth of Flowers) in the spring and *Tarnin Austa* (Qu: Gates of Summer) in the summer (*LT II*, 172). "Gilfanon's Tale" includes a reference to *Turuhalmë* (Qu: The Logdrawing), a winter festival held in the Cottage of Lost Play (*LT I*, 229-230). A slight bit of information on the Eru cult in Númenor is given in *UT*. Already from *S* we know that the Númenóreans had an Eru cult (*S* 312), but in *UT* we learn further that this cult had three major annual holidays. These were the *Erukyermë* (Qu: Prayer to Eru) in the first days of spring, the *Erulaitalë* (Qu: Praise to Eru) at midsummer, and the *Eruhantalë* (Qu: Thanksgiving to Eru) at the end of autumn. On each occasion the king would climb the sacred mountain Meneltarma with a great entourage and speak prayers to Eru on behalf of the people (*UT* 214; also 226, 236-237, 263).

The Cottage of Lost Play. This particular story is told to Eriol by Rúmil, an Elven sage and door-warden of the Cottage. In later versions of the cosmogonic myth, written in the 1930s through 1950s, the frame story is gradually diluted until Christopher Tolkien decided to remove it entirely in *S* (Whittingham 2008, 49). As Whittingham points out, the loss of frame story changes the very character of the cosmogonic myth. *Music* is a tale told in a context of joviality and merriment, whereas *Ainulindalë* is presented as fact (within the narrative world) and recounted in a high style reminiscent of Genesis 1 (Whittingham 2008, 54-57). Whittingham finds the *Ainulindalë* more beautiful and powerful than *Music*, but one might assume that Tolkien religionists of a Pagan bent would prefer the less Christian and more 'pagan' original. Furthermore, I am not convinced that the presence of a frame story will be experienced by all readers as a dilution of textual authority – from 'fact' to 'mere tale' – such as Whittingham suggests. It might actually be the other way around. *Ainulindalë* does not explicitly thematise its own veracity, neither within Tolkien's narrative world nor in relation to the actual world. It is merely presented as one tale among others in a collection of legends, and these legends clearly represent the Elven point of view within the narrative world, a point of view that is not guaranteed to be true. If readers experience *Ainulindalë* as having authority, it is rather because of its hypertextual dependence on Genesis 1 than by an effect of veracity generated by the text itself. By contrast, in *Music* Rúmil reassures Eriol of the legitimacy of his tale: Rúmil has it from the first Elves to whom it was told by Manwë himself (*LT I* 52; cf. *WJ* 406-407).

The second change from *Music* to *Ainulindalë*, and according to Christopher Tolkien the most important one (*LT I* 62), concerns the complexity of the creation process. *Ainulindalë* has three distinct phases. First, the Ainur sing the history of the world in a Great Music. Second, Ilúvatar shows them a Vision of what they have sung. He makes it clear that the World has not yet been created and that both the Great Music and the Vision represent only Ilúvatar's not-yet-realised plan for the World. Only in the third phase, the Creation proper, Ilúvatar gives reality to the Vision by uttering "Eä" ('Let these things Be!'; cf. section 9.1.1 above). *Music* has no Vision phase, but proceeds directly from the Great Music to the Creation. According to Whittingham, the Vision phase in *Ainulindalë* is a significant addition because it emphasises that the Ainur do not create through the Great Music and more clearly stages Ilúvatar as the sovereign creator god (2008, 60). As far as I can see, the addition of the Vision phase does not change much, for the relation between Ilúvatar and the Valar remains the same between the two versions. Already in *Music*, the Ainur, including the evil Melko [Melkor], sing nothing that Ilúvatar has not willed them to sing (*LT I* 54-55). And already in *Music*, Ilúvatar alone imbues the music of the Ainur with "Life and Reality" (*LT I* 53, 55). Furthermore, there is one change from *Music* to *Ainulindalë* that arguably diminishes the distance between Ilúvatar and the Ainur rather than expanding it: The Valar's role as demiurgical co-creators increases. Whereas the Valar in *Music* enter a world that has already been shaped, in *Ainulindalë*

they enter a bare and unfinished world which they must furnish with continents, mountains, and so on (*S* 21-22; cf. *LT I* 225).

All in all, it must be concluded that the alternative cosmogonic ideas in *HoMe* are not significantly different from what is found in *S*. If religion based on *HoMe* is different from religion based on *S*, it will not be due to different views on cosmogony. By contrast, the characterisation of the Valar is strikingly different in *HoMe* compared to *S*.

15.2.2. Theology in *The History of Middle-earth*

Throughout *HoMe*, much additional information is given on the Valar. I shall here touch upon the five most important motifs.⁴⁴⁷ First of all, the Valar are consequently referred to as “the Gods” in *The Lost Tales* and in all of Tolkien’s later texts. When Eriol, in a frame story passage connecting *Cottage* and *Music*,⁴⁴⁸ asks the Elf Lindo “who be these Valar; are they the Gods?” his host confirms: “So be they” (*LT I* 45). This stands in contrast to *LR* and *S* in which the Valar are only rarely and reluctantly referred to as gods. An appendix to *LR* identifies the Valar as “angelic powers” (*LR* 1123), and only once in *LR* is one of the Valar, Oromë, identified as a “god of old” (*LR* 838). In the *Valaquenta* in *S*, it is stated that “The Great among these spirits [the Ainur] the Elves name the Valar, the Powers of Arda, and Men have often called them gods” (*S* 15). Here the meaning is clearly that although humans refer to them as gods, this qualification is actually a misnomer. There are only three additional references in *S* to the Valar as gods, but for instance 20 references to them as The Lords of the West.⁴⁴⁹

In the quote just given, we see that the *Valaquenta* draws a distinction between what Men tell of the Valar (they are gods) and what the Valar really are (they are incarnated Ainur). The stories about the Valar in *HoMe* retain a distinction between ‘what is’ and ‘what is said’, but this does not entail a disqualification of the Valar as gods. It entails only a disqualification of the portrayal of the Valar/Gods in human tales. Consider, for example, how Eriol and Lindo’s dialogue about the nature of the gods continues. Lindo explains that while the Valar are truly gods, “concerning them Men tell many strange and garbled tales that are far from the truth, and many strange names they call them that you will not hear here” (*LT I* 45). That is to say, within the narrative universe, the Valar

⁴⁴⁷ Most of the other information, such as the details about the dwellings of the Valar in Valmar given in *The Coming of the Valar* (*LT I* 73-77), adds little in terms of religious affordances.

⁴⁴⁸ Christopher Tolkien refers to this passage as the *Link*.

⁴⁴⁹ By contrast, Ilúvatar is not referred to as God in *The Lost Tales*. As Rúmil tells Eriol, Ilúvatar is not of the Gods, “for he made them.” Rúmil continues, “Ilúvatar is the Lord for Always who dwells beyond the world; who made it and is not of it or in it, but loves it” (*LT I* 49). In most of his later texts, Tolkien made little fuss and referred to Ilúvatar as God and to the Valar as the Gods. In *LR* and *S*, however, Ilúvatar is not explicitly referred to as God, although Tolkien’s letters make it clear that he understood Ilúvatar as the narrative counterpart of the Christian God which he believed to exist in the actual world (cf. section 15.3.1 below).

are the ‘real Gods’ who live in The Blessed Realm and to whom the ‘narrative gods’ appearing in the mythologies of Middle-earth refer only imperfectly. This motif contributes significantly to the religious affordances of *HoMe*. When combined with the anchorage of the narrative world in the actual world achieved by the frame narratives (cf. section 15.1 above), it affords a reading of Tolkien’s Legendarium as the ‘true story behind the legend’, the ‘legend’ being the actual world’s mythologies.

In line with the identification of the Valar as a pantheon of gods rather than as a collective of angels, many texts in *HoMe* present the Valar as highly anthropomorphic beings. It is emphasised, for example, that the Valar, as incarnated beings, possess both a *hröa* (Qu: body) and a *fëa* (Qu: soul, spirit), just like Men and Elves do (*WJ* 397). Especially *The Lost Tales*, Tolkien’s earliest stories, stress the embodiment of the Valar. For example, whereas the relationships between the married Valar in *S* is platonic if not purely metaphorical, the Valar of *The Lost Tales* procreate. Manwë and Varda have two children, Fionwë-Úrion and Erinti (*LT I* 58); Aulë and Yavanna have Oromë and Nessa (*LT I* 67, 75).⁴⁵⁰ We even hear of one third-generation Valië, Nielíqui, the daughter of Oromë and Vána (*LT I* 75, 93).⁴⁵¹ The Valar of the *Tales* are not only more sexual than the Valar of *S*, they are also more prone to quarrel and folly. Worst of all their imperfections is their failure to make war on Melkor after he has destroyed the Two Trees. Motivated by fear and indolence they choose instead to withdraw Valinor from the physical world (*LT I* 208-211; more on this below). In *S*, Valinor is also hidden (*S* 114), but only at a later stage after Melkor has tried to destroy the Moon. More importantly, the Valar’s failure to go to war is only in the *Tales* condemned as an error and a missed chance of glory (*LT I* 213).⁴⁵² Even though the Valar in *HoMe* are in many ways more human than the Valar in *S*, they are not given the individuality that the gods of the classical pantheons possess. Like the Valar in *S*, the Valar in *HoMe* are primarily demiurges, who build mansions for themselves, fashion celestial bodies, and so on. They do not cheat on their wives like Zeus or go fishing like Þórr. They remain flat characters – less licentious and conniving than the Olympians and less resourceful than the Æsir.

⁴⁵⁰ It is not stated explicitly that Nessa is the daughter of Aulë and Yavanna, but this can be inferred from the fact that she is Oromë’s sister (*LT I* 75).

⁴⁵¹ It is unclear exactly how the notion of Valar children should be understood. Oromë is said to be the son of Aulë and Yavanna, but he is also described as an Ainu descending into Eä. This implies that Oromë was in some way begotten before the creation of the world. His daughter Nielíqui, by contrast, who is mentioned for the first time in the description of the Valar’s mansions, must have been conceived within the world. *The Lost Tales* include references to two other Valar children, Telimektar, son of Tulkas (e.g. *LT I* 101), and Kosomot, son of Melkor (*LT I* 93).

⁴⁵² In *S*, the Valar are later persuaded by Eärendel to make war and they ultimately overthrow Melkor and bind him in the Void (*S* 306). No such tale is included in *The Lost Tales*, though an outline of *The Tale of Eärendel* shows that Tolkien planned to include a tale resulting in the “[b]inding of Melko” (*LT II* 253).

As embodied beings, the Valar communicate through speech (*WJ* 397), and *HoMe* gives much information on Valarin, the Valar's own language.⁴⁵³ Already in *The Music of the Ainur* (*LT I* 48), Rúmil tells Eriol that the Valar possess a language of their own and that only few among the Elves know it. More is said in *The Lhammas* (No: Account of Tongues),⁴⁵⁴ a piece 'authored' by Pengolođ of Gondolin and allegedly based on the "work of Rúmil" (*LROW* 167). Pengolođ here develops a linguistic pedigree that traces all the languages of Middle-earth back to Valarin (or Valinorian).⁴⁵⁵ While *The Lhammas* tells us nothing of the grammar and vocabulary of Valarin, a selection of Valarin words are given in a later "Note on the 'Language of the Valar'" (*WJ* 397-407).⁴⁵⁶ The "Note" includes several Valarin terms, especially referring to cosmological entities and concepts. It also includes some names of the Valar in their own tongue.⁴⁵⁷ A selection of these Valarin names and terms are given in table 15.2 below.

Table 15.2. Valarin Names and Terms (<i>WJ</i> 399-401)			
Quenya	Valarin	Quenya	Valarin
Ainu	Ayanū	Arda	Aḅāraphelūn (<i>appointed dwelling</i>)
Aulë	Azūlēz	Arda Unmarred	Aḅāraphelūn Dušamanūđān
Manwë	Mānawenūz (<i>Blessed One</i>)	Arda Marred	Aḅāraphelūn Amanaišal
Oromë	Arōmēz	Telperion	Ibrīniđilpathānezal
Tulkas	Tulukhastāz (<i>the Golden-haired</i>)	Laurelin	Tulukhedelgorūs
Ulmo	Ul(l)ubōz	Ithil (<i>Moon</i>)	Phanaikelūth (<i>bright mirror</i>)
Aratar (<i>the Supreme</i>)	māxanumāz	Anar (<i>Sun</i>)	Aḅāraigas (<i>appointed heat</i>)

⁴⁵³ The existence of a Valar speech, Valinorean, is mentioned once in *LR* (864), but not at all in *S*.

⁴⁵⁴ 'No' is short of Noldorin, the language of the Noldor. Noldorin was an early form of Sindarin.

⁴⁵⁵ *The Lhammas*, of which three versions survive, was written *circa* 1937-1938.

⁴⁵⁶ The "Note" is an appendix to *Quendi and Eldar*, a piece devoted primarily to the etymology of words in different forms of Elvish. Embedding itself within Tolkien's frame story, *Quendi and Eldar* is presented as excerpts and summaries of Pengolođ's *Lhammas* (*WJ* 393, 397); the "Note" is furthermore said to be derived from "the sayings of Rúmil" (*WJ* 397-398).

⁴⁵⁷ Strictly speaking, the Valarin names given are titles. With the exception of Oromë's name, the true Valarin names of the Valar remained unknown to the Elves (*WJ* 400-401). Furthermore, the compiler of *Quendi and Eldar* warns the reader that the Valarin forms given in his word list are probably not completely accurate (*WJ* 398).

In section 13.1 above we saw that the Fifth Way Mystery School used Quenyan phrases in their ritual, partly in imitation of the Elves and partly to invest their ritual with that magical aura which ancient and incomprehensible languages possess. We can hypothesise that those Tolkien religionists who base themselves on *HoMe* will consider Valarin, the language of the Gods, even more powerful and suitable for ritual use than Quenya. In other words, the parts of *HoMe* concerned with Valarin contribute to the religious affordances of Tolkien's literary mythology by supplying pieces of a language exceptionally fit for theurgy.

The last noteworthy theological motif that *HoMe* adds to *LR* and *S* is the notion that the Valar entered Eä with a "vassalage", a "great host of fair spirits" (*LT I* 59, 58).⁴⁵⁸ Already in *S*, it is mentioned that some spirits of lesser stature than the Maiar entered Eä (*S* 4; 11), but no information is given about them and they do not appear in later tales. In *The Coming of the Valar*, these 'sub-Maian' spirits are divided into nine classes. Three of these classes are particularly important. These are the Oarni, spirits of the sea and helpers of Ulmo, and the the Mánir and the Súruli, "the sylphs of the airs and of the winds" (*LT I* 66) who accompany Manwë and Varda. Only these three classes of spirits play a role also in other *Tales*.⁴⁵⁹ Two other groups of sea-dwelling spirits, the Falmaríni and the Wingildi, are mentioned only in *Coming* (*LT I* 66),⁴⁶⁰ as are four kinds of nature-spirits who accompany Aulë and Yavanna. These are "the Nermir [...] Tavari, Nandini and Orossi, brownies, fays, pixies, leprawns, and what else are they not called, for their number is very great" (*LT I* 66).⁴⁶¹ In *The Lost Tales*, Manwë, Ulmo, Aulë, and Melko are referred to as the "four great ones" among the Valar (*LT I* 58). Each is associated with one of the elements, and these associations are made explicit by their spiritual entourages. Manwë and his spirits are associated with the element Air, Ulmo with Water, Aulë with Earth, and Melko with Fire. *Coming* does not mention any fire spirits aligned with Melko, but from other *Lost Tales* and from *LR* we know that Melko has indeed fire spirits in his service, the chief of them being the Balrogs.

⁴⁵⁸ In *LT I*, Tolkien referred to these lesser spirits as the "lesser Vali" (*LT I* 65), indicating that the term Valar could be used in an expanded sense to refer to all the Ainur, great and small, who entered the World.

⁴⁵⁹ The Oarni play an important role in *The Coming of the Elves* and in *The Tale of Eärendel*. The Mánir and the Súruli appear in *The Theft of Melko* and in the *Tale of the Sun and the Moon*. In the latter story they guide the Sun and the Moon in their course.

⁴⁶⁰ A further kind of sea-dwelling spirits are the Oaritsi. The Oaritsi are not mentioned in *Coming*, but are hinted at in *The Hiding of Valinor* (*LT I* 227).

⁴⁶¹ The lesser spirits disappeared as *The Lost Tales* were developed into *S*. One possible reason was that Tolkien, to make room for a transformation of the Valar into angelic beings, wished to eliminate the lesser spirits, such as the Mánir and the Súruli, which he initially portrayed much like choirs of angels (e.g. *LT I* 181).

15.2.3. Cosmology in *The History of Middle-earth*

Most of the cosmological motifs in *S* are present already in *The Lost Tales*. For example, the World is constituted by two great land masses, the Outer Lands [Aman] in the East and the Great Lands [Middle-earth] in the West (*LT I* 68). Also, the Valar consecutively create three pairs of light sources, the Two Lamps which are destroyed by Melko, the Two Trees which are also destroyed, and the Sun and the Moon (*LT I* 68-73, 153, 179-195). A major difference between *S* and the *Tales*, is that Númenor is absent from Tolkien's initial cosmology. This means that there is also no Númenórean revolt against the Valar and no destruction of Númenor and no rounding of the world as a result of this revolt. As a consequence, all cosmological information in the *Tales* is about a flat world. Horizontally, the world is said to be surrounded by Vai, the Outer Sea (*LT I* 68, 214). Vai, in turn, is fenced in by the Wall of Things (*LT I* 214). Outside of this Wall lies the Void. The World is also surrounded by Vai in the vertical dimension. Beneath the World, Vai is an ocean on which the World floats; above the World, Vai is thinner and becomes Vaitya, the outermost 'air' (*LT I* 86). When not visible on the firmament, the Moon is said to travel through Vai beneath the World. At night, the Sun leaves the World through the "Door of Night" in the Wall of Things and re-enters the World each morning through the "Gates of Morn" (*LT I* 216). Between the surface of the earth and Vaitya are two other 'airs', Ilwë which "is blue and clear and flows among the stars", and Vilna which is closest to the surface and in which "the birds fly safely" (*LT I* 65).

In terms of religious affordances, the most important cosmological idea that *HoMe* adds to *S* and *LR* is that humans can still reach Valinor after it has been withdrawn from the physical world. No less than three roads lead from the human lands to The Blessed Realm. In *The Hiding of Valinor* we hear that two of these roads were fashioned on Manwë's initiative because he considered the Valar's withdrawal of Valinor to be a mistake and wanted to remedy it (*LT I* 211). With these two roads, the Olóré Mallë and the Ilweran, Manwë wanted to reconnect, so to speak, Valinor with the world of Men. In *Hiding* it is described that Irmo wove the first road, the Olóré Mallë or Path of Dreams, by "delicate magic" (*LT I* 211). It was by this road that the human children in the Cottage of Lost Play had come (*LT I* 18, 212). The second road was crafted by Oromë out of the golden hairs of his wife Vána. It is the Ilweran, the Rainbow or the Bridge of Heaven. By this road the Valar can visit Middle-earth, but Men cannot tread upon it (*LT I* 212-213). The third road has been in place since the creation of the World. It is the Qalvanda, the Road of Death, by which both Men and Elves go to the Halls of Mandos upon death (*LT I* 213).⁴⁶²

⁴⁶² Before the hiding of Valinor one could sail directly from Middle-earth to Valinor by the Straight Road. After the hiding of Valinor, this remains possible, but much more difficult (*LT I* 210-211). From *LR* we know that the Straight Road remained open for the Elves travelling from Middle-earth to Aman, but that it was closed for good after the last Elves had left Middle-earth.

The notion of the Olórë Mallë adds a significant religious affordance to Tolkien's mythology, for by this way living humans are said to be able to visit the land of the Valar. The significance of the Olórë Mallë increases further if one delves deeper into the meaning of the term *olor*. In *Hiding*, *olor* seems to refer simply to the dreams of night. This is the case, at least, when Vairë, the narrator of this particular tale, states that "no Man's eye beheld [the Olórë Mallë] save in sweet slumbers in their heart's youth" (*LT I* 211). In the *Unfinished Tales*, however, Tolkien says the following about the word:

Olor is a word often translated 'dream', but that does not refer to (most) human 'dreams', certainly not the dreams of sleep. To the Eldar it included the vivid contents of their *memory*, as of their *imagination*: it referred in fact to *clear vision*, in the mind, of things not physically present at the body's situation. But not only to an idea, but to the full clothing of this in particular form and detail (*UT* 512-513; original emphasis).⁴⁶³

If *olor* can mean a "clear vision", then the Olórë Mallë becomes the 'Path of Visions' rather than the 'Path of Night Dreams'. It seems thus that this 'path' must be interpreted metaphorically, not as a physical road, but as a visionary pathway that allows one to see The Blessed Realm clearly in a vision of the imagination.⁴⁶⁴ In other words, *HoMe* and *UT* present half a model for ritual interaction with Tolkien's narrative universe. They state *that* humans can have clear visions of Valinor, but reveal nothing about *how* a state of *olor* can be induced.

15.2.4. Afterlife and Eschatology in *The History of Middle-earth*

Let me finally touch upon the ideas which *HoMe* adds to *LR* and *S* concerning human and Elven afterlife and the end of the World.⁴⁶⁵ As the *Legendarium* evolved, Tolkien remained quite consistent in his view on human afterlife. The core idea remained throughout that the human soul or spirit (*fëa*) leaves the body (*hröa*) after death and goes to the Halls of Mandos. There it waits until the Great End when it will be reunited with

⁴⁶³ The passage is part of an essay on the Istari. The meaning of *olor* is discussed in this context because Gandalf's name in Valinor, Olórin, is derived from it.

⁴⁶⁴ The interpretation of the Olórë Mallë as a pathway of the imagination is disharmonious with the quite physical conception of the road in *The Cottage of Lost Play*. That does not make this interpretation invalid, however, for Tolkien soon abandoned the idea of a Cottage in Aman full of human children. By contrast, he continued to be fascinated with dream visions and built them into *LR* (cf. sections 7.1.4 and 14.1.2) and into the later frame stories discussed in section 15.1.2 above. The dream visions experienced by Alboin and Audoin in *The Lost Road* and by Ramer and Lowdham in *The Notion Club Papers* are quite similar to traveling the Olórë Mallë. What is different, though, is that these characters have visions of Númenor rather than Valinor, and that their visions are of Other Time, to speak with Ramer, rather than of Other Space.

⁴⁶⁵ These are themes which kept returning in Tolkien's texts. For a fuller discussion of afterlife ideas in *HoMe*, I refer the reader to Whittingham (2008, ch. 5) and to Testi (2012). On eschatology, see Whittingham (2008, ch. 6).

Ilúvatar.⁴⁶⁶ Because of the prospect of ultimate reunion with Ilúvatar, the human doom is referred to as a “gift” already in *The Music of the Ainur* (*LT I* 59; cf. *LR* 1035, 1063; *S* 316). In *The Drowning of Anadûnê* (*SD* 401), Tolkien introduced an additional soteriological motif. In this text humans express the belief that it was Ilúvatar’s original intention that humans should be immortal and become like the Valar. Only the malevolent intervention of Melekō [Melkor] caused a Fall and the allotment of mortality to humans. Tolkien developed this idea in *Athrabeth Finrod Ah Andreth* (*MR* 309-311; cf. Whittingham 2008, 140, 145, 154-155).

Several texts in *HoMe* include interesting reflections on the afterlife of the Elves. Also in this case, certain core ideas remained unaltered throughout. From *The Lost Tales* through to *S*, it is clear that (a) Elves can only die “if they be slain or waste in grief” (*LT I* 59), and that (b) all Elves fade, but the Elves in Middle-earth fade faster than those in Valinor (*LT I* 166, 172-173; cf. Whittingham 2008, 133).⁴⁶⁷ Tolkien was in many minds, however, about what happened to Elven souls after death. The original idea in *The Lost Tales* was that the Elven souls wait in Mandos until they are “reborn into their children” (e.g. *LT I* 59). This is a rather conventional form of reincarnation in which the soul survives death and migrates into a new body upon conception. In the early *Quenta Silmarillion*, the option of being reborn in this way is retained, but the dead Elven souls are given a choice between reincarnation and a purely spiritual existence. If they take the latter option they become “as spirits, taking form according to their own thought, as the lesser folk of the divine race” (*LROW* 247; cf. Whittingham 2008, 139).

Both motifs, reincarnation and spiritual existence, are developed in later writings. In *The Laws and Customs among the Eldar*, Tolkien adds that re-born Elves gradually regain the memory of their former lives as they grow up (*MR* 221). In a later piece, the *Converse between Manwë and Eru*, an entirely new ‘technique’ of reincarnation is introduced. Besides reincarnation through re-birth, Elves can be “re-housed” to a new body created by Manwë (*MR* 362; cf. Testi 2012, 55).⁴⁶⁸ We might say that Tolkien’s original idea of (a) reincarnation into the children without memory of one’s former life gradually gives way via (b) reincarnation with eventual memory retrieval to (c) transarnation with intact memory and personality.

⁴⁶⁶ A more complex eschatology is developed in *The Coming of the Valar*. In this text, Tolkien distinguishes between four temporary dooms for human souls awaiting the Great End. Some stay in Mandos and some are handed over to Melko who takes them to Angamandi, the Hells of Iron. Most souls are shipped to the plains of Arvalin where they “wander in the dusk”. Only a happy few are invited to dwell and feast with the Valar in their capital Valmar (*LT I* 77). This idea of the four dooms was soon abandoned, however.

⁴⁶⁷ In *The Lost Tales*, the difference in fading pace is partly explained as a result of the Elves in Valinor drinking *limpë*, a source of sustenance inspired by ambrosia. As the “wine of song” (*LT I* 97), *limpë* is also reminiscent of Bragir’s mead of poetry from Norse mythology.

⁴⁶⁸ Glorfindel is the only Elf in Tolkien’s literary mythology who has been rehoused (or transarnated) in this way (*PM* 377-378).

Many later texts operate with the option of a purely spiritual existence, although the conception differs from that in the early *Quenta Silmarillion*. Only in that particular text can Elves, after having gone to the Halls of Mandos, choose a spiritual existence. Tolkien immediately abandoned this idea, but introduced a somewhat similar form of afterlife in *Laws and Customs*. This text mentions that Elves who are slain or die of grief sometimes refuse to go to Mandos. These so-called “Houseless” Elves can live on as pure spirits (MR 233). In *Laws and Customs* it is further explained that Elven souls can lose their bodies also in another way, namely as a result of fading. Elves who do not leave for Valinor in time, but stay and fade in Middle-earth, will ultimately become spirits (MR 212; also MR 342-343). These so-called “Lingerers” (MR 224-225) will dwell in Middle-earth until the end. The Houseless and the Lingerers are described as being “invisible to mortal eyes, unless they will to be seen by some among Men into whose minds they may enter directly” (MR 212).

In *Laws and Customs* it is furthermore stated that many Elves believe that their spirits, like those of the Ainur and of Men, originate from outside Eä, and that they will therefore return to Ilúvatar at the end of the world (MR 220). According to this view, Men and Elves have the same ultimate doom. This stands in contrast, however, to most of Tolkien’s other writings, in which the Elves are (near) immortal but bound to the world, while humans are mortal, but may look forward to escape the world at the Great End.

The notions of Elven afterlife sketched here offer interesting religious affordances. The notion that Elves, either by choice or by fading, can become spirits and appear to humans diminishes the difference between the Ainur (Valar, Maiar, minor spirits) on the one hand, and the Elves on the other. At the same time it increases the difference between humans, who are bound to a physical existence in this world, and Elves who either enjoy a spiritual existence in the physical world or a physical existence in the spiritual world (the Blessed Realm). As a result, a new conceptualisation of the Elves becomes possible. Where the Elves in *LR* and *S* are presented as ‘perfect humans’, they can now be seen also as a collective of lesser deities. Hence, we can expect *HoMe*-based religion to count on the existence of Elven spirit guides and to involve ritual communication with Elves as well as with Valar (and Maiar). At the same time, the difference between humans and Elves is diminished on another dimension, namely by the Elven belief that Elves and humans have similar souls with similar dooms, and by the human belief that humans were originally destined to immortality. Taken together with the developed conceptualisation of Elven reincarnation, this stress on the similarity of Elven and human souls provides some textual basis for the belief, encountered in earlier chapters, that Elven souls sometimes reincarnate in human bodies. While Tolkien nowhere explicitly mentions the possibility of such trans-species soul transfers, *HoMe* provides all the building-blocks needed to construct the notion.

As we have seen, Tolkien's ideas about individual afterlife grew in complexity over time. His eschatological ideas about the Great End of his narrative world changed also, although this change was rather one of style than one of scope. More than other aspects of his literary mythology, Tolkien's eschatological vision changed in character from pagan to Christian. In *The Lost Tales*, several tellers foresee a "Great End" involving the destruction of the Sun and the slaying of Melko in the last Great Battle (*LT I* 219). This cataclysm is followed by a Second Music in which the Sons of Men will join the Ainur (*LT I* 53, 59) and a perfect world will be made. This tale of world-destruction and world-rebirth, which is alluded to also in *LR* (981) and *S* (4), seems modelled on the Ragnarök myth of Snorri's Prose Edda. By contrast, the patently Christian notion of "the Old Hope" appears in the dialogue *Athrabeth Finrod Ah Andreth*. Andreth tells the Elf Finrod that some Men believe that "the One will himself enter into Arda, and heal Men and all the Marring from the beginning to the end" (*MR* 321; cf. Whittingham 2008, 157). In this version of the story no great destruction preludes re-creation. It is not up to the Valar and their entourage to defeat Melkor in the final battle; Melkor's Marring of Arda will be undone by Ilúvatar himself in his sovereignty. In this version, the eschatological events are not only bound to happen given the constitution of the world, but much more manifestly become part of Ilúvatar's soteriological plan.

15.2.5. Narrative Religion in *The History of Middle-earth: A Summary*

Concluding this section on narrative religion, we can say that *HoMe* adds additional religious affordances to *LR* and *S* in four significant ways. First, the Valar in *HoMe* are represented as more suitable partners for ritual interaction than their counterparts in *LR* and *S*. In *HoMe*, the Valar are no mere angels, but are identified as gods. They are even the 'real Gods' to whom the gods of human myth imperfectly refer. Second, while *HoMe* – like *LR* and *S* – includes no narrative rituals in which Elves or humans invoke the Valar, it offers some useful building-blocks for the creation of Valar-directed rituals. Most important is the notion of the Olóre Mallë, the pathway through which humans can 'visit' The Blessed Realm in visions. Of secondary importance are the words in Valarin which can be used to address the Valar in their own language. Third, *HoMe* affords ritual interaction with other spiritual beings besides the Valar. Besides the Valar who inhabit The Blessed Realm where they must be visited (or from which they must be invoked), *HoMe* counts on two classes of minor spiritual beings inhabiting the physical world. These are the collectives of lesser Ainur (sylphs, brownies, pixies, etc.) and those Elves who dwell in Middle-earth without a body (the Houseless and the Lingerers). These beings inhabit the physical world and sometimes let themselves be seen by humans. Hence, their inclusion in *HoMe* affords a belief in Elf/fay apparitions, in the existence of Elf/fay spirit guides, and so on. Finally, the diminished difference between Elven and human souls and the more developed conceptualisation of Elven reincarnation provides some textual legitimisation for the belief that some humans possess Elven souls.

15.3. The Religious Affordances of Tolkien's Letters and Essays

In this section, I analyse a selection of those non-narrative texts in which Tolkien reflects on the nature and possible truth of his literary mythology. I focus primarily on Tolkien's letters, a collection of which was edited and published in 1981 by Tolkien's biographer Humphrey Carpenter (*Letters*). These letters, written to fans, critics, publishers, friends, and family, concern *LR* and the yet unpublished *S*, and show how Tolkien thought about this literary mythology and how he experienced the writing process. The analysis of Tolkien's letters will be supplemented with a number of other sources. One of these is the essay *On Fairy-Stories (OFS)* which was presented in its original form as the Andrew Lang Lecture in 1938, but not published until 1947 in *Tree and Leaf (TL)*. Another is an essay accompanying the short story *Smith of Wootton Major*. *Smith* was published in 1967, but the reflective essay was not published until 2005 (Tolkien 2005). It is worth considering Tolkien's reflective texts at this point because those Tolkien religionists who base themselves on *HoMe* are also interested in Tolkien as an author and hence in Tolkien's commentary on his narratives. What matters to these Legendarium Reconstructionists is the total sum of religious affordances possessed by the narrative corpus as a whole (*H*, *LR*, *S*, and *HoMe*) together with those religious affordances ascribed to this corpus by Tolkien's letters and essays.

The reflective texts considered here function as a kind of authorial prefaces to Tolkien's literary mythology, though they do not strictly speaking belong to that category. Real authorial prefaces, such as Tolkien's prefaces to *H* and *LR*, are published together with a main text to which it stands in a *paratextual* relation (cf. section 7.3.3). Tolkien's letters, by contrast, comment on his narratives but have not been published with them. For this reason they stand in another intertextual relation to the narratives which Genette terms *metatextual* (1997a, 4). The *Smith* essay likewise stands in a metatextual relation to the *Smith* short story. The essay stands in a more distanced relation to Tolkien's literary mythology, for though *Smith of Wootton Major* shares author and theme with the narratives about Middle-earth, it is set in a different fictional world and hence no part of the Middle-earth text corpus. *OFS* is also a metatext because it comments on other texts, but it is a metatext of a different kind than *Letters* and the *Smith* essay, because the subject is fairy-stories in general, rather than Tolkien's own particular tales. We can thus say that *Letters*, the *Smith* essay and *OFS* all stand in a metatextual rather than a paratextual relation to Tolkien's literary mythology, but that the intertextual distance is smaller between *Letters* and the narratives than between *OFS* and the narratives. Even so, all of these texts shed some light on how Tolkien thought about his own narratives, and they thus function, at least to some extent, in the same way as paratextual, au-

thorial prefaces.⁴⁶⁹ That is to say, these texts are capable of ascribing religious affordances to Tolkien's literary mythology and to argument religious affordances already present.

Two different kinds of passages in Tolkien's letters and essays attribute religious affordances to his narratives. In the first kind Tolkien expresses a belief in – or at least a considerable fascination with – the religious motifs and paranormal phenomena occurring in his narratives. While Tolkien rarely engages in an explicit discussion of the veracity of his narratives, the very similarity between his personal beliefs and certain religious motifs in his narratives causes a semiotic quality of veracity to spill over from his reflective texts to the narratives. For example, Tolkien seriously seems to consider the possibility that a Faery Otherworld exists within the actual world, so even though he nowhere explicitly claims that the Otherworld in his narratives (The Blessed Realm) is a representation of the real Otherworld, it is easy to think that this was indeed what he believed.

The second type of religious affordances which the letters attribute to Tolkien's literary mythology concern reports of Tolkien's writing experience. In numerous letters, Tolkien expresses the belief that he was not the sole author of his literary mythology, but that parts of it were revealed to him. The accounts of Tolkien's *experience* of being inspired afford the interpretation that Tolkien *was indeed* inspired and that his narratives therefore include divinely sanctioned truth. Also here a semiotic effect of veracity is attributed to the Tolkien's literary mythology.

15.3.1. Thematisation of Veracity: Religious Affordances Attributed to Tolkien's Literary Mythology by Tolkien's Personal Beliefs

Tolkien was a Christian. Indeed, his friend George Sayer described Tolkien as "a devout and strict old-fashioned Catholic" (Birzer 1999, 46). More than that, Tolkien's Catholic convictions are apparent in his letters and other writings. In *OFS*, for example, Tolkien described the Christian Gospel as the ultimate fairy-story. It is a fairy-story because it offers hope and joy, and the ultimate fairy-story because, in contrast to normal fairy-stories, it is historically true (*TL* 62-63). Just as Tolkien was convinced that the Gospels' account of the Redemption was historical, he also believed that the Fall narrative in Genesis 3 had an historical core. As he writes in one letter, there "certainly was an Eden on this very unhappy earth" (*Letters* 110).

Tolkien described God as the "Author of Reality" and believed that he had a hand in the unfolding of history. Furthermore, Tolkien explicitly wanted to express this belief in his narratives. This intention becomes clear in a letter in which Tolkien discusses the

⁴⁶⁹ This effect has been increased in two cases where Tolkien's metatexts have been published together with the narratives they comment on in later editions of those works. The 1999 edition of *S* includes a letter by Tolkien to his publisher Milton Waldman, and in 2005, Verlyn Flieger published the *Smith* essay (Tolkien 2005) together with the original short story and additional material (Flieger 2005b). In both cases Tolkien's metatexts were transformed into paratexts.

destruction of the Ring of Power. The reader will remember that Frodo, after having carried the Ring to Mount Doom, gives in to its power. He cannot destroy the Ring, but claims it for himself. At this point Gollum wrests the Ring from Frodo, but slips and falls into the crack. Unwittingly, Gollum secures the Ring's destruction (*LR* 946). On this scene, Tolkien writes: "the Other Power then [after Frodo's failure] took over: the Writer of the Story (by which I do not mean myself), 'that one ever-present Person who is never absent and never named'" (*Letters* 253).⁴⁷⁰ While it is Gollum who wrestles the Ring from Frodo, we understand that Gollum is only God's instrument. Gandalf expresses faith in a supreme power at work in the world and he foresees that Gollum has a destiny (cf. section 7.2.1). It is only Tolkien's letter, however, that makes it clear that Gandalf's theology of Providence intentionally mirrored Tolkien's own faith in divine Providence in the actual world.⁴⁷¹

Most of the supernatural elements in Tolkien's narratives (such as the Valar, magic, dream vision, and otherworlds) are not Christian in nature. It is more contested whether Tolkien believed that also some of these phenomena existed in the actual world. Providing a counterweight to the theological commentary on Tolkien's oeuvre, Verlyn Flieger, the *grande dame* of Tolkien Studies, argues that Tolkien probably (though not certainly) believed in the existence of Elves, hereditary memory, and a Faery Otherworld, just as he believed in God.⁴⁷² For our purposes, it is ultimately unimportant whether Tolkien really believed in these things or not. What matters is that passages in his writings afford the interpretation that he did and thus bestow a semiotic effect of veracity on the occult elements in Tolkien's literary mythology.

Let me start by considering Tolkien's possible belief in Faery. In *OFS*, Tolkien describes Faery (which he here spells "Faërie") as "the realm or state in which fairies have their being" and defines a fairy-story as "one which touches on or uses Faërie" (*TL* 15, 16).⁴⁷³ Tolkien continues:

Most good 'fairy-stories' are about the *aventures* of men in the Perilous Realm [...] Naturally so; for if elves are true and really exist independently of our tales about them, then this also is certainly true: elves are not primarily concerned with us, nor we with them. Our fates are Sundered, and our paths seldom meet (*TL* 16).

⁴⁷⁰ This scene is discussed in a similar way in letter no. 246 (*Letters* 326). In several other letters Tolkien refers to God as the Author of Reality (*Letters* 100-101, 215, 252).

⁴⁷¹ On fate and Providence in *LR*, see also Davenport (2003) and Hibbs (2003).

⁴⁷² The demonstration of Tolkien's occult fascinations runs as a red thread through Flieger's Tolkien scholarship (1997; 2002; 2005a; 2006; 2007; Flieger and Anderson 2008).

⁴⁷³ Tolkien used the spellings Faërie, Faery, and Fayery interchangeably (Flieger 2005b, 85). In *OFS*, he also used a number of synonyms for Faery, namely Elfland (e.g. *TL* 13, 15), the Perilous Realm (e.g. *TL* 11, 16), and fairyland (e.g. *TL* 21).

All discussions of Tolkien's possible belief in Faery take off from these statements. Of course, *OFS* is generally concerned with the form and function of fairy-stories as a literary genre, not with the possible existence of Faery or elves in the actual world. It is therefore fully justifiable to assume that Tolkien here is speaking about Faery and elves as narrative phenomena that can be encountered *within* fairy-stories. The passages are sufficiently unclear, however, to afford also the reading that Tolkien is speaking about the actual world. Flieger, who approaches Tolkien's work with a baggage of Jungian-Campbellian myth theory, can therefore argue that Tolkien here sees Faery as "an altered state of consciousness" (2006, 183) that can be experienced by people in the actual world.

The second significant piece of writing in which Tolkien discusses the nature of Faery is the essay accompanying his fairy-story *Smith of Wootton Major*. Tolkien here reflects on the ontology of the fictional world of *Smith*. This world is two-tiered, consisting of World and Faery. The two are connected in such a way that elves can enter World whenever they desire, while only specially gifted humans are allowed entry into Faery (Tolkien 2005, 85). Like Tolkien's remarks on Faery and elves in *OFS*, his reflections in the *Smith* essay afford two readings. The mundane reading is that Tolkien simply reflects on matters within the fictional world and that these have nothing to do with the actual world. The alternative reading sees *Smith* as Tolkien's attempt to clarify for himself how he believed the real Faery in the actual world to be. Flieger adopts this alternative reading. Convinced by *OFS* that Tolkien believed in Faery but was unsure how to understand it, she interprets *Smith* as Tolkien taking "what was for a man of the rational twentieth century the far riskier position [riskier than seeing Faery as an ASC] that Faërie is or could be an actuality" (Flieger 2006, 183).⁴⁷⁴ We can hypothesise that Tolkien religionists, who like Flieger bring inspiration from Jung and Campbell to bear on Tolkien's narratives, will also read *OFS* and *Smith* as evidence for Tolkien's belief in Faery, especially if they are familiar with Flieger's work. This might lead them to go one step further than Flieger and to straight-out equate Faery with the narrative world of Tolkien's literary mythology, thus taking Tolkien's (alleged) profession to believe in Faery as his profession to believe that his narrative world (or the Otherworld included within it) is also real, either as an expression of some altered state of mind or as an independently existing alternate world.

In *OFS*, Tolkien not only talked about Faery and elves. He also wrote that "[i]n dream strange powers of the mind may be unlocked" (*TL* 19). This statement can be read as Tolkien's testimony that true dream visions, such as those experienced by Frodo and

⁴⁷⁴ In their critical edition of *OFS*, Flieger and Donaldson write about the term 'Faërie' that it is "possibly the single most important term in Tolkien's critical lexicon, with a complex of referents. He used it to mean the Otherworld beyond the five senses – a parallel reality tangential in time and space to the ordinary world; he used it to mean the practice of enchantment and magic, especially through the use of words, for example spells or charms; and he used it to mean the altered mental or psychological state brought about by such practice" (2008, 85).

Merry in *LR* (cf. section 7.1.4 above) and by Ramer and Lowdham in *The Notion Club Papers* (cf. section 15.1.2 above), can really take place. This interpretation gains credibility when read together with Tolkien's account of a recurrent and strange dream of his, the dream of the Great Green Wave which he continuously built into his stories. In a letter to W.H. Auden, Tolkien writes:

I have what some might call an Atlantis complex. Possibly inherited, though my parents died too young for me to know such things about them, and too young to transfer such things by words. Inherited from me (I suppose) by one only of my children, though I did not know that about my son [Michael] until recently, and he did not know it about me. I mean the terrible recurrent dream (beginning with memory) of the Great Wave, towering up, and coming in ineluctably over the trees and green fields (*Letters* 213).

In another letter, Tolkien describes his "Atlantis-haunting" as a "legend or myth or *dim memory of some ancient history*" that keeps troubling him (*Letters* 347; emphasis added). As these passages show, Tolkien believed that some dreams are out of the ordinary and that his Great Wave dream was one of them. More than that, he seemed to believe that in this dream he was re-experiencing an inherited memory.

Immediately following the passage on the 'Atlantis complex', Tolkien continues his letter to Auden with another experience of hereditary memory. He writes, "I am a West-midlander by blood (and took to early West-midland Middle English as a known language as soon as I set eyes on it)" (*Letters* 213). Does this passage mean that Tolkien believed that his ability to learn rapidly the language of his mother's West-midland ancestors was due to him possessing some inherited memory of that language? Perhaps Tolkien believed; perhaps he just played with the ideas. In any case these passages afford a reading that Tolkien believed that 'strange powers' can indeed be unlocked in dreams, and that one of these powers is the ability to access the memory of one's ancestors.⁴⁷⁵

As we have seen in section 15.1.2 above, Tolkien built a hereditary memory motif into *The Lost Road* and *The Notion Club Papers*. Now, *OFS* and the letters show that Tolkien probably considered these pieces to be fictional narratives *about a real paranormal phenomenon*.⁴⁷⁶ Since Tolkien worked his own dream into his stories, the letters also af-

⁴⁷⁵ It might strike a contemporary reader as odd that Tolkien, a respectable scholar and devout Catholic, possibly believed in hereditary memory. As Flieger (2007) convincingly argues, however, Tolkien was simply influenced by the ideas of his time. First of all, J.W. Dunne's theory of "serial memory", advanced in *An Experiment with Time* (1927), likely inspired *The Lost Road*. Briefly stated, Dunne assumed that 'time travel' is possible because everything takes place at the same time. Flieger further suggests that Tolkien may have been influenced by Jung's notion of the collective unconscious and convincingly argues that he must have been familiar with other fiction writers exploring the theme hereditary memory in the 1920s and 1930s (2007, 104).

⁴⁷⁶ Flieger is convinced that the strange powers which Tolkien refers to in *OFS* "are powers of recall by the unconscious mind capable of taking memory beyond personal experience and history into a realm which Tolkien clearly saw as metaphysical, and just as clearly believed to be possible" (2007, 106).

ford the more far-going reading that parts of Tolkien's narratives, at least the part about the destruction of Númenor-Atlantis, are descriptions of historical events which Tolkien's ancestors had experienced and which Tolkien himself had re-experienced in dream visions. In other words, Tolkien's discussion of his Atlantis complex not only affords the interpretation that Tolkien took his stories to be fictional narratives about real paranormal phenomena, but also affords the interpretation that Tolkien considered his stories to have a true core that is at the same time revealed and historically true.

Tolkien discusses the relation between his literary mythology and actual history in several other letters. For example, he writes the following about the truth of his own mythology in a letter to Milton Waldman from 1951:

These tales are 'new', they are not directly derived from any other myths and legends, but they must inevitably contain a large measure of ancient wide-spread motives or elements. After all, I believe that legends and myths are largely made up of 'truth', and indeed present aspects of it that can only be received in this mode; and long ago certain truths and modes of this kind were discovered and must always reappear (*Letters* 147).⁴⁷⁷

Tolkien here says that myths and legends, *including his own*, contain a large amount of truth. It is not immediately clear what Tolkien means by 'truth', however, and therefore also this passage affords two readings: Either Tolkien considered myths and legends (and his own mythology) to include historical truths, or he considered them to include truths of an ahistorical character. The first reading is possible in the light of the Númenor-Atlantis letters discussed above, but context shows that the second reading must be the intended one. Earlier in the same letter Tolkien explains that "[m]yth and fairy-story must, as all art, reflect and contain in solution elements of moral and religious truth (or error), but not explicit, not in the known form of the primary 'real' world" (*Letters* 144). It is furthermore clear from the letter that Tolkien considered his own stories to thematise moral truths (and errors) through the actions and choices of the characters, and that the religious truths expressed concerned such themes as God, Fall, and Mortality (*Letters* 145).

Even if Tolkien did not intended his narratives to be read as history, he certainly worked tirelessly to constitute them as plausible 'feigned history' (cf. sections 7.3.1 and 15.1 above). In another letter to Auden he comments on the feigned history ploy, writing: "I am historically minded. Middle-earth is not an imaginary world. [...] The theatre of my tale is this earth, the one in which we now live, *but the historical period is imaginary*" (*Letters* 239; emphasis added). In a later letter to Rhona Beare, Tolkien reflects at greater length on the relation between his mythology and the historical record:

[I]f it [Tolkien's literary mythology] were 'history', it would be difficult to fit the lands and events (or 'cultures') into such evidence as we possess, archae-

⁴⁷⁷ The letter was an unsuccessful attempt to persuade Waldman to publish *S* together with *LR* as one narrative whole.

ological or geological, concerning the nearer or remoter part of what is now called Europe; though the Shire, for instance, is expressly stated to have been in this region [...]. I could have fitted things in with greater verisimilitude, if the story had not become too far developed, before the questions ever occurred to me. I doubt if there would have been much to gain; and I hope the, evidently long but undefined, gap in time between the Fall of Barad-dûr [the destruction of the Ring] and our Days is sufficient for 'literary credibility', even for readers acquainted with what is known or surmised of 'pre-history'. I have, I suppose, constructed an imaginary *time*, but kept my feet on my own mother-earth for *place* (*Letters* 283; original emphasis).

In this passage, Tolkien makes clear that his stories are fictional and that the aim of anchoring them in the actual world is not to achieve *literal credibility*, but *literary credibility*. He wanted to create what he in *OFS* calls a "Secondary World", that is a fictional world so consistent and deep that a reader will accept it as real while reading (*LT* 36). Samuel Coleridge classically referred to this acceptance as the reader's "willing suspension of disbelief". Tolkien finds that expression misleading, however, because Coleridge seems to suggest that readers believe in the fictional tale in the same way as they believe in facts within the actual world. That is not the case. As Tolkien puts it, successful fairy-stories and other pieces of literature produce "literary belief" (*LT* 36) or "Secondary Belief" (*LT* 45), i.e. the belief that what the narrator says is true *within the fictional world*. Such secondary belief is different both from disbelief and from "Primary Belief" in the sense of belief that something is true of the primary world (or the actual world).⁴⁷⁸

To sum up this section, Tolkien's letters and essays show that Tolkien did not wholeheartedly promote a referential reading of his narratives. Nowhere does he clearly claim that his literary mythology has an historical core. With the exception of his equation of Ilúvatar with God, he also does not promote his stories as fictional stories about real supernatural entities. In other words, Tolkien does not explicitly promote a mytho-historical or a mytho-cosmological reading of his narratives. Even so, there are several passages that afford a reading that Tolkien believed his tales to possess some measure of cosmological and historical factuality. Tolkien's probable belief in hereditary memory and his possible belief in Faery and elves, together with the fact that these three phenomena are built into Tolkien's narratives, indirectly afford a mytho-cosmological approach to the entire literary mythology. For if there is an overlap between narrative motifs and Tolkien's beliefs on these three points, then the same might go for other parts of the narrative world's inventory (such as the Valar). Furthermore, Tolkien's discussion of his inherited dream of the destruction of Númenor-Atlantis suggests that his literary mythology tells at least partially of events that have taken place in the actual world. The

⁴⁷⁸ Tolkien's distinction between primary belief and secondary belief is synonymous with Michael Saler's distinction between naïve belief and ironic belief discussed in section 2.3 above.

passages on the Atlantis haunting hence indirectly afford a mytho-historical reading of Tolkien's literary mythology.

15.3.2. Divine Inspiration: Religious Affordances Attributed to Tolkien's Literary Mythology by Tolkien's Experience of Revelation

Tolkien often had the feeling that he was not in control over the writing process, but that ideas, characters, and sometimes entire stories 'came through' to him from another source. Consider as an example a passage from a letter that Tolkien wrote to his son Christopher in 1944. Tolkien was at that time working on *The Two Towers*, and of the chapter "Treebeard" he writes: "What happens to the Ents I don't yet know. [...] [T]he thing [LR] seems to write itself once I get going, *as if the truth comes out then*, only imperfectly glimpsed in the preliminary sketch" (*Letters* 104; emphasis added). Reflecting on his Ent chapter 11 years later, Tolkien expresses the same feeling that this part of LR developed beyond his conscious control. To W.H. Auden he writes:

Take the Ents, for instance. I did not consciously invent them at all. [...] I like Ents now because they do not seem to have anything to do with me. I daresay something had been going on in the 'unconscious' for some time, and that accounts for my feeling throughout, especially when stuck, that I was not inventing but reporting (imperfectly) and had at times to wait till 'what really happened' came through (*Letters* 211-212).

These Ent passages constitute only two examples among many in which Tolkien expresses a sense of "reporting" (or "recording") rather than "inventing". Consider another example, again from a letter to Christopher. "A new character has come on the scene (*I am sure I did not invent him*, I did not even want him, though I like him. [...] Faramir, the brother of Boromir" (*Letters* 79; emphasis added). In another letter Tolkien says about LR in general that "parts seem (to me) rather revealed through me than by me" (*Letters* 189); and in yet another he confesses: "I have long ceased to *invent* [...] I wait till I seem to know what really happened. Or till it writes itself" (*Letters* 231; original emphasis). "[O]n the matter of the Third Age", writes Tolkien, "I regard myself as a 'recorder' only" (*Letters* 289).

Tolkien not only felt to be recording LR; he had the same feeling about the tales comprising S. To Milton Waldman he explained that these tales "*arose in my mind as 'given' things*. [...] Always I had the sense of recording what was already 'there', somewhere: not of 'inventing'" (*Letters* 145; emphasis added). Also his short story *Leaf by Niggle* arose as a given thing. To Stanley Unwin – who later published *Leaf* together with OFS in *Tree and Leaf* (TL) – Tolkien explained, "I woke up one morning (more than 2 years ago) with that odd thing [*Leaf*] virtually complete in my head. It took only a few hours to get it down, and then copy out. I am not aware of ever 'thinking' of the story or composing it in the ordinary sense" (*Letters* 113).

Tolkien's experience of reporting, recording, or revealing – rather than inventing – his stories affords three interpretations. The straightforward interpretation is that there is nothing special about it and that Tolkien was well aware of that. All writers know the feeling that ideas 'come to them', but this can be accounted for simply as unconscious material entering consciousness. According to this naturalistic interpretation Tolkien did not believe his ideas to stem from a source outside himself. That this was indeed Tolkien's view is supported especially by the letter to Auden in which Tolkien seems to consider the emergence of the Ents a result of a stirring in his 'unconscious'.

A second possible interpretation is that Tolkien believed to be inspired by God. Support for this interpretation can be found in *OFS* where Tolkien discusses the category of "true fairy-stories (or romances)". These stories are not pure *inventions*, but also include some measure of *inspiration* (*TL* 62n1) which allows them to offer a "sudden glimpse of the underlying reality or truth" (*TL* 61-62). This truth was for Tolkien a very particular one: the Christian *evangelium* (*TL* 62-63). When authors of fairy-stories succeed in conveying a glimpse of this truth, the inspiratory source is the Christian God. As we saw in the previous sub-section, Tolkien seems in some letters to consider his literary mythology to be a collection of such 'true fairy-stories'. This could imply that he believed his source of inspiration to be the Christian God. That this may have been Tolkien's conviction is most clear in a late letter from 1971 in which he describes himself as a "chosen instrument" (*Letters* 413). It seems, however, that Tolkien was afraid that an overly explicit assertion of his belief to be a chosen instrument might come across as improper and arrogant, for he surrounds the term with scare quotes and states that one should not "puff up" chosen instruments, but remember their "imperfections" and their sometimes "lamentable unfitness for the purpose" (*Letters* 413).

A third interpretation is that Tolkien believed to draw inspiration from a source outside himself other than the Christian God. Taken together with his general fascination of dream visions and other transpersonal phenomena, Tolkien's feeling of inspiration can be read as the experience of breaking through to another reality – to the collective unconscious, perhaps, or to Faery. Flieger holds this interpretation and backs it up with an anecdote told by Simonne d'Ardenne, a close friend of the Tolkiens, in the memorial volume *J.R.R. Tolkien: Scholar and Storyteller* (Salu and Farrell 1979). As Flieger tells the story, d'Ardenne "recalled saying to [Tolkien] once, à propos his work: "You broke the veil, didn't you, and passed through?" [...] [D'Ardenne] adds he "readily admitted" that he had done so" (Flieger 2002, 9; inner quotes d'Ardenne 1979, 34). Flieger interprets this as Tolkien's confirmation that he believed to have penetrated "beyond normal perception into another reality, one always present but not readily accessible" (2002, 9).

For the purpose of this book it matters not what Tolkien really believed. What matters are the textual affordances of his letters and essays. In earlier chapters we have seen that Tolkien's fictional narratives afford two readings. The dominant fictional affordances invite the reader to take the texts as mere fiction, but the narratives at the same time include sufficient religious affordances to be read alternatively as fiction about real

supernatural entities. Also Tolkien's letters and essays include different sets of textual affordances. Roughly speaking, we can distinguish between two sets. Contrary to the textual affordances of the narratives, however, both sets of textual affordances possessed by the reflective texts invite the reader to approach the narratives as having some supernatural referents. The first and dominant set of textual affordances presents a Tolkien who considers his narratives to include references to the Christian God and to Christian truths and who possibly also believed to be God's chosen instrument. The reflective texts afford also another, sub-dominant set of textual affordances. These textual affordances promote the reading that Tolkien believed to have broken through to another reality and that he built his own transpersonal experiences into his narratives for others to emulate. This second reading, which Flieger adopts, goes together with and reinforces a reading of the narratives as referring to real otherworlds, spiritual beings, and paranormal phenomena. According to this line of reasoning, Tolkien's reflective texts include the implicit proposition that his narratives reveal aspects of another world – Faery or a part of Faery – and that some of the characters of his stories (besides God) really exist within that alternate world. In other words, Tolkien's essays and letters can be read as metatexts prescribing a mytho-cosmological approach to his literary mythology, either of a Christian or of a Pagan/occult kind.

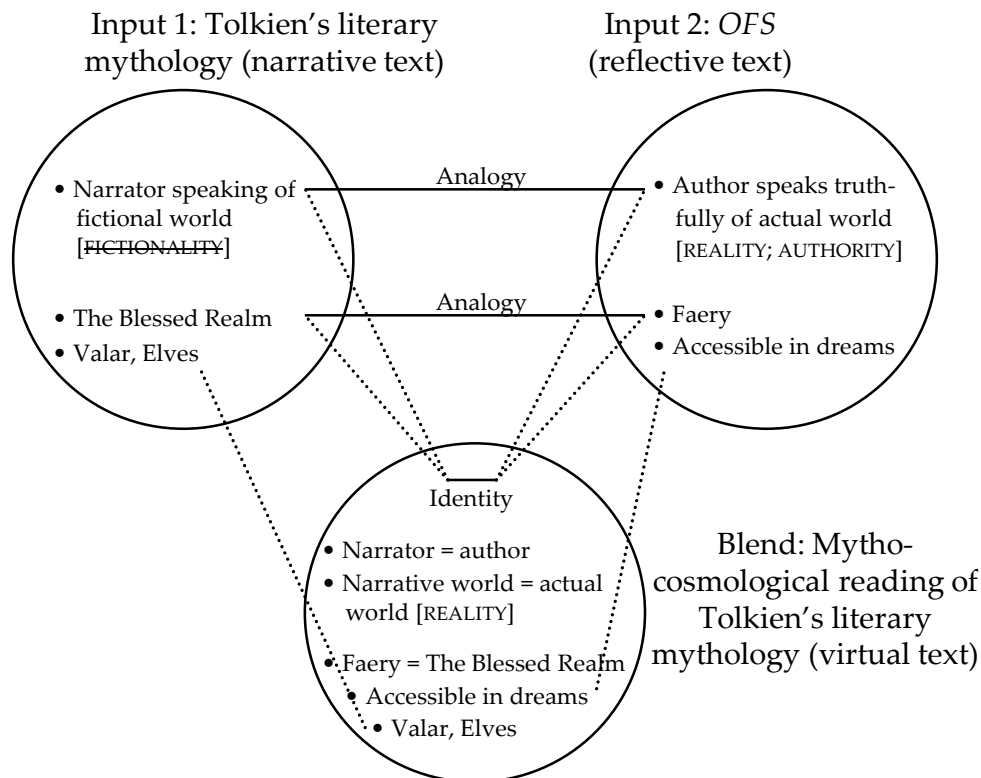
15.3.3. The Veracity Spill-Over Effect as Conceptual Blending

In the preceding two sub-sections we have seen that Tolkien's letters and essays contain passages suggesting that Tolkien himself believed in some of the supernatural phenomena that appear in his literary mythology, and other passages that demonstrate that Tolkien felt inspired during the writing process. Both kinds of passages ascribe an effect of veracity to Tolkien's narratives. I have so far not systematically discussed how this effect is achieved semiotically. Let me therefore now consider the 'veracity spill-over effect' as a case of conceptual blending.

As the reader will remember from chapters 4 and 10, conceptual blending refers to a semiotic and cognitive process in which a blended space is created out of information from two (or more) input spaces through processes such as selective projection and the compression of Vital Relations. When Tolkien's narrative texts (input 1) are read in the light of his reflective texts (input 2), a blended space arises constituted by a new interpretation of the narrative texts. This blended space includes semiotic representations and meta-representations projected from both input spaces. In figure 15.1 below, I have illustrated how this can lead to veracity spill-over so that Tolkien's narratives are interpreted as referring to real supernatural entities in the actual world. Please note that the model is simplified, as it does not take the different readings afforded by both narratives and reflective texts into account. It represents only the dominant reading afforded by the narratives, namely that they are entirely fictional, and only one of the possible readings affor-

ded by the reflective texts, namely that Tolkien did indeed believe in paranormal phenomena, such as the existence of Faery.

Figure 15.1. Example of Veracity Spill-Over from Reflective to Narrative Texts

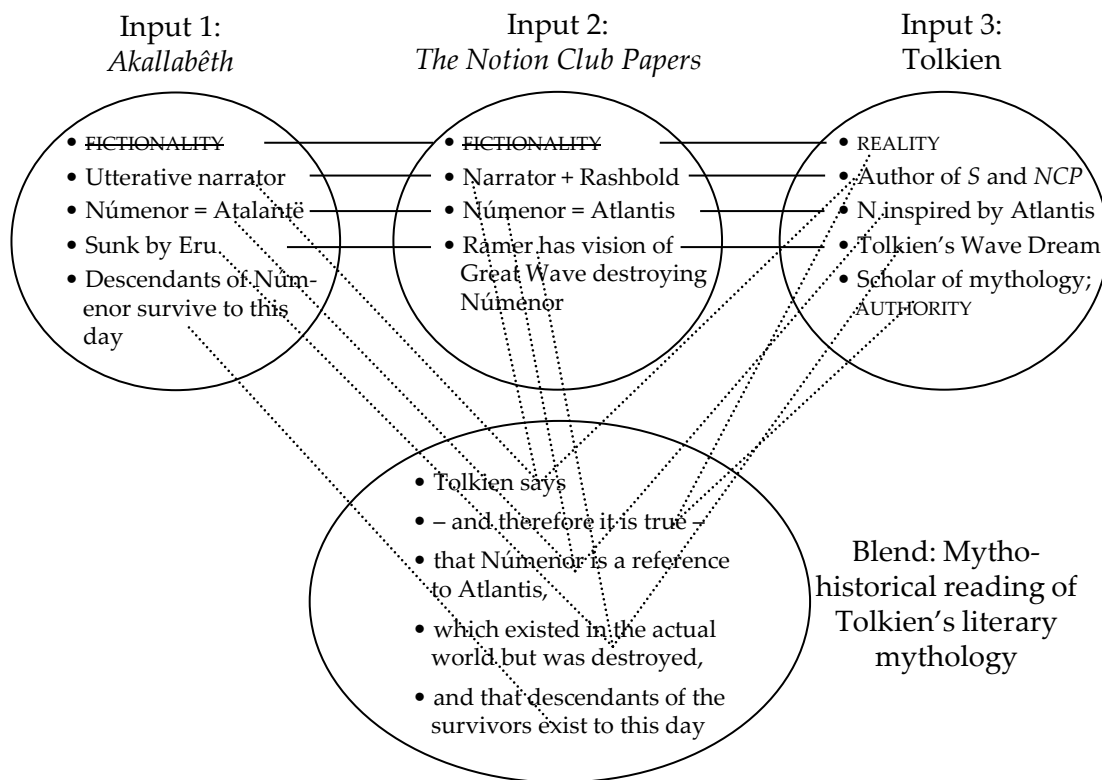


As the figure shows, the veracity spill-over effect includes both compression of Vital Relations and selective projection. Most importantly, the narrator of Tolkien's literary mythology (Input 1) and Tolkien the author (Input 2) are identified with each other. This has the effect of changing the textual reference world of the narratives. The narratives are no longer seen as a narrator's discourse about a fictional world, but as Tolkien's discourse about the actual world. In other words, a semiotic effect of REALITY is projected into the blend from Input 2. Hereby, an overlap is claimed to exist between the inventory of the textual actual world and that of the actual world itself. In our example that means that the reader accepts the postulate afforded by the reflective text, that the actual world includes a Faery Otherworld as part of its inventory. This effect of anchorage is dependent upon, or at least reinforced by, another meta-representation of AUTHORITY, i.e. the notion that Tolkien is not mistaken and does not lie, but gives accurate information. Not only is the Otherworld believed to be real, it is also believed that it was Tolkien's intention *as author* to convey real truths about it.

The identification of the actual world as the narratives' reference world allows a second compression of Vital Relations to take place, namely between the Blessed Realm

and Faery. In the blend, the Blessed Realm is identified as Faery.⁴⁷⁹ This operation, in turn, allows further representations in the input fields connected either to the Blessed Realm or to Faery to be co-projected into the blended space. As shown in the figure, the Valar and Elves (inhabitants of the Blessed Realm in Input 1) can thus be projected into the blended space and become conceptualised as inhabitants of Faery. Similarly, the notion that Faery can be accessed in dream visions can be projected into the blended space to produce the notion that one can interact with the Valar when having visions of Faery/the Blessed Realm. All in all, the figure shows an example of how Tolkien's reflective texts can reinforce already present religious affordances in the narratives to produce a mytho-cosmological reading of Tolkien's narrative mythology.

Figure 15.2. Mytho-historical Reading Afforded by Frame Story and Letters



As pointed out in section 15.1 above, the frame stories in *HoMe* can reinforce the religious affordances of the rest of Tolkien's literary mythology in much the same way as Tolkien's letters and essays. The strongest effect is achieved when frame stories and reflective texts work together. Towards the end of section 15.1.3, I analysed how *The Notion Club Papers* and the *Akallabêth* – when read together and with Tolkien's letters – afford a

⁴⁷⁹ It should be mentioned that Tolkien himself came close to identify these two places with each other. In a draft to one of his early tales, Tolkien referred to Elvenhome as "Fairyländ" (*LT I* 110). In *H*, Elvenhome is referred to as "Faerie in the West" (*H* 194).

mytho-historical reading of Tolkien's literary mythology. Let me here offer a graphic depiction of that analysis conceived in terms of conceptual blending.

15.4. The Religious Affordances of *The History of Middle-earth* and Tolkien's Letters and Essays: A Summary

Let me round off this chapter by formulating four hypotheses about the form that religion based on *HoMe* and Tolkien's reflective texts can be expected to take given the religious affordances of these texts. First of all, we must hypothesise that *HoMe*-based religion will be focused on the Valar and treat them as a full-fledged pantheon. This hypothesis follows directly from the clear identification of the Valar as Gods, the additional information given about them, the notion that they are the 'real Gods' to which human myths refer, and the idea that their abode, The Blessed Realm, can be visited or perceived in visions. By contrast, *HoMe* does not afford the veneration of the Elves as deities or even as expressions of archetypal powers. Based on differences in religious affordances, a maximal difference on the issue of deities can thus be expected between Tolkien religion based on *LR* and Tolkien religion based on *HoMe*. It is possible that the Elves will also play a role in *HoMe*-based religion other than as deities, for also the Elves can be visited in The Blessed Realm and according to *HoMe* some of the Elves linger as spirits in the physical world where they sometimes show themselves to humans.

Second, it can be hypothesised that Tolkien religion based on *HoMe* and on Tolkien's letters and essays will approach Tolkien's literary mythology in a mytho-cosmological mode (or possibly even in a mytho-historical mode). This follows from the fact that the frame narratives in *HoMe* and Tolkien's reflective texts provide much stronger support than *LR* and *S* for the position that Tolkien himself considered his narratives to be fictional tales about real supernatural phenomena, such as elves, a Faery Otherworld, and hereditary memory. Already in earlier chapters we have encountered a mytho-cosmological approach to Tolkien's literary mythology, but there is reason to believe that *HoMe*-based religion will be different. The mytho-cosmological approach that we have seen so far considers Tolkien's entire world, including Middle-earth, to be situated on another plane. By contrast, and assuming that *HoMe*-based religion will indeed be focused on the Valar, this must be hypothesised to go together with a two-tiered cosmology that identifies Middle-earth with our physical world and stages The Blessed Realm as (part of) the actual world's Otherworld.

Third, and in contrast to *S*-based religion, religion based on *HoMe* cannot be expected to necessarily involve a self-identification as Elves. This is not because the representation of the Elves is different, for also *HoMe* presents the Elves as wiser and in other ways superior to humans. The significant difference is that where *S* is presented from an Elven perspective (and *H* and *LR* from a Hobbit point of view), most of the significant texts in *HoMe* are "Mannish" (as Tolkien put it). For example, while the *Lost*

Tales are recounted by Elves, they are told to Eriol and it is this human traveller with whom the reader is invited to identify. Also the two time travel frame narratives anchor Tolkien's literary mythology in an explicitly human (and contemporary) world much more forcefully than does the human compiler-narrator in *LR*. Furthermore, some stories in *HoMe* come in both Elven and Mannish versions; and *Athrabeth Finrod Ah Andreth* even has a human and an Elf discuss an issue from the perspective of their respective races. In short, *HoMe* includes both Elven and Mannish viewpoints, and that makes it impossible to predict whether *HoMe*-based religion will go together with Elven self-identification or not.

Fourth, it can be hypothesised that religion based on *HoMe* and Tolkien's reflective texts will take Tolkien as a spiritual role model. We may expect this given Tolkien's discussion of his inspiration experiences and of his Great Wave dream. If Tolkien is here saying that he received insights, through various transpersonal means, about the Otherworld and about the distant history of this world, then we may assume that *HoMe*-based religionists will wish to emulate him. However, since neither *HoMe* nor Tolkien's reflective texts reveal whether or how Tolkien actively induced his transpersonal experiences, we cannot predict how *HoMe*-based religion will take shape ritually. Given the notion of the Olóre Mallë, however, we may hypothesise that the induction of visionary trance will play a role.

Finally, let me formulate a fifth meta-hypothesis, namely that the nature of *HoMe*-based religion will be easier to predict than was the case with *LR*-based, *S*-based and movies-based Tolkien religion. I think so simply because *HoMe* includes many more religious affordances than the other texts, thus leaving fewer empty slots that must necessarily be filled with material from other-than-Tolkien sources.