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Fiction, Invention and Hyper-reality

From popular culture to religion



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INFORM

The twentieth century was a period of rapid change for religion. Secularisation resulted in a dramatic fall in church attendance in the West, and the 1950s and 1960s saw the introduction of new religions including the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), the Church of Scientology, and the Children of God. New religions were regarded with suspicion by society in general and Religious Studies scholars alike until the 1990s, when the emergence of a second generation of 'new new' religions – based on popular cultural forms including films, novels, computer games and comic books – and highly individualistic spiritualities confirmed the utter transformation of the religio-spiritual landscape. Indeed, Scientology and ISKCON appeared almost traditional and conservative when compared to the radically de-institutionalised, eclectic, parodic, fun-loving and experimental fiction-based, invented and hyper-real religions.

In this book, scholarly treatments of cutting-edge religious and spiritual trends are brought into conversation with contributions by representatives of Dudeism, the Church of All Worlds, the Temple of the Jedi Order and Tolkien spirituality groups. This book will simultaneously entertain, shock, challenge and delight scholars of religious studies, as well as those with a wider interest in new religious movements.

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RELIGION

Cover image: Dearinth (Goddess as Labyrinth) with stars and planets © Oberon Zell

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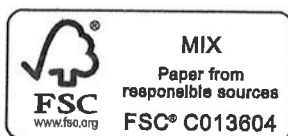
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1 The Elven Path and the Silver Ship of the Valar

Two spiritual groups based on
J. R. R. Tolkien's *Legendarium*

Markus Altena Davidsen

An unexpected email

On 7 May 2009 I received an unexpected email. I had just begun a PhD project, intending to focus on *Star Wars*-inspired Jediism, but now Gwineth wrote this: "I thought that maybe you might be interested to know – though maybe you already do – that there is a small number of people who are trying to build a 'spiritual path' on the mythical history of Prof. J.R.R. Tolkien. I am one of them".¹ I had never heard of any such Tolkien-based spiritual groups, but eagerly replied and was soon introduced to the other members of Gwineth's online-based group. These members approached Tolkien's stories about Middle-earth, his so-called *Legendarium*, in a variety of ways, but they all agreed that the *Legendarium* was an effective means of transportation to the Faery Otherworld or "Imaginal Realm". Several members were also well versed in Tolkien's Elvish languages and had named the group *Ilsaluntë Valion*, which means the Silver Ship of the Valar in Qenya.² The Valar referred to in the group name are the angelic beings or lower gods of Tolkien's cosmology; the Silver Ship is a poetic reference to the Moon.

Gwineth's email became the start of a co-operative adventure. For the next six years, I had regular contact with Gwineth and other members of *Ilsaluntë Valion*, especially Nathan Elwin and Eruannlass, and I was introduced to the group's history and ritual practices.³ I followed the forum's discussions on topics ranging from the true nature of the Valar to the 're-discovery of *Limpë*', the Elves' favourite beverage which the group took to be saffronated mead. I witnessed the coming and going of dozens of peripheral members while about six individuals formed a stable and active core group.

Ilsaluntë Valion had existed for less than two years when Gwineth introduced me to the group, but some of the members had been practising Tolkien spirituality for several years. They were also in contact with likeminded individuals and other Tolkien-based spiritual groups, some of which were much older than their own. Gwineth immediately put me in touch with members of *Tië eldaliéva* (Qenya: The Elven Path; founded 2005), a group from which *Ilsaluntë Valion* had broken off in 2007, but with which it continued

to cooperate very closely.⁴ Calantirniel of Tië eldaliéva, in turn, helped me uncover an entire network of Tolkien spirituality that had existed since the late 1960s.

The spiritual Tolkien milieu proved so fascinating and complex that I decided to devote my entire dissertation to the topic (Davidsen 2014; also 2012, 2013), leaving Jediism aside for a future project. In this chapter, I present a small selection of some of the most interesting material. Following a brief overview of the history of Tolkien spirituality, I zoom in on Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion. These groups are interesting because they have gone the furthest in creating an exclusively Tolkien-based spiritual tradition. In cooperation with other members of their groups, Michaele Alyras de Cygne and Calantirniel (Tië eldaliéva) and Gwineth (Ilsaluntë Valion) have authored two short pieces that outline the practice of their respective groups from the members' own perspective. These two pieces are included as appendices to this chapter. We think that this combination of insider and outsider perspectives constitutes the richest and most fair way to represent of the material. In addition to the three pieces on Tolkien spirituality published in this volume, readers might be interested in studying also the Enderi ritual, an exemplary Tië eldaliéva ritual that has been published, together with a glossary and an overview of Tië eldaliéva's ritual calendar, on the group's homepage.⁵

Tolkien spirituality: a brief history

The Lord of the Rings (LR) had been published in three hardback volumes in 1954–55, but it was the paperback edition of 1965–66 that took the general audience by storm. In the United States, LR outsold the Bible in 1967 and 1968 (Helms 1978: 105), and it became “the absolute favorite book of every hippie” (Hinckle 1967: 25). Hippies married each other in ceremonies based on the book⁶ and read passages from LR during LSD-trips to amplify the spiritual experience (Ratliff and Flinn 1968: 144; Clifton 1987).⁷ Some readers wondered whether LR was in fact a parable about Faery and joined the emerging Neo-Pagan movement to explore the Celtic and Germanic mythologies from which Tolkien had drawn much of his inspiration. Pagan scholar, Graham Harvey, has observed that even today Pagans typically mention “Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* and other Fantasy writings” rather than “how to do it” manuals when asked to name the sources that have most significantly influenced their Pagan world-view (Harvey 2007: 176).

We have evidence of one 1960s-group that read LR as ancient history and hoped to excavate Minas Tirith in the Mojave Desert (Ellwood 2002: 133), but typically hippies and Pagans considered Tolkien’s books to be inspiring fiction rather than revelation or historiography. For them, Tolkien’s narratives did not refer directly to real supernatural beings and powers, but provided, in Harvey’s words, the “metaphorical binoculars through which the realm of Faery became visible again” (2000). Following Harvey, I suggest

using the designation 'binocular mode' to refer to the approach to a narrative corpus, such as the Neo-Pagan approach to *LR*, that does not ascribe metaphysical reference to the texts themselves, but stresses instead the texts' sacred intertextuality.

Tolkien died in 1973, but in 1977 his son Christopher published an edited collection of his father's mythological backstories entitled *The Silmarillion* (*S*). *S* narrates the history of the world according to the lore of the Elves and begins OT-style with the creation of the world *ex nihilo* by the over-god Eru (the One) or Ilúvatar (All-Father). The Ainur (Holy Ones), a group of angelic beings, reside with Eru outside Eä (the World), but some of them choose to incarnate and help shape the world and instruct Ilúvatar's Children, the Quendi (Elves) and the humans. The 14 most powerful demiurges are referred to as the Valar (Powers); the less powerful are the Maiar (the Beautiful). We learn that the Wizard Gandalf, a major character in *LR*, belongs to the class of Maiar, and that Elbereth, the chief deity of the Elven religion in *LR*, is Queen of the Valar.

The publication of *S* led to the emergence of enduring groups that went beyond the binocular approach to Tolkien's literary mythology. These groups build elements from Tolkien's cosmology into their regular ritual practice and typically approach Tolkien's narratives in what I call the 'mytho-cosmological mode'. That is, they consider the storyline to be fictitious, but believe that at least some of the supernatural entities, such as the Valar, exist in the actual world and can be communicated with in ritual. A minority go even further and approach the *Legendarium* in the 'mytho-historical mode', considering some or all of the actions of the supernatural beings in Tolkien's narratives to refer to real interventions of these beings in the actual world.

The largest of the *S*-based groups is the Tribunal of the Sidhe, a Neo-Pagan organisation founded in 1984 on the American West Coast. The Tribunal of the Sidhe synthesises Tolkien's literary mythology with Celtic mythology, Wicca, and Robert Graves-inspired goddess worship – and some of the group's rituals are directed at the Valar, including the fertility Valië Yavanna.⁸ Members of the Tribunal also claim to be Changelings, that is Elves (or similar beings) from an astral world who have been incarnated in human bodies by mistake. They say that "magickal research" has established that Tolkien was a Changeling himself and that *LR* and *S* tell the history of the Changelings in mythic form. Today, the Tribunal boasts a total of 150 members, many of whom are second generation.⁹

Already prior to the publication of *S*, a movement of self-identified Elves had emerged when a Ouija board spirit allegedly instructed a group of American magicians to name themselves the Elf Queen's Daughters sometime around 1970. The original members of the Elf Queen's Daughters told Margot Adler (1986: 319) that their identification as Elves was tongue-in-cheek, but they inspired other people to self-identify as Elves, and these people went on to speculate about possessing Elven genes or Elven souls. The publication of *S* in

1977 consolidated the Elven movement's foundation on Tolkien and inspired members to experiment with Valar-directed rituals. This did not last, however, and from the 1990s onwards, most self-identified Elves have distanced themselves from Tolkien's fiction and emphasised their dependence on sources they consider more legitimate, especially pre-Christian mythology and folklore. They did so under the influence of the broader Otherkin movement (cf. Laycock 2012), which has itself been eager to deny its fiction-based character. Zardoa Love and Silver Flame, together known as the Silver Elves, are the Elven movement's most important intellectuals, and their regular *Magical Elven Love Letters* have provided coherence and direction for a growing Elven community from the early 1980s.¹⁰

In 2001, 2002 and 2003 Peter Jackson's successful movie adaptation of *LR* premiered in three instalments, and, in the years that followed, a large number of Tolkien-inspired groups emerged online, especially on Yahoo! Groups and ProBoards. Most of these groups were devoted to two new types of Tolkien spirituality: Middle-earth Paganism and Legendarium Reconstructionism. Middle-earth Pagans drew most of their inspiration from Jackson's movies, which they considered as canonical as Tolkien's books. Since the Valar do not play any role in the movies, Middle-earth Pagans directed their ritual communication at the characters of the movies – especially Gandalf and Galadriel, but also Arwen and Aragorn, and even Frodo and Éowyn. The aim of these groups was not to develop a fully fledged tradition, but to construct a Middle-earth 'path' that Pagans could use in combination with other paths.

Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion are examples of Legendarium Reconstructionism, a form of Tolkien spirituality which stands in stark contrast to Middle-earth Paganism. Legendarium Reconstructionists do not consider Jackson's movies to have any spiritual significance, but draw instead on a whole range of textual sources. They prefer *S* to *LR*, and, in addition to this, they familiarise themselves with Tolkien's letters (Tolkien 1981) and Christopher Tolkien's 12 edited volumes of *History of Middle-earth* (*HoMe*) (Tolkien 1983–1996). *HoMe* includes the earliest drafts of the stories that were to become *LR* and *S*, non-narrative material about the Elves and the Valar, and two aborted 'time-travel' stories in which Tolkien stages Middle-earth as our world in prehistory. The firm textual foundation of Legendarium Reconstructionism has made possible a second key characteristic of this type of Tolkien spirituality: Legendarium Reconstructionists attribute a centrality to Tolkien's texts not found in any other type of Tolkien-inspired spirituality. Whereas Middle-earth Pagans, the Tribunal of the Sidhe and all other groups discussed above integrate Tolkien material into some broader (typically Neo-Pagan) framework, Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion aim to base their spiritual practice exclusively on Tolkien's Legendarium. The ambition has been to construct a fully fledged and independent tradition by systematising the scattered information on the Valar and the Quendi (the Elves) in Tolkien's texts and by adding 'Tolkien-true'

inventions to fill the gaps where needed. I refer to this form of Tolkien spirituality as Legendarium Reconstructionism, because it mirrors the approach of Pagan Reconstructionists.

The emergence of Legendarium Reconstructionism

Tië eldaliéva was founded in August 2005 on the initiative of two Americans, Nathan Elwin and Calantirniel (Lisa M. Allen MH). At this time, Elwin had spent almost three decades searching for likeminded people. He had often encountered people who integrated Tolkien's mythology into a broader Neo-Pagan framework, but felt more affinity with individuals who asserted that Tolkien's works convey esoteric knowledge or 'gnosis'. A lecture by Stephen Hoeller, entitled "J.R.R. Tolkien's gnosis for our day", had made a particularly strong impression. In this lecture, the long-time leader of the Ecclesia Gnostica in Los Angeles explained that Tolkien had visited the Imaginal Realm and that his narratives reflected the gnosis which he had so received.¹¹ After listening to this lecture, Elwin decided to found a group devoted to the gnostic exploration of the Legendarium, and in February 2005 he launched the newsgroup UTolk (short for United Tolkienists) on Yahoo Groups!¹²

One of those attracted to UTolk was Calantirniel. A Neo-Pagan and an astrologer, Calantirniel had been fascinated with the Star Queen deity in various mythologies, and she had thoroughly enjoyed Jackson's *LR* movies. When she finally read *S* in 2005, she discovered that the name of the main deity of the Elves – Elbereth in Sindarin and Varda in Quenya – means 'Star Queen', and she instantly knew that she wanted to join or found a tradition based on the spirituality of Tolkien's Elves. After a few weeks of hectic online networking, she found Elwin and UTolk, and took the Elvish name, Calantirniel, meaning (Lady) Guardian of the Gift of Light in Sindarin.

In early 2005, a group of UTolk members, including Elwin and Calantirniel, decided to construct a Tolkien-based tradition and name it Tië eldaliéva (The Elven Path). The new tradition was officially launched with a 'birthing ritual' held via phone on 23 August 2005, and on 23 January 2006, a discussion forum was launched on the bulletin board hosting site Freebb.com. The forum remained active until Freebb.com closed its services on 30 August 2007, at which time it had 59 registered members, out of which 27 were active posters. All significant contributions, however, came from a smaller core group that besides Elwin and Calantirniel counted Lomion, a Wiccan who helped create the birthing ritual; Llefyn Mallwen, a Canadian Pagan; Niennildi, Elwin's wife and a metaphysical Christian; Lomelindo, who had a background in Heathen Reconstructionism; and Ellenar, who claimed to have been communicating with fairies and elementals since childhood. In early August 2007, the core group launched a homepage stating that Tië eldaliéva aimed to "re-create, as closely as possible the original spirituality and way of the Elves, and in particular of the 'Quendi' . . . described in

JRR Tolkien's . . . writings".¹³ Members believed it possible for humans to possess a partly Quendian soul and/or some portion of Quendian genes, but the emphasis of the group was on the *wisdom* of the Elves. As Calantirniel put it, the guiding question – on both spiritual and quotidian matters – was 'What would the Elves do?'

Legendarium Reconstructionist rituals

The Elves in Tolkien's narratives worship Eru and venerate the Valar, but Tolkien's texts provide few clues to *how* the Elves went about doing this. This is because Tolkien, himself a devout Catholic, was afraid that explicit descriptions of Pagan cult would make his novels look too blasphemous. Individuals engaging in Tolkien-based spirituality are therefore required to construct their own rituals. The Tië eldaliéva core group did this by adapting the form and content of Wiccan and ceremonial magical rituals to the Legendarium.¹⁴ Furthermore, Elwin constructed a ritual year calendar with 13 lunar and 8 solar observances, based on scattered references in the Legendarium.

From August 2006 onwards, rituals following the new format and calendar were carried out by about four to seven people over the phone and later on Skype. After the hive-off in late 2007, Ilsaluntë Valion members modified the format, and members continued to do rituals collectively throughout 2008 – over Skype in Tië eldaliéva and over the phone in Ilsaluntë Valion. From 2009, it became normal practice in both groups to perform rituals individually, though ideally still according to the shared format. The transition to individual rituals had to do partly with the disadvantages of the media, as the phone/Skype-mediated rituals were experienced as hectic and counterproductive to inducing a meditative state of mind. Other reasons were that post-schism Tië eldaliéva had become too small to muster enough members for collective rituals, while Ilsaluntë Valion had attracted new core members from Europe for whom it was impractical to perform rituals simultaneously with the original North American members. Despite these practical problems, members hope to revive the practice of collective, mediated rituals and to perform them with members of Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion together. Table 1.1 below gives a synoptic overview of the phases of a typical Tië eldaliéva ritual, compared to the standard Wiccan circle casting ritual and to the rituals of Ilsaluntë Valion as they were developed after the schism.

Tië eldaliéva rituals

Tië eldaliéva constructed a new ritual format according to the logic of ritual innovation which Ivan Marcus (1996) has termed "inward acculturation". Coined in a study of Jewish ritual innovation in a dominating Christian context, inward acculturation refers to the integration of ritual content and forms from a larger tradition (Marcus: Christianity; here: Wicca and

Table 1.1 Structure of Legendarium Reconstructionist rituals

	<i>Wiccan Circle casting</i>	<i>Tië eldaliéva (2007–)</i>	<i>Ilsaluntë Valion (2009–)</i>
Separation phase	1 Preparation of food		1 Preparation of altar and food
	2 Drawing the circle	1 Song of the Starflower	2 Blessing Circle Dance (or Song of the Starflower)
	3 Grounding; centring	2 Draw septagram in the air to seal energy (see Figure 1.1)	3 Awareness of Arda as Sacred Sphere
	4 Calling the Quarters	3 Acknowledgement of the directions and evocation of the Valar	4 Reading from Tolkien's literary mythology
Liminal phase		4 Reading from Tolkien's literary mythology	5 Intonation of Valarin name
	5 Communication with deities; other magical work	5 Drinking starflower-infused water	6 Communication with Lunar Radiance
		6 Visualisation of Oneness with Arda	7 Individual Otherworld experience, initiated by reading
Reintegration phase		7 Individual Otherworld experience, including direct communication with one or more of the Valar, initiated by reading	8 The flower of Telperion is thanked
	6 Opening the circle	8 Returning awareness to physical space	9 Returning awareness to physical space
	7 Cakes and wine ceremony	9 Opening the circle	10 The blessed food is eaten

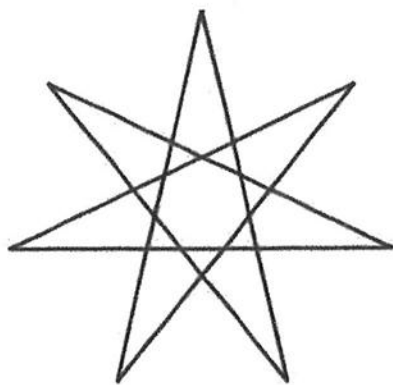


Figure 1.1 Figure of the Septagram.

ceremonial magic) into one's own, typically smaller, local or dependent tradition (Marcus: Judaism; here: Legendarium Reconstructionism). The effect of inward acculturation is to construct and maintain an independent tradition and identity, while at the same time adapting and naturalising foreign elements.

Most fundamentally, *Tië eldaliéva's* rituals adopted the general structure of Wiccan circle casting and ceremonial magical rituals, with (a) a separation phase in which a sacred space is created and the participants prepare themselves, (b) a liminal phase in which contact with the deities (here: Valar, Maiar and Quendi) is established and experienced, and (c) a reintegration phase in which the deities are thanked and dismissed, and the circle is opened. Also, the individual separation rites were crafted by adapting existing Wiccan/magical rites to Tolkien's mythology. First, the lesser pentagram ritual, which ceremonial magicians use to prepare a space for magical work, was developed into a septagram ritual called *Lindë Elenlótë* (Quenya: Song of the Starflower), as members felt seven to be the sacred number in Tolkien's literary mythology. Second, the Wiccan Calling of the Quarters was transformed into a seven-phased evocation of the Valar in pairs of two. This entailed adding two directions, Above and Below, to the five ordinary directions, East, South, West, North and Within.¹⁵ Gestures and intonations in Quenya were crafted for all directions, and a short greeting was written for each Valar pair. Third, following the drinking of water infused by starflower essence,¹⁶ a Tolkien-based visualisation sequence was constructed as a variation of the Middle Pillar exercise (cf. Regardie 1998: 85–100, 218–219). At this stage, participants visualise themselves circulating the light from *Telperion* and *Laurelin* (the two primordial trees and the first sources of light in Tolkien's world) through their chakras, then visualise themselves being one with *Arda* (the Earth).

At the end of the visualisation sequence, participants visualise themselves being within the Blessed Realm, the home of the Elves and the Valar in Tolkien's cosmology, and a short text, which is different in every ritual, is

read aloud, describing a particular scene and perhaps introducing one of the Valar as a guide. Then follows the liminal climax of the ritual, 5–20 minutes of silent meditation in which the vision is allowed to unfold. Typically, the guide conveys some information of relevance for the personal lives of the participants, but some members have experienced receiving messages about the Valar or other aspects of Tolkien's cosmology as well. After the meditation, participants gradually return to the physical world, detach themselves from the Oneness with Arda and slow down the circulation of light/energy from the Two Trees. A bit of the "healing energy" from the Two Trees is brought back and the participants visualise carrying it in their pockets, ready for use when needed. To get an idea of the feeling of a Tië eldaliéva ritual, consider the climax of the visualisation ritual for Enderi, the Elven mid-year festival, falling around 25 September. This particular ritual is focused on the Vala Oromë.

[Stage 6] Close your eyes and notice you are standing on Corollairë, the Green Mound of the Two Trees. . . . Circulate this silver light [of Telperion] to your Ajna or third eye chakra, as well as your sacral (orange) chakra, about 3 inches below your belly button. . . . Next, feel your tree roots pushing deeper and deeper into Arda, our Earth, and allow Arda to nurture and nourish you. . . . You are feeling VERY supported by Arda now, and in fact, you ARE Arda. . . . You may also connect with the Valar and/or your Maiar or Elven guides at this point. . . . You may be more fully re-awakening your Elven DNA and ancestral memory. . . .

[Stage 7] Then, visualise yourself with the protective, hunting Vala Oromë on his white horse with his horn, and he may have hounds with him. . . . Allow all the time you need for this to occur. . . . [Individual meditation].

[Stage 8] Now, your meditation can come to a close when the time is right. Thank the Valar, especially Oromë, and your Maiar or Elven Guides for their assistance, and slowly come back to the physical world, remembering what transpired!

As mentioned in the introduction, the complete Enderi ritual, together with a glossary and an overview of Tië eldaliéva's ritual calendar, can be found on the group's homepage.¹⁷

Ritual practice is important for Legendarium Reconstructionists as it expresses their identity as both decidedly Tolkien-centred and markedly different from more mere fans. Perhaps for this reason, differences in ritual taste proved a source of tension and were one of the drivers behind the schism in 2007. The schismatic founders of IIsaluntë Valion considered Tië eldaliéva "too Pagan" and championed a more purist take on Legendarium Reconstructionism. They modified the ritual format accordingly.

Ilsaluntë Valion rituals

In *Ilsaluntë Valion*'s rituals, most references to *Legendarium*-foreign concepts (*mudras*, *chakras*) and rites (pentagram ritual, Middle Pillar) were purged and new ritual elements were developed as substitutions. To raise energy, for example, most *Ilsaluntë Valion* members use the gestures and intonations of the Blessed Circle Dance rather than the Song of the Starflower, because the former is not based directly on the pentagram ritual. Similarly, the visualisation sequence of *Ilsaluntë Valion* no longer includes a circulation of energy via the chakras, but has become richer in references to Tolkien's cosmology – for example to the three Airs (Vilna, Ilwë and Vaitya) and the Great Sea (Vai). Another new element, which substitutes the evocation of the 14 Valar in the *Tië eldaliéva* ritual, is the intonation of the name of the Vala or Maia to which the ritual is dedicated. The name is intoned in Valarin, the language of the Valar themselves, and several of the Valarin names used in this phase have supposedly been discovered by one of the members in trance.

Whereas the *Ilsaluntë Valion* ritual compresses the ceremonial separation rites to a bare minimum, it expands the liminal phase by doubling the ritual structure of separation-liminality-reintegration *within* the liminal phase itself. This has been done to create a feeling of actively journeying to the Blessed Realm via the Moon (in the case of a lunar observation) or via the Sun (in the case of a solar observation). As illustration, consider the climax of the *Isilnarquelië* (Moon of the Fiery Fading) ritual, a moon ritual focused on Oromë. This version of the ritual is from 8 October 2011.

[Stage 6] Close your eyes and envision the full moon, aloft within the starry heavens, filling the Earth with slender lights and deep quick-moving shadows; sending radiant dreams that go with cool wings about the world. . . . Behold the last flower of Telperion, floating in a shimmering, water-like substance. . . . *Feel it, breathe it. Slowly.* Then, when you feel that you are ready to proceed, exhale – still very slowly – and while you do, the Moon-vessel recedes into the distance.

[Stage 7] From afar you hear the rolling echo of the Master's horn Valaróma. Its majesty shakes the hills and the shadows of night flee at its music. You answer the call of Lord Aldaron as he circles his people and cattle on the shining white Nahar. . . . [Individual meditation] When your journey is complete, thank Oromë and any others who assisted you or offered teaching and retrace your steps to where you arrived.

Members explain that one can travel to the Blessed Realm via the Moon or the Sun because these heavenly bodies exist both in the physical world and in the Blessed Realm. It is done by first visualising the Moon/Sun as it looks in the physical world (“aloft within the starry heavens”) and thereafter visualising it as it is described in Tolkien's mythology (holding the flower of Telperion as its light source). The core of the ritual has remained the silent

meditation in which participants experience the Blessed Realm, but Ilsaluntë Valion has transformed the ritual frame around this climax from a ceremonial magical evocation of the Valar into something more reminiscent of a shamanic journey. The new format did not put an end to the debates about how to properly approach Tolkien's cosmology in ritual, however, and while all members of Ilsaluntë Valion make visualisation journeys to the Blessed Realm, some members prefer to use modified or simplified versions of the official liturgy. As members of Ilsaluntë Valion put it themselves, the ritualistic approach is only one of three ways of spiritually appreciating Tolkien's Legendarium. The other two are the (sub-)creative and the mytho-historic approaches. The (sub-creative) approach takes Tolkien as an artistic-cum-spiritual role model and seeks to connect to the Faery Otherworld, such as Tolkien is believed to have done, in order to draw from the same inspirational font as he did. The mytho-historical approach is more intellectual and aims to systematise the historical and religious lore in the Legendarium and to relate it to the historical record and the mythologies of the actual world. Most members combine several approaches, but tend to emphasise one in particular. A group of members emphasising the (sub-)creative approach have established a forum, Anima Mundi, in which they discuss their own experiences and those of Tolkien in the light of C.G. Jung's ideas.

Cosmology and theology in Legendarium Reconstructionism

I have emphasised that the rituals of Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion have been a cause of debate and division, but that is only half the story. Just as importantly, the groups' ritual formats result from collaboration and express two 'first-order beliefs' that all members share. These beliefs are (1) that Tolkien's literary mythology refers to real supernatural beings, namely the Valar, the Maiar and the Quendi, and (2) that these beings dwell in a world that is different from the physical world, but which can be accessed in ritual. On top of these core beliefs, Legendarium Reconstructionism has a superstructure of more detailed and reflective 'second-order beliefs' concerning Tolkien's world and its supernatural denizens.

Cosmology All members of Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion agree that Tolkien's narratives refer to an independent, non-material reality, and, inspired by Henry Corbin (1972), they refer to this reality as "the Imaginal Realm". With references to Islamic esotericism, Corbin claimed that the Imagination (which he always capitalises) constitutes both a valid source of knowledge and a realm or mode of being, the *Mundus Imaginalis* or the Imaginal Realm. He coined the term "Imaginal" to emphasise the reality of the Imaginal as opposed to the non-reality of the merely "imaginary". The notion of the Imaginal Realm entered the vocabulary of Legendarium Reconstructionism through Stephan Hoeller who argues, in the lecture on Tolkien and gnosis already mentioned, that Tolkien had accessed the

Imaginal Realm and that his narratives are based on Imaginal experiences. Tolkien himself never spoke of the Imaginal Realm, but in his short-story *Smith of Wootton Major* he makes a comparable distinction between World and Faery.¹⁸ The Legendarium Reconstructionists follow Hoeller in considering Tolkien's distinction between World and Faery synonymous with Corbin's distinction between the material world and the Imaginal Realm. They differ in opinion, however, on how to relate the distinction between the material world and the Imaginal Realm/Faery to another of Tolkien's cosmological distinctions, that between Middle-earth and the Blessed Realm. Those who approach Tolkien's narratives in the mytho-historical mode, and hence consider the Legendarium to refer in some way to historical events in the actual world, equate Middle-earth with our physical world, and consider the Blessed Realm synonymous with the Imaginal Realm/Faery. This makes good sense, for even though the Blessed Realm is part of the created world within Tolkien's cosmology, it is no longer physically connected to Middle-earth at the time of the narrator of *LR*.¹⁹ By contrast, those members who approach Tolkien's literary mythology in the mytho-cosmological mode consider both the Blessed Realm *and* Middle-earth to be situated within the Imaginal Realm/Faery, or at least believe that Tolkien's descriptions of the Blessed Realm and Middle-earth reflect genuine experiences of Faery. For both groups, the notion of the Imaginal Realm serves to explain how the Valar and the Blessed Realm can be real, although they do not exist in our physical world. Table 1.2 below gives an overview of the mytho-historical and mytho-cosmological rationalisations of Tolkien's narrative cosmology.

theology

Members of Tië eldaliéva and IIsaluntë Valion largely agree on the nature of Eru/Ilúvatar and the Valar. Most fundamentally, they agree that Eru and the Valar exist and follow Tolkien's description of the relationship between them: Eru is the supreme deity and the Valar are created beings and subordinated Eru. Therefore, while members focus their ritual work on the Valar, they stress that they do not worship these beings. Those members in particular who have a Christian rather than a Neo-Pagan background, point out that the Valar are not gods, but are rather on a par with (arch)angelic

Table 1.2 Rationalisations of Tolkien's narrative cosmology

Corbin's esoteric cosmology	The cosmology in <i>Smith</i>	Tolkien's cosmology in the Middle-earth text corpus	
		The mytho-historical fit	The mytho-cosmological fit
The Imaginal Realm	Faery	The Blessed Realm	The Blessed Realm; Middle-earth
The Material World	World	Middle-earth	—

beings. In fact, all members de-emphasise the ontological difference between themselves and the Valar and approach them as teachers and role models, or even as friends with whom they “hang out”, as Calantiriel put it when I participated with her and Llefyn.

In Tolkien’s tales, *Eru Ilúvatar* is depicted as a male, theistic being residing in distant sovereignty outside the created World, but this image conflicts with the inclination of both Pagan and Christian members to conceive of the divine in holistic, pantheistic terms. Therefore, in the Tië eldaliéva ritual discussed above, Ilúvatar is not addressed directly as a personal power, but participants several times acknowledge their oneness with him in a way that is quite foreign to Tolkien’s own theology. Elwin has attempted to solve the tension between Tolkien’s patriarchal dualism and the member’s holistic inclinations by declaring first Tië eldaliéva and later Ilsaluntë Valion to be *panentheistic* traditions. To the acclaim of the other members, Elwin explained that Eru Ilúvatar is both *outside* Eä (the World), such as Tolkien says, and Eä *itself*, such as the holistic world-view of the members dictates. Elwin supported this view with a reference to Tolkien’s own texts, pointing out that Eru creates the world by sending his creative power, the Secret Fire or Flame Imperishable, into the Void (cf. Tolkien 1977: 9, 15). Even so, Tolkien himself never referred to this theology as panentheism and would probably rather have seen it as a reflection of Christian omnipresentism.

In ritual, Legendarium Reconstructionists treat the *Valar* as discrete, spiritual beings. In theological discussions outside ritual, the Valar are often referred to as “energies”, “archetypes”, or even “archetypal energies”, but such references are not meant to reduce them to non-personal powers or cosmic principles. The Valar, and humans for that matter, are energies and persons at the same time. That the Valar embody *archetypal* energy means that their energy is of a subtler type than that of humans. It also indicates that the Valar stand in some relation to the deities of other pantheons. Members disagree, however, whether the Valarian pantheon constitutes just one manifestation among others of a set of cosmic archetypes that make themselves known also in other mythologies, or whether the Valar *are* these archetypes. According to the latter and bolder view, the Valar (and Maiar) have revealed themselves, in various guises, in the many mythologies and religions around the world, but only Tolkien describes them as they really are.

Why can Tolkien’s fantasy function as authoritative texts for religion?

The existence of Tolkien spirituality prompts the question why Tolkien’s fantasy can function as authoritative texts for religion, when this is not the case for all fantasy fiction. Why, for example, has no religion emerged from *Harry Potter*, while Tolkien’s narratives have given us all kinds of Tolkien spirituality, and George Lucas’ *Star Wars* has given rise to Jediism?

(On Jediism see Davidsen 2016, and the contribution by *The Temple of the Jedi Order* in this volume.) In short: what does it take for a piece of fantasy fiction to be a possible foundational text for a new religion? A comparative study is needed to answer this question properly, but let me risk some tentative conclusions.

NR

First, for a fantasy text to work as a foundational text for a new religion it must include 'narrative religion', i.e. descriptions of religious teachings and institutions, and rituals engaged in by the characters of the story. Tolkien's literary mythology includes some such narrative religion. *LR* includes several Elven hymns to the Valië Elbereth, and an Elven ritual calendar is given in one of the appendices. *S*, and especially *HoMe*, convey much additional information on the theology, eschatology and ritual life of both Elves and humans. For example, *S* tells of the names, abodes and functions of the Valar and in various texts in *HoMe*, makes it clear that humans expect an afterlife with Eru, while the Elves believe in reincarnation. All in all, the narrative religion of Tolkien's literary mythology provides sufficient building-blocks for a religious tradition in the actual world to be based upon it. By comparison, *Star Wars* also includes a narrative religion that lends itself to emulation in the actual world, namely the Force religion of the Jedi Knights, but the *Harry Potter* books do not. This explains the lack of a *Harry Potter*-based religion.

1. Identity

2. NR at forefront

3. TV

Several additional textual traits can enhance the religious potential of a fantasy narrative. First, it helps if the narrative offers a strong, positive and slightly superhuman identity that people can adopt. In the case of Tolkien spirituality and Jediism, the attractive identities offered are those as Elves and Jedi Knights. Second, the nature of the narrative religion matters. It adds to the religious potential of a fantasy text if its narrative religion is at the forefront of the story, and the narrative religion should ideally present a set of teachings that is appealing to a contemporary audience while at the same time offering a new and distinct religious vocabulary. This is all the case with *Star Wars*. All the main characters are Jedi Knights, and the notion of the Force is immediately recognisable, yet distinctly its own. This may well account for the great success of Jediism, compared to Tolkien spirituality and other fiction-based religions. Third, it enhances the religious potential of a fantasy text if it thematises its own veracity. Tolkien's narratives do this to a remarkable extent, as do some of Tolkien's writings about his narratives. For example, the first edition of *The Fellowship of the Ring* included a preface in which Tolkien thanked both family and friends *and* those Hobbits who had allegedly helped him draw an accurate map of the Shire. Tolkien here mixed up the roles as author and narrator and hence anchored his narrative in the actual world. His preface could be read – and was read – as if he seriously believed in the existence of Hobbits. Tolkien later regretted this, and the second edition from 1965 included both a preface – in which Tolkien as *author* thanks family and friends – and a

longer prologue in which a narrator, who is human and close to Tolkien in time and space, yet clearly different from the author, informs the reader of the customs of the Hobbits. *S* has no such frame narrative, but here Tolkien plays with historical anchorage in a different manner. For example, he tells us that Númenor, a continent which is destroyed by Eru after its inhabitants rebel against the Valar, is called Atalantë in the human language. 'Atalantë' is strikingly similar to 'Atlantis', and even if it was really Tolkien who borrowed from Plato, several practitioners of Tolkien spirituality argue that it is the other way around: Plato and Tolkien refer to the same historical event, but Tolkien's account is more accurate. In his letters, Tolkien goes even further, frequently suggesting that he received (divine) inspiration. In one letter he states, "I have long ceased to *invent* . . . I wait till I seem to know what really happened. Or till it writes itself" (Tolkien 1981: 231; original emphasis). In another, he plays with the thought of being a "chosen instrument" (1981: 413). In sum, it is the combination of narrative religion and thematisation of textual veracity that makes Tolkien's literary mythology usable as an authoritative text corpus for real world spirituality.

The persistence of Legendarium Reconstructionist online communities

I mentioned earlier that the success of Peter Jackson's film adaptation of *LR* led to the emergence of two new forms of Tolkien spirituality. Middle-earth Pagans focused on ritual interaction with *LR* characters (especially Gandalf and Galadriel) and offered an expansion pack, so to speak, to Pagans wanting to try out a new pantheon. Legendarium Reconstructionists, as we have seen, base themselves on Tolkien's written works, tolerate little blending of Tolkien's literary mythology with other religious frameworks, and focus on the exploration of Tolkien's cosmology in meditation.

Middle-earth Paganism and Legendarium Reconstructionism have differed remarkably in their ability to produce stable and enduring online communities. All Middle-earth Pagan online groups collapsed after just a few years, while the Legendarium Reconstructionist groups have survived, despite tensions and divergent opinions. I think that three factors can explain the relative success of Legendarium Reconstructionism. First, the Legendarium Reconstructionist online forums have been much better moderated. This has given members a feeling of contributing to a collaborative project and counteracted the "strain to variety" (cf. Campbell 1972: 128) that often causes cults to loose focus and dissolve. By contrast, the more loosely moderated forums and newsgroups of Middle-earth Pagans, Children of the Valar, the Eldalondë Society and many similar groups soon hosted more discussions of Vampirism, reiki healing, sunken Egyptian cities and guardian angels than on Tolkien spirituality. In these groups, total collapse followed quickly after the Tolkien focus was lost.²⁰

A second reason for the success of Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion has to do with their membership. Already when joining, the core members had a substantial knowledge about Tolkien's literary mythology, and most had already experimented with Tolkien-based rituals. They were intelligent and highly educated individuals in their forties, thirties or late twenties, with plenty of knowledge and experience to share. This stands in contrast to the members of the Middle-earth Pagan groups who were mostly young people who were fascinated by Elves and Jackson's films, but were in no position to contribute substantially in terms of spiritual knowledge.

The third reason for the Legendarium Reconstructionists' successful community formation is that they from the beginning aimed to construct an independent tradition. This sometimes caused disagreement and tension, but it also led to the formulation of certain core ideas and a sense of shared identity. Most significantly, rituals were developed and carried out together. Even though most members eventually found it unsatisfying to perform rituals via Skype or over the phone, all members continued to believe that Tolkien's narratives describe a real world in some way, and that the various ritual techniques used by the members constitute a repertoire of legitimate ways of communicating with this otherworld and achieving gnosis about it. This again stands in contrast to the modest Middle-earth Pagan aim of developing an optional Tolkienesque add-on for eclectic Wiccans. Moreover, Legendarium Reconstructionism has had the advantage of being based on a larger authoritative text corpus. *S* and the many other texts by Tolkien simply demand more time and effort to discuss and digest than do the *LR* movies, and that provides for long-lived groups. The *LR* movies, by contrast, provided too little textual substance for tradition-building (they include no substantial narrative religion, and do not thematise their own veracity). After trying out some movie-based rituals, most Middle-earth Pagans went back to being 'normal' Pagans, while a few went on to read *S*, began working with the Valar and hence turned into Legendarium Reconstructionists.

It must be admitted that the relative stability of the Legendarium Reconstructionist online cults as social units says little about the attractiveness of Legendarium Reconstructionism relative to Middle-earth Paganism as a religious expression. The Legendarium Reconstructionist groups are stable, but they are tiny and hardly grow. Working occasional rituals with Gandalf and Galadriel has proved to be no basis for tradition-forming and institutionalisation, but it has been attractive for many Pagans to try out all the same. From a numerical perspective, Middle-earth Paganism, rather than Legendarium Reconstructionism, has been the most successful expression of Tolkien spirituality in the twenty-first century. But, if there were a prize for the most elaborate fiction-based religious tradition, it would probably go to the spiritual entrepreneurs of Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion.

Appendix 1.1 Tië eldaliéva

*Reverend Michaelae Alyras de Cygne
and Calantirniel²¹*

Origins of the Elven Path

“Tië eldaliéva” (The Elven Path) began in May of 2005 when, seeking others who were like-minded regarding the sense of J.R.R. Tolkien’s writings being more than fiction, Nathan Elwin (pseudonym) and Calantirniel (Lisa M. Allen MH) met online as kindred spirits. Quickly, they discovered they had great parity relative to their perspectives on Tolkien’s work, and they began to lay the foundation for what is now known as the sacred tradition of “The Elven Path”. By August of 2005, what began with Calantirniel and Elwin grew to involve others, from different spiritual backgrounds, and Tië eldaliéva (T-e) was formally established as an organization, centrally focused on advancing the awareness and formal practice of Elven spirituality, with a respectably wide diversity of spiritual backgrounds among its members. In November 2007, T-e evolved into two separate expressions of the Path, the other being led by Elwin and named “Ilsaluntë Valion, the Silver Ship of the Valar”. Valuing the development of the Path in such a way that increasing numbers of Eldalië and Elendili (Elves and friends of Elves, respectively) would be able to be served by it, the group established its Inner Circle to be a core, guiding (rather than governing) body. Presently, T-e is based online at www.ElvenSpirituality.com, serving members worldwide.

Beliefs and practices

The principles of T-e’s practices arise from their core beliefs which are, in turn, derived from the Legendarium, as well as innate talents and understood relationships. The core beliefs and practices of T-e enable its members to explore, apply and practice the Elven Path individually and together; differently and alike.

Beliefs. Embraced as a sacred text, T-e believes that all insight, wisdom and inspiration relative to the Path may be found in the Legendarium, without reference to any other text. Nonetheless, they all recognize that Truth is not confined to the Elven Path, nor, therefore to the Legendarium; hence, they are able to appreciate many principles of other sacred traditions, as

such traditions may be analogous to those of the Path and, at their discretion, to apply them in their individual practices. T-e members believe the Valar (reasonably analogous to Archangels) are literal entities, as Tolkien described them, who are the Powers underlying and sustaining all life on Earth, or “Arda”. They believe the Valar deeply love and are profoundly interested in both Elves and humanity, and that they (the Valar) are willing to befriend, teach, nurture and even nourish human beings, no differently than Elves, in order progress the evolution of planetary Consciousness towards a collective transformation of Earth into a perfected expression of Arda, as it exists within the Mind of Eru (God). Consequently, T-e members believe that developing personal relationship with the Valar leads to insight, wisdom and a right perspective on how to live as spiritual beings in the context of the Elven Path; hence, the nature of their practices.

Practices. The practices of T-e are rooted ritual and meditation, and are primarily relative to developing the personal relationship between the individual and the Valar. To that end, monthly, circa the Full Moon, the group engages in a formal ritual focused on interacting with one or more of the Valar. As the year progresses, there are also several Tolkien-designated holidays, or Holy Days, upon which ritual is also performed that is also relative to the Valar, the Ainur (the siblings and offspring of the Valar, collectively), and/or the Maiar (servants of the Valar). T-e members practice their rituals individually, generally communicating their relative experiences, lessons and consequent insights with each other, privately, online.

One of the most important practices of T-e is education, i.e. providing the public, and particularly the Eldalië and Elendili, with educational materials (from their website and social media outlets) enabling them to become more familiar with the underpinnings of the Elven Path. At the time of this writing, the Inner Circle is preparing to expand that offering with materials providing a deeper understanding of principles and processes facilitating integration of the Path into the adherent’s ritual and meditation practices, and into practical, daily life.

Practising differently, alike

Although the members of T-e’s Inner Circle (Calantirniel, Llefyn, Earendil and Alyras) are united in their perspectives on the Legendarium, the Valar and the importance of maintaining the integrity of the Elven Path, the way they practically apply the Path in their lives remarkably differs, one from another. These practical differences primarily come from the varying spiritual backgrounds of each member prior to joining T-e; Alyras coming from a mostly Christian, mystical viewpoint, and the other three arriving from more earth-based, pre-Christian viewpoints. Earendil’s primary practice is not through formal ritual at all, but, instead, he implements his healing skills through creating a lively, bustling, professional holistic herbology practice. In the context of what is effectively his own “Rivendell”, he also created

and lives in an organic, vegan and eco-sustainable permaculture homestead. Llefyn explores the Path primarily in the context of the astral plane, engaging the Powers on subtle and dynamic levels more than the others. Calantirniel's practice is similar to Earendil's, insofar as she is a herbalist. However, her professional astrology and divination background provide a more esoteric, yet solid method of solitary ritual practice that easily scales to a group setting. (Calantirniel wrote much of the group's initial rituals.) Just as a composer has an intuitive relationship with Music, Alyras, (as the musician of the Circle), is primarily focused on developing and learning what's necessary to teach others how to have an intuitive, constant, in-the-moment camaraderie-like communication with the Valar – as a student, as a sibling and as a friend – with and without the ritual process facilitating such communion. With the lunar and other periodic rituals, and meditations as the lattice binding their practices, Tië eldaliéva's Inner Circle is a snapshot of the general demographic comprising its members, with respect to the organization's beliefs, principles and practices.

To give interested readers an idea of our ritual practice, we have published an exemplary ritual on the Tië eldaliéva homepage. We have chosen the Enderi ritual which takes place in late September and is dedicated to the Vala Oromë. The ritual is published together with a glossary of Tolkienesque terms and an overview of the solar and lunar observances of our ritual calendar. The ritual can be found here: <http://www.tieeldalieva.org/docs/ritual/enderi.pdf>.

↳ no longer active

Appendix 1.2 IIsaluntë Valion

Gwineth

IIsaluntë Valion is a small online community of individuals who have in common that they find the mythos as described by J.R.R Tolkien in his books meaningful and relevant to their own lives and the world at large beyond the level of mere amusement. However, there are significant differences among the members regarding how they exactly view the material, how it is integrated into their world-view and what they do with it. The word “gnosis” is used inside IIsaluntë Valion to refer to the individual and experiential nature of spiritual practices based upon Tolkien’s mythology; but it also refers to the manner in which Tolkien dealt with his own creative experiences (as is shown by Stephan Hoeller and Lance Owens of gnosis.org).

I feel I should stress that there is no such thing as ‘a Tolkien religion’, as some newspaper journalists eagerly wrote following the publication of Markus Altena Davidsen’s thesis, ostensibly misunderstanding this point and, in one case, even denying ever having received the explanation that I wrote and sent to them. Having said that, we can distinguish three basic approaches in how IIsaluntë Valion members deal with the subject matter. A common concept shared by all is “Faerie” which is the term that Tolkien used to denote the particular imaginative realm or ‘creative space’ that he explored and through which the raw material for his books came to him. Note the term “explore” here, as opposed to “making up”, a distinction that he often stressed in his letters and elsewhere. “Faerie” seems to be equivalent to what C.G. Jung calls “the Collective Unconscious” (Jung 1990 [1959]), or Henry Corbin “the Imaginal” (Corbin 1964). We also have in common that accessing this realm is one of the basic elements of what we do in the context of IIsaluntë Valion.

The first approach could be described as ritualistic. It is loosely inspired by the (Neo-)Pagan tradition, and it tries to construct a consistent framework based on the mythos (especially the Elvish calendar), tied to a meaningful harmony with the nature and the Moon cycles. It can be combined with meditations on a key element identified for the occasion, readings of certain texts from the mythology and possibly other ritualistic or creative elements.

1. ritualistic approach

Next to the shared attraction we all feel to Tolkien's mythos, people can be motivated to take this approach in order to improve balance and (spiritual) well-being.

2. The (sub-)creative approach is different in that it is not motivated by explicitly seeking balance or spiritual growth, but by a deeply felt urge to create things: drawings, writings, music, whatever. You could say that this is similar to what drove Tolkien himself (and many other artists). Meditations using the active imagination technique can be very helpful; and vice versa, the creative act tends to enhance the awareness of Faerie so that, ideally, this becomes a self-amplifying process. Apart from the creative act itself, there is often the urge to "bring back some of the Faerie Gold": to do something with the result, no matter how small.

3. Then there is an approach that could be labelled as mytho-historic. The overall goal of this approach is to gain a deeper understanding of Mytho-History: how the Imaginal and factual worlds interweave and interrelate. This approach can involve elements from other traditions that seem compatible with gnosis, such as animism. Entheogens can also be useful, if applied wisely and carefully. In contrast to the sub-creative approach described above, individuals with this motivation might want to share their experiences and findings as well – albeit in different form (e.g. rather a document than a painting).

Of course, this is just one possible categorisation. In reality, these categories overlap even in this very small population. The ritualistic approach can be a powerful tool in the creative process, even if you are not interested in following the integral Elvish calendar which, in turn, has been assembled using the mytho-historic approach. Inversely, creative results have proved very helpful in meditative trance-inducing formats. There are as many paths as there are persons, each one based on the individual's needs and talents.

The most striking feature of the whole business remains almost indescribable: the Imaginal experience itself and its profound, life-changing effects, and how it relates to the observable, factual world outside. Any factual description can only relate what it looks like from the outside, plus whatever people report about it. I have often found it a somewhat alienating experience to read Markus' descriptions; it was as if he were writing about something entirely different because the most important feature is missing altogether. But that can not be helped: a thesis is a scientific paper, dealing with observable facts only. However, the news articles following Markus' defence lacked his genuine interest and care, aiming straight for "look what these crazy people believe in!"

Still, I understand this reaction very well. Because of my background in physics, I have a well-developed rational side; at times I can almost feel that part of me shrugging. I have never been able to make sense of all this from that vantage point, even when it feels completely natural and homely as seen from the Imaginal position. These two worlds seem to be essentially

orthogonal to one another: the Imaginal cannot be understood or described in factual terms, as many greater minds have concluded before me. Lacking this acknowledgement, you get religions claiming factual evidence, materialistic New-Age balderdash and other such distorted hybrid constructs; and from the other side, atheists who reject every religious notion because they think religion is about “unfalsifiable weirdo hypotheses”. The reason is the notion that “the Imaginal” is nothing but a fanciful falsehood. If there is anything that I have learned from my experience in Ilsaluntë Valion, it is that this is wrong – but that, too, has been said before by many, such as Albert Einstein. If only people would listen.

Notes

- 1 Personal communication, 7 May 2009. Gwineth is a pseudonym.
- 2 Qenya is an early form of Quenya or ‘Elf-Latin’, one of Tolkien’s two main Elvish languages. Sindarin, the other main Elven tongue, was the Elven vernacular in Middle-earth at the time of *The Lord of the Rings*. The homepage of Ilsaluntë Valion can be visited at westofwest.org. Accessed 15 April 2015.
- 3 Nathan Elwin is a pseudonym.
- 4 Tië eldaliéva’s homepage is located at elvenspirituality.wordpress.com. Accessed 15 April 2015.
- 5 <http://www.tieeldalieva.org/docs/ritual/enderi.pdf>. Accessed 1 September 2016.
- 6 According to Tolkien’s biographer, Humphrey Carpenter, in the documentary *J.R.R. Tolkien: Creator of Middle-earth* (2002).
- 7 On Tolkien and the hippies, see also Walmsley (1984).
- 8 Valië is the designation for a female Vala.
- 9 The Tribunal of the Sidhe consists of a number of local circles. For my PhD project, I interviewed Lady Danu who leads the Circle of the Coyote. The circle’s Facebook page can be visited here: www.facebook.com/pages/The-Circle-of-Coyote/115248658487280. Accessed 15 April 2015.
- 10 The homepage of the Silver Elves can be visited at silverelves.angelfire.com/. Accessed 15 April 2015. The Silver Elves have self-published more than 20 books on Elven spirituality, including 3 volumes with their letters.
- 11 Hoeller’s lecture was given on 2 October 1998 and has been online since late 1998. It is available on YouTube at www.youtube.com/watch?v=xbuYlasPA7E. Accessed 15 April 2015. The website of the Ecclesia Gnostica can be found at www.gnosis.org/eghome.htm. Accessed 15 April 2015.
- 12 A Legendarium Reconstructionist forerunner for UTolk was Middle-earth Reunion: The Alternative Tolkien Society, which published *Reunion: The Journal of Middle-earth Studies* from 1996 to 2005. The society’s homepage is still online and can be visited at alt-tolkien.com. Accessed 15 April 2015. Several articles from *Reunion* are available through the homepage.
- 13 Tië eldaliéva’s original homepage was situated at www.thehiddenrealm.com, but is no longer online.
- 14 Another source of inspiration for Tië eldaliéva’s rituals was the ‘High Elvish Working Based Upon J.R.R. Tolkien’s Mythic World’, developed in 1993 by the Fifth Way Mystery School. This ritual can be accessed through the Internet Wayback Machine. Visit web.archive.org/web/20130430174512/http://www.fifthwaymysteryschool.org/valar.html. Accessed 15 April 2015.
- 15 The correspondences between individual Valar and particular cardinal points are part of a much more elaborate system of correspondences which group members

- (especially Elwin) have created based on Tolkien exegesis and trancework. Within this system, each Valar is also associated with certain 'key words' (for example, Mind, Clear Sight, Authority, Poetry, and Truth for Manwë, the King of the Valar) and with one of the Cirth and one of the Tengwar, the characters used for writing Sindarin and Quenya.
- 16 Starflower essence is used because it is believed to be connected to the Elves, who, in their own tongue (Quenya), refer to themselves as the People of the Stars (Eldar).
 - 17 See <http://www.tiëldaliéva.org/docs/ritual/enderi.pdf>. Accessed 1 September 2016.
 - 18 See Flieger (2005) for a critical edition of *Smith*. Verlyn Flieger, the *grand dame* of Tolkien Studies, sees in *Smith* evidence that Tolkien may himself have believed in Faery – that he took “what was for a man of the rational twentieth century the far riskier position [riskier than seeing Faery as an altered state of consciousness] that Faërie is or could be an actuality” (Flieger 2006: 183).
 - 19 Within Tolkien’s narrative world, the Blessed Realm used to exist on the same plane as Middle-earth, but gradually became separated from this material plane, first through the Hiding of Valinor following a war against the Satan-figure Melkor, then through the Rounding of the World following the destruction of Númenor, and finally through the separation of the worlds after the retreat of the Elves from Middle-earth.
 - 20 The Ilsaluntë Valion forum continues to be an important information centre, also for Tië eldaliéva members, and the Tië eldaliéva forum was important until it closed in 2007. Even so, the forums have never been the primary communication channels for Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion members. The most significant discussions take place bilaterally, over chat, phone or email, and new ideas are often generated and tested in this way before being introduced on the forum. Not only do core members communicate in this way, but new members typically also have much contact with the captain/moderator or another mentor figure via email for some time before becoming active posters on the forum.
 - 21 The authors wish to thank Llefyn and Earendil for commenting on a draft of this article.

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